

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT COLONEL EVAN TRINKLE,
DIRECTOR, IRAQI CENTER FOR LESSONS LEARNED VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 9:59 A.M.
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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG, (Office of the Secretary of Defense for
Public Affairs): Okay, we're going to go ahead and get started.

Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's
Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday, April 9th, 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 the bloggers on the call: Please remember to clearly state
your name before asking your question.

With that, I'd like to welcome our guest today. He is Lieutenant
Colonel Evan Jay Trinkle. He's director of the Iraqi Center for Lessons
Learned. Lieutenant Colonel Trinkle will be discussing the center and the
lessons learned so far in Iraq. With that, sir, I'm going to turn the floor
over to you, if you'd like to start with an opening statement.

LT. COL. TRINKLE: Well, I want to thank everyone today for the
opportunity to speak with you this morning, explain what we do here at the
Multinational Security Transition Command here in Iraq. As the director for the
Iraq Center for Lessons Learned, Multinational Force Iraq training team, I have
firsthand the accomplishments the Iraqis have made in building a professional
and viable military force and becoming a sovereign nation.

The government of Iraq is making enormous progress in developing a
professional military force that is capable of collecting and analyzing data
from the variety of current and historic sources. This includes operations and
training events that produce reports and viable training, lessons for military
commanders, staff and students. The mission of MNSTC-I is to be a -- be of
assistance to the Iraq government. In that, we must make certain the necessary
steps of ensuring the nation's self-sufficiency during the critical transition
from coalition- to Iraq-led operations in support of the security agreement are
all in place.

MNSTC-I works as advisers to Iraq minister of Defense and minister of
Interior to help develop the Iraq security force into a well-trained and
professional force to protect the citizens of Iraq and its vital infrastructure
components. The government of Iraq faced challenges. For example, the drop in
the price of oil has caused a budget shortfall that they must deal with. Like

many other nations in the world, the global recession has had a sizable impact on Iraq's economy. Despite the neglect endured under Saddam Hussein, every facet within MOD and MOI are making positive strides. Building a nation takes time, and we shouldn't measure their progress by Western standards.

The coalition forces and the Iraqi government are advancing into a new stage of cooperation and partnership. We're committed to providing continued support to the government of Iraq. Our hope is to provide the necessary support in an innovative and long-lasting means, especially as we transition full responsibility for security to the government of Iraq and the security force.

That concludes my opening statement.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Thank you, sir.

Let's go on with Sean. Sean, you're first. Go ahead with your questions.

Q Thanks, Jennifer.

Sir, this is Sean Pillai. I'm with defenseiq.com, and my actual question for you, sir, is going to deal with the transition and the lessons learned with regard to a lot of the Iraqi TTPs and their relationship with the Americans who are embedded with them. Have any of the lessons learned been transferred over to the ANA, for instance, or the Afghani police, from what the Iraqis have learned, from your office?

LT. COL. TRINKLE: Well, that's an interesting question. We just had the -- my counterpart to the Iraq -- I mean, to the Afghan lessons learned center in country with myself and my predecessor, and we compared notes. And we are -- it's two different operating environments, and some of the hurdles that they are overcoming there are quite different than the ones here.

We're into our fourth year. I'm the sixth adviser here. And the Afghan Lessons Learned Center, that's a little less developed than here. So, naturally a lot of lessons that we're learning, we're giving them everything that we have to give, and they're trying to create the same infrastructure that we're creating.

Q Thanks, sir. That's great.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Chuck, please go ahead.

Q Good evening, sir. Chuck Simmins from America's North Shore Journal.

We had a Bloggers Roundtable a while back with some officers who were involved in a lessons learned program for the entire United States military. Are you familiar with that?

LT. COL. RINKLE: Could you develop that question a little bit more for me, please?

Q Lieutenant Cragg, do you remember that particular Bloggers Roundtable?

LT. CRAGG: That was last year. It was like another -- like a think tank. I think it was -- keep on talking, and I will find it for you.

Q Okay. Well, I guess my question was going to -- there's a lessons learned center now for Iraq, one for Afghanistan. Does this look like a type of development that we're going to want to put in place on a regular basis in all commands or just as an as-needed thing? Because I'm gathering that the lessons learned are both for us and for the Iraqis.

LT. CRAGG: And sir, before you answer that, what Chuck was referring to is the Army center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

LT. COL. RINKLE: Yes, I'm familiar with Leavenworth and the Center for Army Lessons Learned there. The Center for Army Lessons Learned at Leavenworth is about into its 25th year of development. In comparison, you've got the Iraqi Lessons Learned Center and the Afghan Lessons Learned Center, both of which are very much in their infancy compared to Leavenworth. Leavenworth would be an ultimate model to strive towards, where the Afghan and Iraqi Lessons Learned Centers are models that can benefit, but one of the things that one has to keep in mind when they do those types of comparison is that you have to look at the culture in each of those countries.

And what we're finding is that the culture within the Afghan and the Iraq cultures are different than the U.S. culture. So we have to tailor the lessons learned centers along with their culture and their structure that they want to collect by.

So they're not going to be exact patterns, but they're good models to follow as far as the Center for Army Lessons Learned back in Leavenworth, because that's who we -- that's who I work with, the Leavenworth Center for Army Lessons Learned.

Q All right. But is this a program then that we are -- that the United States military is putting in place everywhere it interacts with another country, or is it just kind of unique to Iraq and Afghanistan right now?

LT. COL. TRINKLE: Well, within both the Afghan and Iraq theaters, we have what we call TODs, theater -- these are liaisons that are assigned to different units and organizations that are going out collecting on everything that's going on in theater.

The lessons learned are specific to that task. They are liaisons that are attempting, with the support of both Leavenworth and the host nation, to go ahead and develop a lessons-learned center for that particular organization.

Q All right. Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Let's go back to Sean, then we're just going to go back and forth to Sean and Chuck. So Sean, please go ahead.

Q Hey, sir. Last question for you, actually, is how the Iraqis handle the dissemination of their information across the country. So if there was an incident in Baghdad today, how long does it usually take for the Iraqi center to get that information out to their men and -- you know, their men on the ground, out in some of the other far-distant regions?

LT. COL. TRINKLE: That's a good question that emphasizes one of the infrastructure needs that they're developing right now. Currently, a lot of the dissemination of those types of occurrences are actually done through the local news sources. The infrastructure, the communication infrastructure throughout the theater, is in great need of repair. So that's actually one of the areas that we'll be focusing on over the next year to develop that infrastructure.

Q And sir, just actually to follow up on that, does that entail any of the American advisers that are embedded with them? Do you guys disseminate anything directly to, say, some of the senior enlisted that are embedded with the Iraqi army, the Iraqi police?

LT. COL. TRINKLE: We're mainly military, and we're working some, but we are -- we're trying to develop that infrastructure. We realize that is a means of passing information on quickly, and we're -- matter of fact, that's one of the topics of discussion in some of the meetings that we're going to -- that I'll be attending this coming week.

Q Thanks, sir. Appreciate it.

LT. CRAGG: Over to you, Chuck.

Q Yeah. Sir, could you -- without either embarrassing anyone or giving any vital information away -- could you give us an example or two of lessons learned? LT. COL. TRINKLE: Well, checkpoints are a real good one. The center here did an analysis on the effectiveness of the checkpoints, and from -- as a result of their study and the implementation of that, it made the checkpoints a lot more effective.

Q Are we talking about physical organization or are we talking about operations? I don't -- I know you don't want to reveal too much, but just what was it, if you can give me a hint, of what was it that improved? Interaction with --

LT. COL. TRINKLE: It reduced the numbers of incidences within the checkpoints, breaches of security.

Q Ah, okay. All right. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Sean, did -- I think Sean might have dropped off. Sean, are you still there?

Q I am still here, Jennifer, yeah.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Did someone else join us?

Q Jarred Fishman's on.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Jarred. If you -- Sean's on the line, as well as Chuck Simmins. So if you have any questions -- I know you just came on cold. We've been talking with Lieutenant Colonel Evan Jay Trinkle. Do you have some questions for him? I can turn it over to you.

Q Yes, ma'am, I guess, if -- I'll piggyback off the other ones -- questions as well, but since I was unfortunately unable to hear the first part, if you could talk about what you've seen in the last few months that you've been there about the greatest improvement amongst the Iraqis that you have to deal

with, and what's still the greatest weakness that you see from the indigenous Iraqis and those who you have to deal with on a daily basis?

LT. COL. TRINKLE: That's an interesting question, because one thing that you have to realize, when we frame a question like that, is to understand the culture here within Iraq. We often approach questions in a Western mindset. And when I first came here, the first thing I did was I just didn't have any pretension as to what to expect. So I spent most of my initial month here just understanding the culture and how to ask a question effectively. And as a result of that, one thing is that some of their greatest strengths is their desire for change. And some of their weaknesses: It just takes time to do that.

And there's just a great positive force going on right now within the country, and they're trying to move forward. The elections have been positive. A lot of people I see on the ground, the feedback I'm getting from a lot of the -- both the military and the local people that I talk to, is that they're very much appreciative of everything that's gone on and what's taking place right now within theater.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, let's go over to Chuck or to Sean. Sean or Chuck, do you have any follow-on questions for Lieutenant Colonel Trinkle?

Q I have actually a quick one, Jennifer. If you don't mind, sir, on the operational side, how long does it usually take for -- if there's an incident. You were talking about checkpoints. How long does it usually take for that incident -- say if it were again to occur today -- to get to your Iraqi center and to the Iraqis who are conducting in the lessons learned format?

LT. COL. TRINKLE: It doesn't take long for it to get to the center. It takes a while to do the analysis and to make recommendations that will be implemented. And that's what we're working on right now, is we're trying to suggest measures that can be in place so that a lot of those processes will be almost -- you know, a reduction of time. You know, you're talking right now, we can do an analysis and turn that analysis around, but dissemination right now is slow. So we're working specifically on how to increase that effectiveness in getting the information out to the units.

Q And, sir, are there Americans that take part in a lot of these debriefs, or is it mainly Iraqi-run?

LT. COL. TRINKLE: We have a host of advisers to different levels of -- within the military structure of Iraq. And what we're trying to do -- you've got to remember, we're advisers. So what we're trying to do is give them our best advice, and as they take our advice, they turn it into what works in Iraq.

So sometimes it's not always implemented word for word, what we give them as advice. And that's one thing that we have to realize, is that it's not always based on what we would like to see happening. It's based on what is best for the nation here.

Q Thanks, sir. Appreciate that.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Chuck or Jarred.

Q Yes. Colonel, can you give me some idea of the number of people from the coalition in your unit? And can you speak to if you've got Reserve or National Guard folks as part of your unit? And then if so, what do they bring?

LT. COL. TRINKLE: I'm not sure which unit you're trying to talk to --

Q The --

LT. COL. TRINKLE: You talking about which -- I'm not exactly sure how you want that question framed.

Q Your command. Your particular command. How many --

LT. COL. TRINKLE: Okay, within the lessons-learned center?

Q Yeah.

LT. COL. TRINKLE: Okay. Well, specifically to the lessons- learned center, we just have -- we have very few U.S. -- and then we're dealing primarily with a -- you know, a number of advisers on the U.S. side. And what we're trying to primarily do is create an Iraqi-driven lessons-learned center. So we're trying to work with almost entirely Iraqi military officers.

Q And it is officers and not Iraqi enlisted, primarily?

LT. COL. TRINKLE: Well, no. There are -- there are several -- there are numerous NCOs and enlisted also in each of the departments that we're working in. So there is a mixture between the Iraqi officers and NCOs. But that's a different culture altogether, the military structure there between officers and NCOs.

Q All right. Thank you. LT. CRAGG: Okay. Let's go over to Jarred. Jarred, you have any follow-up questions?

Q Okay. Thanks. Thank you, ma'am. Yes, I do.

Sir, how do we train the Iraqis?

When you're saying the lessons learned -- so that you're taking our view of what the lessons are and then the Iraqi view of what the lessons are, and then I'm assuming you're coming to a joint --

LT. COL. TRINKLE: Jarred, there's a lot of confusion, here. Could you state that question again, please?

Q Okay. Yes, sir. I'm saying -- obviously, the American side has our view of what the lessons learned are, and then I'm supposing that the Iraqi officers probably have, as you mentioned before, their own view about what the lessons learned are. How do you amalgamate those lessons into one joint decision-making? Or do you not do that? And how do you train the senior Iraqi leadership, or at all levels, to understand how you actually do this process together?

LT. COL. TRINKLE: Good question. We -- for one, you listen a lot. You know the lessons learned process. You understand the cycle of collection, analysis and getting it framed and into a viable lessons learned, whether it's a TTP or some other type of document, whether it goes kind of long-term into doctrinal development or whatever the end-state is.

So the piece that you got to place in there is also the culture, the military culture here. They -- there's a -- there's a -- there is a viewpoint here that analysis or actually self-assessment is something that you have to walk on lightly. And that's a cultural thing.

Now, the important thing to realize is that they are in the process of wanting to learn from each other, but it's a matter of how you frame it. It's a matter of saying I -- we want to learn from their senior wisdom, the wisdom that is collected from each of the commanders, so that the army as a whole -- the Iraqi army as a whole will benefit from that lesson that that commander has learned.

Nobody here likes an inspection. I mean, the U.S. Army doesn't like an inspection, but we're more receptive to it. So that's something that the Lessons Learned Center does not do. It does not inspect anybody. They're there to gather information, the wisdom from that commander and package it so that the rest of the army can benefit from it.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Jarred -- Jarred, Chuck, or Sean, either one of you - and did anyone else join us? I just heard -- Q Lieutenant, this is Beth Wilson.

I apologize for my tardiness.

LT. CRAGG: That's okay. I'm sure that you are very busy.

Now Chuck, Jarred and Sean are on the call. I know that you are coming on a little bit late, so you probably didn't hear what they were saying. We're talking with Lieutenant Colonel J. Evan -- Evan J. Trinkle. Excuse me.

Do you have any prepared questions you'd like to ask him, or do you want me to go around the horn one more time?

Q Go around the horn one more time and then I'll come in with my questions. I don't want to re-ask what's already been asked.

LT. CRAGG: Okay.

Q Thanks.

LT. CRAGG: Sean, Chuck or Jarred, one more time.

Q I'm all set, Jennifer. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay.

Jarred?

Q Yes, ma'am. I could -- just as a follow-up, sir -- it's very interesting. You mentioned the TTPs now. Are you actually seeing the Iraqi army at the more tactical level, let's say, the company or the platoon, the jundi -- do they actually incorporate some of these lessons learned, or is it more of a general staff focus?

LT. COL. TRINKLE: It's general staff-focused right now.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Chuck?

Q I'm all set.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Beth, over to you, and we'll wrap up in about six minutes. So over to you, Beth.

Q Thank you. Good morning, Lieutenant Colonel. And I apologize for my tardiness. My understanding is that in gathering the lessons learned, are you then making recommendations of best practices? And how is that being received by the army?

LT. COL. TRINKLE: We are making recommendations. Actually, when I say "we," I'm using that as a general term. The Iraqi center for lessons learned are making recommendations. And for the most part, when it's read, it's received quite well. I talked a little bit about the culture and -- within the military, just vaguely. That's probably another topic for another time. But understanding that culture makes a significant impact on the recommendation and how that recommendation is worded and packaged so that the entire army can benefit from it. (Pause.)

LT. CRAGG: Beth, do you have any more -- (inaudible) --

Q Thank you. Can I just one other question that isn't directly related to this? But I've been curious to get the question asked. And with the recent announcement that troops are going to be pulled out within 16 months, what has been the response of the Iraqi army? Are they welcoming this news? Are they ramping up to be able to step up? What has been their response, if you can speak to that? (Pause.)

LT. CRAGG: Just that one, Beth --

LT. COL. TRINKLE: Yes, ma'am. It's important to remember that we're just partners with the Iraqi government, and we're working at a pace that is comfortable to them, and we're getting them to the place of independence.

Q Super. Wonderful. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. Lieutenant Colonel Trinkle, I'd like to turn this over to you, if you'd like to end with any closing thoughts for today.

LT. COL. TRINKLE: Well, I really appreciate everyone's interest in the Lessons Learned Center. If there are additional questions that you feel that you want to have, we can go ahead and set up another time at a latter point.

Other than that, I -- I know that it's nice to know that there are others out there that want to see the Iraqi army and their Lessons Learned Center be successful, too. So thank you.

LT. CRAGG: (Sound of telephone tone.) That was perfect timing. Our bloggers roundtable --

RECORDED VOICE: This conference is scheduled to be disconnected automatically in five minutes. To extend the time, please signal for an operator by pressing star-0.

LT. CRAGG: I'll vote for that. So we're ending at a perfect time. And Lieutenant Colonel Trinkle, thank you for joining us today.

And a note for everyone online: Today's blogger call will be available off DefenseLink on the Blogger link, as well as a story based on today's call, the audio file and the transcript.

Again, sir, thank you for joining us on DOD Live Bloggers Roundtable. And thank you for the bloggers who came on the call today.

LT. COL. TRINKLE: Thank you.

Q Thank you, sir.

END.