

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH DAVID KING, SES, DIRECTOR, MNSTC-I
MINISTRY OF DEFENSE ADVISOR TEAM (MOD-AT) VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ
SUBJECT: TRAINING OF COALITION ADVISORS TIME: 10:00 A.M. EDT DATE: FRIDAY, APRIL
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PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the
Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Friday, April 17th, 2009. My
name is Petty Officer William Selby, of the Office of the Secretary of Defense,
Public Affairs, and I will be moderating the call today.

A note to the bloggers -- our bloggers on the line today. Please
remember to clearly state your name and blogger organization in advance of your
question. And please respect our guest's time, keeping questions succinct.
Also, please remember to keep your phone on mute if you are not answering or
asking a question.

Today our guest is David King, SES, MNSTC-I Ministry of Defense Advisor
Team, director, who oversees the training of coalition advisors. And Mr. King,
do you have any opening remarks today?

MR. KING: Yes, absolutely. I, first of all, want to sort of say hello
to the one blogger who's out there. Good to know you're out there. If we are
joined by others, that'll be great as well. So I'm really pleased to have the
opportunity to talk about what we're doing in MNSTC-I for the people and for the
government of Iraq.

I ought to say something about myself, first of all, and indeed why I
am in the job that I am in. I'm a member of the senior civil service back in
the U.K. I've had a career in the U.K. Ministry of Defense that's been in the
regions, been abroad, been in NATO, been on our nuclear sites and been in our
headquarters most recently.

I've had a lot of background in different arms of acquisition, as a team
leader -- a project team leader and a commercial team leader.

I worked with U.K. ministers and I worked with the coordinating part of
government, we call the Cabinet Office in the U.K. So I'm pretty well equipped
in terms of understanding how government bureaucracies work, and it's for that
reason that I've been picked -- selected for post of senior advisor to the
Ministry of Defense -- the Iraqi Ministry of Defense.

My team are advisors themselves, as I am. They're experts in their
field, from plans and and budgets to human resources, acquisition and so on.

Their mission is to help develop the individual and collective institutional capability needed for good governance and to generate and sustain the Iraqi security forces.

We work in partnership, as we must, with the Iraqi Ministry of Defense. Therefore, we have a series of relationships that we exploit in the best of senses in what they and we judge to be their national interest. And specifically today I'm here to talk to you about not only any subject of the kind we've just touched on, but on the advisor school and the ministry or training development center.

The advisor school is a MNSTC-I-run operation in an Iraqi institution - training institution. And each week we get 20, 25 new advisors or coalition officials, service or military, who will be having dealings with the Iraqi counterparts. And we give them through that two days a very intense short piece on a variety of related subjects; so, society, history, culture, the nature of relationships, the use of linguists, the way, in effect, to be effective, how to be effective as swiftly as possible in terms of approaching the Iraqi counterparts.

Our people have deep skills, but what many of them don't have is past advisory experience. And there is a real art every where about bringing you're expertise to bear, and that's particularly true when you're going across cultural boundaries.

So the advisor school is an endeavor to try and help speed that pace of learning and to make our advisors -- our key people with key relationships, with senior people in Iraq, as effective as possible as swiftly as possible.

I'll just mention one last thing, and then I'm open to questions. It's part of a wider package with education and train -- training -- excuse me. (And it includes/let me include ?) two illustrations: not just the advising and training for the Iraqis we provide, but a part of the support is where we talk to our Iraqi friends, at their request, about what makes us tick, and the why do we act the way we do. So this is a counterpart to the advisor support, is about opening us up to Iraqi culture, Iraqi thinking.

We also did a women's conference. We've had the first one of those recently. And that's putting women together from the civil service and the services here and in MNSTC-I with their counterparts. So a lot around cultural relationship, because we believe that's so critical for effectiveness now and in the future.

So that's some explanation. I'm happy to take any questions on that or, really, to let the conversation go wherever it might.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir.

And Nick, if you want to go ahead with your questions.

Q Yes, thank you very much. One thing that I wasn't clear on: Are you employed by the U.S. government? Are you employed by a private contractor from the U.S.? Who funds the work that you've been doing?

MR. KING: Well, the United Kingdom is a still a member of the coalition. I'm an -- so I'm an embedded U.K. official, and my salary gets paid by my government, as does everything else, really -- apart from -- I don't get -

- I don't get charged for the food I eat here in the dining facility. But no, I'm a U.K. embed, and I'm part of the coalition presence in Iraq. And although the U.S. -- U.K. forces are drawing down in the south, as you all know, there are quite a few of us still here doing the best job we can alongside our mostly U.S. colleagues. We do have contractors and people from a variety of disciplines here, but I am a U.K. civil servant.

Q Yes. Thank you. I also wanted to ask you whether you've had experience with the department -- or, excuse me, the Ministry of the Interior in Iraq. It was mentioned on the description of your experience that you had worked with them. And I'm wondering if that -- is that accurate? MR. KING: I haven't worked with the Ministry of the Interior, although the reality is that as one command here, MNSTC-I, covering all of the security forces, I rub shoulders with my colleagues who are advising the Ministry of the Interior.

I advise the Ministry of Defense and my team advises the Ministry of Defense.

I do do some cross-cutting work. We have issues, you can imagine -- for example, human rights detention, governance and here, on the subject of advising, growing the skills of advisors. Those skills cross all the boundaries. So in that sense, I have an indirect relationship. But I don't directly advise the Ministry of Interior. I'm aware of some of their issues. And I'm -- as I say, I help with the advisors.

Q All right. Okay. Well, there'd be two categories of things that I would like to ask you about, if I might. The first is with respect to the Ministry of Defense and I guess you'd say the disposition of their forces and responsibilities. Could you give any idea of what percentage of the Iraqi forces are devoted toward protecting the Iraqi oil resources, the refineries, the terminals, the pipelines?

MR. KING: Well, Nick, percentage is probably not that helpful. What I can say is that, as you will -- I guess you'll know, the primary focus, the -- (inaudible) -- of the Ministry of Defense is naturally army-centric. That's both history and tradition but also the reality of where the greatest risks to the population are; they're in -- they're in and through the insurgency. So the primary focus is that way.

The Ministry of Defense does devote time, energy and people to protection of both the oil pipelines and the oil facilities. So in that sense, they are, with the Ministry of Interior, putting people onto the challenge of keeping the essential oil infrastructure in good shape, so both on land and, of course, down in the south at sea at Umm Qasr and then the pipeline installations out in -- out in the bay, there are resources devoted there -- marines and army and navy and, on land, of course, police and the army.

So you could look at this as a -- in the big sense, the big picture sense, you've got quite a lot of assets devoted to that. But it's just -- it's a smaller picture, compared to the wider challenge. But it does get time and attention. There is an awareness that oil is the lifeblood of the nation. They are, as you know, very much oil-dependent and cash-dependent on the price of oil in turn. So protection of that does matter and it does get attention. Q Is that going well, relative to what it was several years ago?

MR. KING: I would -- I would -- I can't judge about the -- sort of the relative sense in an absolute way, but I would -- I would say that I see more

awareness of the importance of the oil infrastructure in terms of priorities for protection. And these are difficult years for the Iraqis, so they choose amongst many priorities for expenditure. I believe that they'll make some more choices for -- help and support the navy. Certainly, that's our -- that's our recommendation, that they do so. And I know there's been real success with growing a marine corps.

Q And in dealing with the advisors generally, basically you're training Americans and other maybe private contractors to work with the Iraqi military and interior department. Do you find that there -- Iraqis are resistant in any way to this kind of involvement?

MR. KING: I would say no. I mean, I think -- if I was to take the majority opinion, I think there's a deep welcome for what the advisors can do. I mean, individual by individual are remembering that -- some of the senior officials have seen many advisors come and go. I'm sure that the opinion and the value that they place upon what we do really does vary. And I hear that from those who (are prepared ?) to be frank.

But in the round, in the round, there is a real value still placed upon advisors. And given the distance that our Iraqi counterparts -- not in natural intellect, I hasten to add, but in terms of just experience, of the modern technology and the modern world -- they recognize, the best of them, that there is something that they can gain from us.

And there are many good relationships that I do see, Nick, some very warm relationships which tell me, you know, we are making really a difference in lots of parts of the bureaucracy. And while that's the case, then this is still worth pursuing.

Q The other thing I wanted to ask about has to do -- you mentioned detention and training, I guess, advisers to work with the Iraqis, on issues around prisons and detentions.

Have you had an opportunity to visit any Iraqi prison or detention centers?

MR. KING: I have, Nick.

Back to the first part of your question, yes, we do offer -- provide support to our Iraqi counterparts and not just in MNSTC-I but elsewhere. MNSTC-I, we provide, for example, a couple of people who help the human rights director here.

I personally engage on the issues that arise around detention facilities and the sort of challenge that there is, between operational pressure and frankly the rule of law now. So yes, I do get involved. And I have been to a number of facilities. So I do have some idea of the issues that face up.

Q Would you say that generally -- how would you characterize the health conditions and the treatment of prisoners overall?

I know that there have been press reports about overcrowding, poor health conditions, guards mistreating prisoners and detainees. Have you observed any of these conditions?

MR. KING: I think the press reports are, by their nature, going to be focused on parts of the picture, Nick. And that in itself is fair enough.

I -- from what I -- from what I can see -- and I've not visited all the facilities, but I do get reports on the sort of -- what we understand to be the position across the country -- and I'll put that with the people I talk to and my personal glimpses, those places that I've seen -- I would say this.

I would sort of say that in the round, there's -- (audio break) -- in the round, it's an uncomfortable place to be, to be in an MOD detention facility. If you judged it by the standards we hope at our best we'd apply in, say, the U.S. and the U.K., we would say that they are very overcrowded, and they've -- and they are -- are very poorly equipped. And they are, therefore, uncomfortable.

But there are some cultural pieces to this about a willingness to accept more people in a smaller space than we might. I make no judgment on that, but overcrowding and -- overcrowding is an issue in many facilities. It's not an issue in all of them.

And if I'm specific, again, medical conditions -- I do hear often, I do see, issues that result from proximity to people and a lack of light and lack of air. You know, as I say, these are not -- these are not great places.

But I have also seen good care, and I've seen some improvements. We try to sort of manage -- now, I can't say we've managed them personally, but we've tried to manage to keep an overview of what's happening. And quite a few of the indicators are the right way we've, you know -- on, for example -- in terms of getting clean bedding and clean clothing to people, getting visits to detainees, getting family access, getting notification to the families after arrests. These are things which are better than they were.

But there's no disguising the fact that the detention facilities, even in the MOD, are not ideal. There'll be positive exceptions and there'll be places which are very overcrowded, and there'll be places in between. So there's no one answer I can give you. There are a lot of problems. There are some improvements. And we're working with our Iraqi friends to keep a -- sort of a positive pace and pressure up to get things better.

Q Good.

Q Could I ask a question, please? Someone else has a question.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Oh, somebody else joined us.

Who's this?

Q Yes, I've been on the whole time. It's Captain Fishman.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Oh, okay. We didn't hear you join. Sorry about that. Go ahead.

Q Sir, thank you for your time. Could you talk a little about -- to the lessons that you've learned? How does the training schedule -- (inaudible) -- when you train both the instructors and the personnel? Talk a little bit -- you know, we've been fairly theoretical and philosophical in this conversation, but on a day-to-day basis, what actually happens, you know, in

the daily lives of your program as far as how many people are -- is your program able to interact with? How many different officers are able to be trained? And what are the results of that?

MR. KING: All right. Let me try and give you some specifics, then. And good morning to you.

We've -- in fact, let me just talk about my team, first of all. I mean, I've got about 60 advisors, relatively senior people from -- mostly from the U.S., some from the U.K., also from Australia, experts in their field.

Who do they see? Well, they see their senior counterparts. And this often can be a one- or a two- or a three-star official -- I use the notary reference -- inside the Ministry of Defense and their teams.

They'll spend, typically, anything between two to six hours a day -- for some it will be more -- inside the Iraqi Ministry of Defense. They'll be seeing their counterparts. They'll be doing what advisors can do. And that's -- this is around providing knowledge and help and assistance. Then, in that sense, it's a very wide framework. It could be very technical assistance, technical challenges to which we give technical answers. It could be advice around policy. It could be advice around process and practice. So it's all of the issues of the day.

I recently visited, just a few days ago -- give you a couple of examples -- some infrastructure colleagues. And there we going through land deeds, so that's demonstrative help and assistance. We had an architect who was -- who was working with his counterparts on drawings and plans. So the advisory role can be everything from in principle -- how should you go about the governance and organization, how to be more effective, how to delegate -- to very specific pieces of work where technical advice and assistance, whether it's on budgets or human resources or planning, where technical assistance is probably the primary duty.

But all of them involve the same things. They require to you have a series of productive engagements with your counterparts, to be influential without being directive; you know, not putting your finger in the chest --

Q Hello?

MR. KING: -- but trying to get across what's helpful.

Q Hello?

MR. KING: Does that help?

Q Yes, thank you, sir.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Somebody was saying hello?

Q Hello?

PETTY OFFICE SELBY: Yes. Are you there, sir?

Q (Off mike.)

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Mr. Fishman -- or, I'm sorry, Lieutenant Fishman, if you want to continue and ask a few more questions and catch up, if you have some more.

Q Okay. It's actually captain now, but that's okay.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Oh, I'm sorry. Captain. I thought you said (three/30 ?) more days. Sorry.

Q Sir, could you talk a little about what has been the effect on the Iraqi -- the upper leadership? You mentioned the one, the two, possibly the three-star generals that we'd have to interact with. You know, obviously, they came from a different system. So, how has the training gone at that senior level and then on the company, the field grade levels, you know, at the lower ranks, as well as you have to train the new people to come up to take the older people's positions in the next few years. Talk a little bit about that culture of learning and training and how that works, as well.

MR. KING: It's a great question. I could get drawn into a wide answer, but let me just try and keep this as narrow as I can.

From my perspective, if you take this in the only way you can, which is in the round, given the breadth of the organization, it's undoubtedly true that you've got a lot of very talented people, as you'd hope with any organization, who have a real hunger for learning. And I hear stories, directly and indirectly, about just how much we have had the pleasure and the privilege of access to information and how little information has been available to our colleagues. And a sort of specific illustration of this would be that when I talk about dissertations for degrees and for masters and so on, it soon becomes plain that the Internet doesn't feature in that for our counterparts. Now, that's becoming, I think, a barrier that is being broken down, but the thinking and the patterns and the practices academically still lag behind our own, and they reflect the fact that so much was cut off and unavailable to our Iraqi counterparts.

So there is a lot to do. There is a lot of training and help and assistance being provided at every level. I mentioned earlier, I think -- at least I hope I did -- the Ministerial Training and Development Center, which has a primary focus of helping the security ministries but is open to the government of Iraq.

And people come from another 10 or dozen different institutions in the GOI for professional development. And this is today's standards on human rights and ethics and business establishment and project development and so on. And that's -- that is really, really highly welcomed by our Iraqi friends.

So in sum, I see a great welcome, particularly, as you would expect and imply, for the more junior and for the more middle ranks and the younger of our counterparts, for the information and knowledge that there is. That's not to say that their more senior counterparts don't have the same, but of course their responsibilities are rather different.

And I would say across the board we've got some very talented people who I don't doubt are going to make their own way with -- I hope, with our help, and therefore our positive influence; but one way or another, that they will make that progress themselves, at every level, I have to say.

Q Well, may I ask another question?

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Sure. Captain Fishman, are you done with your questions right now?

Q Yeah, I'm finished. Thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Roger that. Yes, sir, go ahead.

Q Yes. Would you say that the numbers of people being detained in Iraq are -- you know, by the Iraqi military and the U.S., are pretty constant, or would you say there's been a decline? You spoke of overcrowding. And I also wondered if you had an idea of how many people are being held in various Iraqi detention facilities at this point.

MR. KING: Again, I will try and give you the best answer I can. I haven't got information on all of the facilities. I do have some sort of sense of the very changing numbers inside the Iraqi MOD detainee facilities. They are typically a sort of -- well, they have of late been perhaps from around 1,500, 2,000 or so. It depends on how you -- how you number them and which sites you include.

But that doesn't really in a way sort of help the specific point about overcrowding, because it depends on where operations are being held and where people are being picked up for what should be -- sometimes is; sometimes isn't -- a short period before investigation and then either release or processing in the system.

So overcrowding tends to be worse in areas where there is -- and this is understandable -- where there is an intense effort to try and deal with the terrorism in the field.

More widely, I think it would be right to say that there are well published and public statements around the release of detainees that have been held by coalition forces.

And there is a -- there is a process of release that we agreed with the government of Iraq was consistent with the strategic agreement. And month on month, people are being released. So I can't give you an overall number. My sense, certainly, of coalition involvement, is, as a result of what I've just described, the numbers are in a fairly steady -- quick and steady downward movement.

And I think more widely, inside -- my impression is that, more widely, inside Iraqi society, there is a lot of attention paid to the issues around detention. They're sensitive, particularly for understandable reasons, because there's always going to be a conversation around, well, the justice or injustice of who's being held and the relationship of all of that to the security position.

So there's a lot of attention on the subject, which is probably a better way of looking at this, in my view. There is a sensitivity about how many numbers are being held. There is a debate -- a healthy debate about conditions and trying to improve them. And the coalition does what it can to both help that -- and, for its part, as I say, part of the withdrawal is to disengage from this business and to leave this as it should be, as a matter for the government of Iraq.

So I'd caution any sort of judgment, really, based on numbers. They don't necessarily convey anything in the circumstances we're in. And we're -- we can't do a comparison against a particular norm nor against a particular standard in that matter for these circumstances. These are quite unique circumstances.

But what I can say is -- and this is the bit that I think really matters -- that there -- this is a very live issue that gets a lot of attention in -- not just by us, but inside the government of Iraq and inside the Ministry of Defense. There is a debate all the time about what to do, how to do and how best to meet the obligations under the law. And that's a very healthy thing, even if there are problems day by day.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir.

And we only have a few minutes left, and thank you for all the questions today.

Mr. King, do you have any closing remarks?

MR. KING: Well, I just want to say thank you, first of all, to all the bloggers for your questions. It was -- they were stimulating. I thank you for them. I hope I've given you, you know, a reasonably wide -- because you need that -- as well as a reasonably specific response. And I'm happy to sort of pick up, in whatever way we need to, any sort of supplementary questions, if that will be a help, or to clarify a conversation that may have been less clear than the ideal.

I'll just say this as well: You know, it is a real privilege to be here as a Brit working with the U.S. colleagues. It's been fantastic for me personally. They work me to death. It's been -- it's been wonderful. And our Iraqi friends are very talented -- in the main, from my experience, talented and decent people. And it's been a real learning lesson.

So it's been -- it's been good to be part of this, and it's been good to speak to you all today. And thank you all very much for your time.

Thank you.

Q Is there a way we can be in touch by e-mail, if there are further questions?

MR. KING: As far as I'm concerned, yes. I don't know what the protocol is here, but I'm very happy to do that. And we can make that available.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Yes, sir. We can -- what we'll do is e-mail me your questions, Nick, and we will go from there. I'll -- if you -- actually, e-mail them to Jennifer Cragg, Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg, and she will e-mail it to Mr. King.

Q (Off mike.)

Q All right.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: All right.

Q Thank you so much. I appreciate it and I will join other calls,
too.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you. We appreciate your participance
today.

Q Okay, thank you, Mr. King.

Q Bye-bye.

MR. KING: Welcome.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Thank you, sir. This concludes the call today.
MR. KING: Thanks so much. Thank you.

END.