

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH NAVY VICE ADMIRAL ROBERT HARWARD, COMMANDER, JOINT TASK FORCE 435, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM AFGHANISTAN TIME: 9:37 A.M. EST DATE: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2010

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Sir, if you want to start with the opening statement, we'll go right into questions.

ADM. HARWARD: Okay, Jennifer. And for everyone else out there, thanks for taking the time out of your day and giving us the opportunity to participate in this roundtable discussion.

We're a new task force, Joint Task Force 435. We were conceptually perceived in September 2009, I was confirmed in November, and we went initial operating capacity (sic/capability) just recently, on the 9th of January. So I appreciate the opportunity to make sure you understand our mission and talk about it.

Let me start by just reiterating. As you all know, we've been involved in a war in Afghanistan for eight years now, operating under the law of armed conflict. As you know, the Supreme Court affirmed that detention as a fundamental and accepted occurrence in war, and detention is recognized as a legitimate practice under international law in times of war.

So we maintain the legitimacy of detention as a warfighting tool, and this requires that we demonstrate our commitment to transparency, the rule of law, and to individual human dignity, and that we empower the Afghan government to take responsibility for its citizens.

And I think you saw President Karzai's inaugural address, where he clearly reiterated that detention operations in Afghanistan should fall under the sovereignty of the government of Afghanistan, and the desire to move in that direction. I think you all also saw the press release of the recent memorandum of understanding signed by seven Afghan ministers that codified the transition through the Ministry of Defense.

So we've initiated a plan, a one-year plan. We've established a tashkeel, and we'll move that transition of U.S. detention operations

through the Ministry of Defense to the government of Afghanistan, leaving the door open for further transition to the minister of Justice at sometime to be determined after that. We believe that process could take several years as we help build and partner to build up the rule of law and those other elements critical in running the sovereignty of detention operations.

I think you also know we recently opened a new detention facility in Parwan province. This facility has room for 10,000 -- I'm sorry -- 1,050 individuals, and could be expanded. We provide each detainee with human care, custody, medical and dental facilities, on-site family visitation, vocational and educational training. And we also work and identify those to be reintegrated back into peaceful society with greater skills when they return to their villages.

The intent of the U.S. government is to transfer this facility to the government of Afghanistan as soon as transfer can be -- responsibly occur in accordance with all applicable international law. And as I said, we currently have a plan, a one-year plan.

Now, will we meet that aggressive timeline? I'm optimistic at this point, but we don't control all of the elements. As we know -- a great demand to expand the Afghan national security forces, so we compete with those soldiers who may be going on the battlefield to come in and help take on this mission.

As you know, there's currently the Afghan national detention facility, where they place their national-security threats, so we do have a gene pool of experience and knowledge, and we want to leverage that leadership and that tool as part of the transition. So an individual new military member would get his basic military training, he could go to the ANDF, get additional training and OJT, and then come to the detention facility in Parwan, where he right-seats, left-seats, works with a partner to build that capacity. But getting that flow of individuals into the pipeline, and reaching the numbers of 2,000 we're looking for approximately, could be one of the determining factors in when we make the final transitions.

And so that's all I've got for opening remarks. Let's turn it over to you for any questions.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Scott, you're first. Please go ahead.

Q Admiral, it's Scott Zamost from CNN. In terms of the detainees, how many of them are you seeing that are -- that actually were working with -- in -- at bases, at FOBs, that became a threat?

ADM. HARWARD: Well, let me tell you, right now, as you know, as I said, we went IOC on 7 January. So we have still not had the complete transition of looking and -- of having each one of these individuals go through the detention review board. So I don't have that -- statistics

in my hip pocket. I could go back and check, but I think relatively very few. But I don't have the exact number in my hip pocket.

Q Okay. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Scott.

Jeff, please go ahead.

Q Hi. This is Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes. Do you have any figures on detainees that have been released who have returned to the fight?

ADM. HARWARD: Yes, I do: very, very few. But that's an interesting question, so I'm going to expand a little here. As you know, I'm responsible for U.S. detention operations. And last year there were approximately 750 individuals detained by U.S. forces operating under OEF. About 550 of them came to the detention facility in Parwan (formerly the BTIS). And in the history of our detention operations, it's been about 3,000 in all. I can document where 15 of those -- I'm sorry, now it's up to 17; we had two more recently -- 17 have returned to the fight. So that's less than half of 1 percent, but that's not the whole story.

ISAF and U.S. forces operating under ISAF this year alone captured just under 2,000. Those 2,000 go through a short period of detention by ISAF, up to 96 hours, and then they're turned over to Afghan security -- be it NDS, ANA, ANP. And so I don't get -- I don't have the information on those detainees, so I can't tell you what the recidivism rate is there. So I can tell you it's very, very low for those that are captured -- U.S. forces -- and go through our detention facilities.

I can't tell you how it is in the broader context, 'cause I don't have visibility on those captured through ISAF and what happens to them.

Q Thank you. I had some follow-up questions, but I'll wait until the end.

LT. CRAGG: Jeff, if you have any follow-up questions, you can send them to me. I don't know if we'll get around to doing another rundown. Okay?

Q That's fine.

LT. CRAGG: So you can forward it to me, and I'll forward it to Eric (sp). Thank you, Jeff.

Spencer?

Q Hi, Admiral. Thank you. Spencer Ackerman, with the Washington Independent.

In November, The New York Times reported that there was something called the "black jail" at Bagram that was kept off limits to the Red Cross, and where some detainees who said they'd gone through it had heard about harsher treatment than was typical. Is -- was that story correct? And can you affirm that all detainees under your command do have access to the International Committee of the Red Cross?

ADM. HARWARD: All detainees under my command have access to the International Red Cross.

Let me make sure everybody understands some of the process. When an individual is first detained, they're taken to a field detention site. At those field detentions sites -- and we don't disclose where those field detention sites are, because of operation security. They would be targeted. They'd be at great risk. At those field detention sites, they're held for a very short period, to determine who they are, their classification, immediately actionable intelligence. And then, from that point, they're moved to our detention facility in Parwan. So there are no black jails, secret prisons.

We do have field detention sites we do not disclose that they're held there for very short periods. And then they're moved. If they're determined to need additional interment, they're moved on to the detention facility in Parwan or released.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Spencer.

Dale.

Q Hello, sir. This is Dale Kissinger from [militaryavenue.com](http://militaryavenue.com).

Recently I heard from President Karzai on the news that there was talk of trying to make peace with the Taliban. Is that having any impact on your operations and detaining of prisoners?

ADM. HARWARD: No.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Dale.

Did you want to expand on that, sir? Should I move on to the next blogger?

ADM. HARWARD: Well, I mean, Dale, we're seeing same rate right now, in fact maybe a little higher rate, of detainees. As you know, we're working hard on our reintegration programs. We have several programs at our prisons. Individual working through the detainee review

board is determined, is he the accidental guerrilla or is he a hardcore insurgent? We then place them in programs where they learn English, they learn to sew, they learn skills.

We teach them literacy skills, for those that can't read and write, to help give them skills and reintegrate them back into their villages and society and, as we move to transition this to the government of Afghanistan, inculcate the Afghan partners into that process, so they have a sense of accountability, not only from our partners who run the detention facility but for those villages, district and provinces who agree to accept these individuals back into their tribes and back home.

Q Thank you, sir. That's great. I appreciate the explanation.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Dale.

Thank you, sir.

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

The prisons run by the Afghans, over the last eight years-nine years, have had an unfortunate problem with both serious internal revolts and mass escapes. What kind of things are you trying to inculcate, into the Afghans that you're working with, to try to turn around Afghan prisons and not make Parwan a future site of a major revolt or a mass escape?

ADM. HARWARD: Well, firstly, a couple things. Let's -- I want to hit on a couple things. First off, as you know, we've expanded not just DOD but State Department through CSSP, the criminal justice program, and justice security programs. Both partner at the prisons, mentor to help inside the prisons. That's with programs. That's how -- with influence, all those things, to help the prisons inside.

We've also partnered to help secure the outside, security assessments, how they -- how far a fence should be built up, as we've done in Policharki, adding an additional perimeter. So we're actively doing that.

The government of Afghanistan has approached us recently, realizing they have not only criminal elements but insurgent elements inside their prisons, so partnership and helping to deal with that.

We've even started to discuss -- and as you know, one of General McChrystal's top priorities is how do we separate those criminal and accidental guerrillas from the hard-core insurgents? And one of the proposals we're looking at now is to remove some of those insurgents from the criminal prison population and move them into either the ANDF or the detention facility in Parwan, where we'll deal -- have a separate community of national security threats to the government of Afghanistan. So I think those steps are going to take us a long way in avoiding those issues.

We also share intelligence with Afghanistan in terms of threats to the prison system. So I think -- and as you know, we're also helping to fund refurbishment, as we're doing in Policharki right now. So I think all those elements will take us a long way in addressing those issues.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Chuck.

Nathan Hodge, please go ahead.

Q Good evening, Admiral. Nathan Hodge with wired.com. I wanted to see if you might be able to speak a little bit to perceptions of -- among the -- in the Afghan population about, you know, how detention operations are run by the United States, if there's any kind of outreach or anything in that respect to sort of explain what exactly is going on and what the plan is for transition of detention ops to the Afghan government.

ADM. HARWARD: Sure. Well, look, I mean, let's go back to the basics as we look at this transition. So we've got agreement now the Ministry of Defense is going to be the mechanism. We've come up with a manning document. We're establishing the pipeline and timeline for those individuals to be trained.

We've established -- we're building out the barracks to accommodate those forces within the DFIP (ph). They will -- once they get through the training program, they'll be assigned a partner within the DFIP (ph) that they will work and be partnered with to bring on line.

So all those steps is the plan. We could get into the details of any one of them, but I want to go back to what the whole issue is. It's kind of like we do in the United States, what I call the life cycle of a detainee. Once a(n) individual is detained, not only are we notified, but the government of Afghanistan is notified. So that village, that district, that province will be notified.

So now the government of Afghanistan and our partners will share that same accountability for that detainee from the first step of detention. So when he goes through that short period of detention, where we're classifying -- clarifying it, where if he's a threat to the government of Afghanistan and U.S. forces, that's now done in a partnership, not just through U.S. eyes.

If that village says, yeah, he's a bad guy, we've just gotten additional intelligence on him and better understanding of the individual. The village may say, hey, he's a bad kid but he could be good. Well, then maybe he does need a program where we teach him to read or write; and a short incarceration would benefit him and convince him not to be the jihadist, that he was the accidental guerrilla; that there's options and purpose for him in Afghan society outside of that, and maybe we can give him some skills that will help him.

Maybe that village comes back and says, hey, you've got the wrong guy. And by the evidence they can suggest -- and we're able to return him to the village immediately.

So I think that partnership, one, will help us do the right things in the eyes of the Afghan population. So it will -- the perception will match reality. Because right now most of that perception is based on what they hear and not what they're seeing. So we want the Afghan partners to assume a responsibility and accountability through this whole lifecycle of a detainee so that the Afghan population understands what we're doing.

It's also interesting, in a society where they've never really had laws to deal with armed conflict -- their laws are focused on criminals only -- this is a new area of law for the government of Afghanistan. So as we look at the rule of law and help build that understanding, and how you're going to deal with that in your court, is part of -- the other part of this equation. So we want to be partnered and mentored through all of those elements.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Nathan.

Thank you, sir.

Paul, please go ahead.

Q Hi, Admiral. It's Paul McLeary from DTI. I'm wondering, are Afghan forces partnering with U.S. forces as part of their training inside the prisons? And are you using any private contractors to do any -- or any sort of security work at the prison?

ADM. HARWARD: Well, yes, yes, yes. Yes on all of them. Yes, we are partnered with them -- not in the prisons, but on ANDF, the Afghan national detention facility. There are -- not our contracts, State Department contracts, in the corrections systems, in the prisons, where they have guys who have been jailers in the U.S. all their time, corrections officers, guys with those backgrounds who are on contract to State Department, mentoring and partnering, in Policharki, they're -- I've been to and seen them. They really do an incredible job. I mean, they're there with them every day. They know you can't open this gate until everybody's in and through. You got -- here's how you inventory your handcuffs. So there are contracts through the State Department with experienced corrections work forces inside the prisons.

In the military side, we have our guys, military uniformed individuals partnering with our military -- the Afghan MOD uniformed individuals, and that's the same model we'll follow in the detention facility in Parwan.

Q Great, thanks.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

ADM. HARWARD: And I forgot, one other thing I'll add.

We also do the same thing in the courts system. If you go to the counternarcotics justice center, we have DOJ contractors and active DOJ partner inside the courts, in the justice system.

So it's the same model we're going to do, inside the rule of law as well, very close partnering and mentoring using both contract, uniformed and State Department personnel as well as Justice personnel.

Q Thanks. LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Paul.

Kim.

Q Admiral, can you describe the rule of law programs not related to detention under your purview? What effort is your command making to support the development of processes within the Afghan court system, informal justice structures, and other rule of law priorities identified by the command and by Ambassador Holbrooke?

ADM. HARWARD: That's a great question and one we're all focused on now. And I'm not a lawyer unfortunately, I'm a SEAL. So I can't give you some of the technical terms. But let me give you some examples of what we're doing.

At that first part of detention where an individual is detained and we make that village, that district, that province and the government square, those same individuals now we will bring in. And they will be able to inject their input into our detention review board.

So they'll come to review board and say, hey, here's what we know about that guy, here's what we're doing. So that's combining the informal with the formal process, under the laws of armed conflict.

We're going to be doing that same thing in the rule of law, as we see, and I like to use the counternarcotics justice system. Because that's the model we're going to try to build on outside here, where we help mentor them and guide them through application of law and introducing those informal networks, so they can participate in that.

So I think eventually as we move down the road here, that's what we'll be doing under the laws of armed conflict. Does that finally migrate completely under the criminal law in Afghan? Or will they adopt new laws to deal?

I can't tell you that. But we do recognize the role of the informal processes that have been in place right now, developing the formal processes, where they can interact. And they can share that in a timely, understood and just system for all.

LT. CRAGG: And we're coming to a close of the blogger roundtable. We only had 30 minutes for this. So I'm going to try to get at least Grim and Taylor. And the rest of the bloggers, like Maggie, Nick and John Doyle, if you could send me questions via e-mail, I'll make sure that I send them to Eric or one of his PAs.

With that, Grim, please go ahead, and we will wrap up today's call. Grim, go with your question. Q Yes, sir. This is Grim of Blackfive.net.

I wanted to ask you about your strategic communications efforts within the prisons -- detention system. How much have you taken from Major General Doug Stone's efforts in Iraq, and what other lessons learned, or have you devised, that are particular to Afghanistan?

ADM. HARWARD: Yeah, that's a great question. As you know, we started -- when I first found out I got this job, I went right to the Stone report.

We used that as our model to initially stand up. As we've come here and as we've seen Afghanistan, in the model we've changed. And what's really surprised me is how enthusiastic and active the government of Afghanistan is down there. The day they completed the MOU, they were holding press conferences, getting the words out. I go to meetings every day. There's no one I don't meet that tells me, "Hey, the press conference held by the government about -- we've learned this -- we saw it in the press." So they've been very proactive in their strategic communications.

We have a good plan. We're partnered closely with that. So we've taken the lessons learned from the Stone report, but we've also been surprised by how active -- how this has been aligned with everything from Karzai's inaugural speech, how the leadership in Afghanistan has taken ahold of this. So we're partnered closely. I wouldn't say we're following their lead, but we're partnered as we go down this road together, to ensure we get the right road -- messages out, and we leverage it for all the opportunities it presents.

And it's -- at the end of the day, it's a good news story. We want people to have the facts. We want -- as we've seen in so much of this conflict the last eight years, perception did not always equal reality; yet reality -- perception was considered reality. We now really are working to align perceptions with reality in what detention operations in Afghanistan are.

Q Thank you, Admiral.

LT. CRAGG: And again, I apologize to the other bloggers, that we couldn't reach you on this call, but please forward your questions, and I will make sure that I send them to Captain Eric Badger.

With that, sir, I'd like to turn the floor back over to you, if you'd like to end with any closing statements.

ADM. HARWARD: No, I hope we're able to clarify where we're going on this. It's really a very close partnership with the government of Afghanistan. They're anxious to take on the role.

And it's important, if you look at detention operations over the last eight years, they've been in support of a CT strategy, a CT campaign. As General McChrystal has stepped up and taken command, we're shifting to a COIN strategy. These detention operations will support that strategy and is in line with his objectives in the campaign plan.

So I think that's that biggest paradigm shift you'll see, and I think the measures and items we've talked about tonight are in support of that campaign and address those issues.

So thank you, everybody. We appreciate your time.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

A note to everybody on the line: For a copy of the transcript and the audio file, please go to [www.dodlive.mil/bloggerroundtable](http://www.dodlive.mil/bloggerroundtable). You'll find the transcript when it's completed by Fed News, as well as the audio file and a story from today's roundtable.

Again, thank you, Vice Admiral Adam Robert Harward, commander of Joint Task (sic) 435 located in Kabul, Afghanistan, for joining us today. And thank you for all the bloggers and online journalists. This concludes today's blogger roundtable. Thank you again. END.