

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH NAVY COMMANDER JOHN MUTH,
DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL STAFF, MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TRANSITIONAL TEAM, VIA
TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ TIME: 11:00 A.M. EDT DATE: WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2009

Copyright (c) 2009 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue,
NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not
affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be
copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News
Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work
prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that
person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet
Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call(202)347-1400

(Note: Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG, (Office of the Secretary of Defense for
Public Affairs): With that I wanted to welcome you to the Department of
Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, March 18, 2009.

My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the Secretary
of Defense for Public Affairs and I'll be moderating the call today.

A note to our bloggers are on the line: Please remember to clearly
state your name and the blog or organization you're with prior to submitting
your question.

Today our guest is Commander John Muth. He's the director of Special
Staff, Ministry of Interior Transitional Team.

And at this point, sir, I'm going to turn it over to you if you'd like
to start with an opening statement. The floor is yours. CMDR. MUTH: Yes,
ma'am.

I'm John Muth. I'm a commander in the United States Navy. I'm
presently serving as director at Special Staff, the Ministry of Interior
Transition Team. Presently I have about a 30-person organization where we're
trying to help with anti-corruption issues and rule of law.

There are four areas that I'd like to talk about today in terms of four
divisions within the MOI: the Internal Affairs and Security Directorate, the
inspector general, the effort that we have in human rights and also about the
new MOI court system.

The Internal Affairs and Security Directorate main mission is to arrest
bad cops. It also has some supplementary missions that are related to
counterterrorism and also performing security background checks.

The inspector general -- we are trying to build that organization or
rather, the Iraqis are building this organization into something that can look
at financial corruption, look at different ways procedures are utilized,
standard operating procedures -- perform different types of inspections.

Within the inspector general's area we have the Human Rights Office.
The Human Rights Office is a program that is growing from about 50 people it

plans to grow to about 260 people that will go to detention centers throughout Iraq. These are pretrial detention centers, rather than prisons, which post-trial. These pretrial detention centers are under the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior.

And then the MOI court system is composed five regional courts and a cassation court. This is the result of a law that was passed in April 17th of '08. Over the next few months the judges were trained. Five courts were established and the first trial to try policemen by the Ministry of Interior was held in late July. And over the past several months, we've seen good progress in that system and we think that it'll have large effects in approving the discipline of the police and holding them accountable.

That's my opening statement. I'm open to any questions.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

And right now I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to the bloggers on the line.

Let's go ahead with Beth. Beth, you're first on the line.

Q Sir, thank you so much for your time this morning. What would you say has been the biggest change you've seen or the biggest impact on the MOI -- that it has made?

CMDR. MUTH: What I've seen over the past year -- when I arrived in April, the security situation was not that great. And I've seen the government of Iraq -- they responded with operations in Basra, Diyala -- or Basra then Mosul then Samarra. And as far as these operations, the Internal Affairs Department went to those locations. They found police stations where the police were not functioning, not doing their job properly. This resulted in large numbers of firings of policemen.

So from that point of view -- from an operational point of view -- I've seen improvements in the police force, because bad elements within the police force have been looked at and removed.

Now, there are still certainly problems within the police force. And so this is, like any police force, will be a continuing effort.

Within the MOI building, which is the -- kind of the headquarters or the Pentagon, so to speak, of the police forces within Iraq -- what's really pleased me the most is seeing the implementation of systems. So now you have systems that are being followed, procedures that are being followed. So you have a greatly increased level of professionalism by the police in how they conduct their business. And this carries over to reducing corruption and improving the rule of law.

So little things such as -- rather than a thick bale of money being handed out on pay day to a large mob of policemen trying to get paid to having that system now distributed such that the policemen are paid outside of the office. That seems like a very tiny thing, but it shows an improvement in the system.

When you couple that with the fact that they can do audits of the pay system to see that the people being paid are being matched to an actual person,

rather than a ghost employee, that's carrying it a step forward in terms of reducing corruption or having other sorts of problems.

So the thing that's pleased me the most, I think, is just the improvement and things at the systems level and how the professionalism is increasing.

Q Outstanding. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. And I know that the commander was speaking, I believe another person had dialed in. Who's joining us?

Q Jared Fishman.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, thank you, Jared. You'll be number three. Let's go ahead and go to D.J.

Q Yes, Commander. It's D.J. Elliott from Long War Journal.

I was just wondering: On the policemen that have been fired since you've been there, how much is that connected with militias, how much is connected with basic corruption and how much is nonperformance? How does that break down, roughly?

CMDR. MUTH: In terms of statistics, I can't give you hard and fast numbers, because I don't have them in front of me. I can give you kind of some opinions.

When we stand up of the MOI courts, we saw a corresponding increase in the number of disciplinary cases. And disciplinary cases include such things as someone being asleep on watch or asleep at a checkpoint or someone being found with alcohol while on duty or to talking back to a superior -- that kind of thing.

In terms of more serious types of cases, there are still issues in terms of the follow through on certain types of cases. Sometimes there's some political interference and that kind of thing. But I'd like to say that compared to 2007, I think that we had something like 6,000-some-odd cases that were opened; whereas in 2008 we had over 14,000 cases opened.

So we've seen a large increase in the total number of cases that have been opened by Internal Affairs and that are being closed. And in 2008, we had something like 1,500 or so policemen be fired and some 2,000 be disciplined.

I'm not sure if that got to the details of your question, but hopefully that gives you a feel.

Q Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. And we'll go around the (horn ?) after everybody has submitted their questions.

Let's go ahead and go with Jared, please.

Q Yes, sir. Thank you for your time.

Could you talk to the training aspect of the program? How do we make sure that everybody's well trained, and as they move up from the bottom ranks to the more senior ranks? Talk about the schools that are open and how we're ensuring that once we step back, they'll be able to run it self-sufficiently.

CMDR. MUTH: That's not entirely within my areas of responsibility, but I can talk to specifically the area of Internal Affairs.

What we've done over the past year is transition our training from us to master trainers that are trained by us to teach specific courses in Internal Affairs. For example, there's a basic Internal Affairs course. That course now -- we have two master trainers that are in Baghdad and two master trainers that are in Kut.

They're training between typically about 20 persons in the classroom up to about 60 or 80 people per month and kind of, you know, what is an IA's job? What does he do? What are the ethical considerations? And we've been pleased, when we spot check the curriculum to see that the curriculum that we co-developed with the Iraqis is still being followed.

Along with that, what we're shifting to is increased emphasis on advanced types of training. So organized crime classes, anti-corruption-type classes. We've had organizations come in and teach things -- concepts such as money laundering, some counterfeiting-type issues. They have an interest in cyber crime type issues.

Some of these types of things weren't really problems until recently with some of the new found freedoms that the Iraqis have had. So my focus within these areas is to get the Iraqis to get comfortable with, get buy-in to the curriculum that we co-developed with them, and then let them take this on.

Same thing with the inspector general. I believe now with -- since October, we've trained over 500 or 600 people in the inspector general's area. Again, in basic IG-type responsibilities and skills using some examples in the United States of some problems that we've had, some of the history of why we developed an IG -- and in that some human rights training. And as we get the population of the IG trained in those basic concepts, we've also gone to advanced investigation training and those types of things. So it's kind of a scalable process.

I think in the future what you'll see is more and more the coalition will be backing out of the back types of training, but specialized skills such as polygraphing or other things will be something where the United States can continue to provide very valuable assistance and that's what they really would like to have from us.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

We're going to go ahead around the horn one more time. And let's go to Beth. Beth, if you have a follow-on question, please?

Q Sir, you touched on it briefly, but with the announcement from President Obama that we will be removing troops, what is the plan for your future Iraq? Will they be staying on for continued support and training or?

CMDR. MUTH: There's still a lot of planning being done as to how we will move forward. We do have a commitment to continue to advise and mentor the

Iraqis. And the Ministry of Interior Transition Team, which it will probably change it's form and composition as it goes forward, what we've been focusing on -- not just for the future, but in the past year -- is we've been trying to bring in more high-level experts in specific areas to, for example, with IT infrastructure.

A lot of problems -- they won't be solved by having an improved IT infrastructure, but the way that we can move forward by bringing in an expert who can construct a kind of strategic plan for IT infrastructure, we start to get things like systems that put in together court statistics more efficiently or be able to track people from their arrest to seeing the judge to going to a detention center to being tried to serving their sentence and being released.

There's also a variety of other experts that we've brought in that are more specialized than say a couple of years ago when we were more focused on basic policing skills.

So I would expect that those types of efforts are going to remain important and help improve the professionalism. And to be honest, that's what I consistently hear from the Iraqis is they want to have increased automation. They want college graduates to be their police officers. They want things to be first class and that's where we can help.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, let's go back to D.J. and then Jared.

D.J.

Q Sir, about the court system: I noticed that Region Three seems to have an inordinate number of MOI troops and territory compared to the other four regions. Are they looking at re-juggling that?

CMDR. MUTH: The different regions are defined different ways for different things. So I'm not sure if Region Three that you're looking at is the same --

Q Region Three for the courts, I believe, is Anbar, Baghdad, Wasit and Diyala. CMDR. MUTH: Oh, that's right.

Well, Baghdad is going to have the largest caseload, regardless of which region. The way the regions were determined was -- I won't say arbitrary, but it was something that was given to the court system by the minister for them to implement.

In terms of plans to restructure that, I'm not aware of any plans.

Q Thank you, sir.

CMDR. MUTH: But the court system is a real success story in my mind. You know, it's distinct from the civil court system. There's an MOD court system, there's an MOI court system. There's a court if there's problems between MOI police officers and MOD -- army soldiers -- that will look at those types of issues.

The judges are taking it very seriously. There's a lot of good work that's being done within the MOI court system.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, and let's go ahead and follow up with Jared.

Jared, do you have a follow-up question?

Q Yes, ma'am.

Sir, you mentioned one of the positive developments was the improvement in the pay ability of the officers. Could you talk a little bit -- maybe expand on that -- and also talk about what are the other improvements that you've seen in the last six months in the projects that you're overseeing?

CMDR. MUTH: I don't have that much direct knowledge of the pay system, because that's not in my area. That comment was really directed to what I was observing directly with internal affairs, who I've been working very closely with.

Other improvements within the MOI is just an increased level of interaction with the Iraqi public. For example, today I looked at a set of trailers where the public can come in and they can meet with representatives of the internal affairs or the inspector general or human rights and they can voice their complaints.

They kind of act as a triage system where those people who have complaints can then go to the MOI building and interact more directly with the, say, the inspector general, who holds a kind of an open house complaint session every Tuesday and has some members of the public come. There's increased transparency, I think, on some levels with what -- how the MOI's interacting with the public. There's the Public Affairs Office also has an outreach effort where they've placed police officers in different parts of the different police stations within Baghdad where they can interact with the community. Those police officers there can communicate what they hear from the citizens back to internal affairs or the inspector general if they see problems.

So none of that was really in place very well when I arrived; some of it was just kind of starting. There's more -- the tip line. A tip-line effort and hot-line efforts by the different organizations have also helped with receiving complaints so they can be addressed by the MOI.

There's still a long way to go on all of these things. Corruption is not just a problem in Iraq, but it's also a problem throughout different countries in the Middle East. But I'm very encouraged that the Iraqis are trying hard to address these types of things.

LT. CRAGG: And I want to just go around the horn one more time. Anybody have any follow-on questions before I turn it back over to the commander for a closing statement?

Q I think I would have another one then while everyone else can think.

Let's see -- can you talk a little bit about a few years ago, if not to a year-and-a-half ago, the big problem in the American media was the problems between Shi'a and Sunni and Kurd and sectarian problems -- particularly within the Ministry of the Interior. And obviously, those articles have stopped coming out, because things have improved

But could you talk a little about the role of the internal affairs and moving out the members of the militia or, you know, other types of Badr Brigades? And what have been the efforts from internal affairs to crack down on having secularization, but trying to have one united Iraq police force or Ministry of Interior force?

CMDR. MUTH: That's an excellent question. On a personal level, one of the things I've enjoyed most working in Iraq is working with a major general who's in charge of internal affairs. I'm thoroughly convinced that he's nonsectarian and that he's trying to do the right thing.

He does have political interference for a wide variety of reasons on different sensitive issues. But there's a couple of things that I can illustrate, I think. First of all, his staff is a mixture of Shi'a and Sunni and has some Christian as well within the staff.

To mention some specific cases, something that's very high profile that was released a couple of weeks ago was the arrest of 12 or 13 police officers who were in a kidnapping-murder scheme. This was excellent police work by the internal affairs. They essentially infiltrated the organization by having the person talk to one person that was suspicious. That person inviting the internal affairs agent into a kidnapping. Then pulling the strings, it unraveled the scheme.

And it turned out that the sister of the vice president of Iraq was one of the victims that this ring had been involved in. There were certainly sectarian elements in that, but it was also a financial element.

There was a human rights case in Diyala where a family of a Sunni complained to internal affairs about the death of one of their family members while in police custody. It was addressed by the internal affairs. Coincidentally, I happened to be present when the Shi'a lieutenant, who had participated or led this in this death at the facility. The reason for the interview between the lieutenant and the major general was partly because of political interference where someone was trying to get the lieutenant off, because the family was connected. The major general had all his documents worked out ahead of time and was very professional about the whole thing and the case has moved forward to the court system.

So the internal affairs, I think, has a little bit of an advantage in that they're at this point probably equally hated by everyone in terms of JAM and Badr and there's a lot of political maneuvering against this, but they've been working very hard and I think that they've made a difference.

LT. CRAGG: Does that answer -- does anybody have any last final questions?

I know, Jared, you did. Is that good to go on your end? Okay, I believe that's perhaps a yes.

With that, sir, I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to you if the bloggers do not have any other follow-on questions. If you'd like to end with a closing statement, sir.

CMDR. MUTH: Yes. I'd like to say that I've been here a full year now in Iraq and I've been personally rewarded in terms of dealing with the Iraqi people. And I can tell that they are working very hard to improve their

organization. While there's a lot of friction and things don't always move smoothly, there's definite progress forward.

The area that I ended up working in is extremely difficult. It's politically sensitive. Politics are a major issue. There's cultural issues, but you have a core of very professional people within the MOI --even though they're surrounded by all these difficulties -- that are working very hard to make a better Iraq.

And I guess that would conclude my statement. LT. CRAGG: Thank you very much, sir.

And thank you for the bloggers on the line today.

A note to everyone that concluding this call, available on the Defense's link bloggers page on Defenselink.mil a story based on today's call, as well as a transcript and audio file will be available.

That concludes today's event. And sir, thank you for attending today's bloggers roundtable and for the bloggers on the line.

CMDR. MUTH: Thank you.

END.