

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH MAJOR RICK LEBRECK,  
LOGISTICS OFFICER; MAJOR JEFF LAPLANTE (SP), INFANTRY OFFICER; MAJOR  
JEANETTE RUTH (SP), MEDICAL SERVICE; MAJOR AARON HOTARD (SP), ENGINEER;  
MAJOR KEVIN KELLER (SP), AIR DEFENSE; MAJOR RICH DUNBAR (SP), FIELD  
ARTILLERY; MAJOR JEFF SALEM (SP), EW, AIR FORCE; PAUL CARLOCK (SP), ARMOR  
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LINDY KYZER (Army Public Affairs): Major Lebreck, would you  
like to get started?

MAJ. LEBRECK: Great, Lindy. Thank you very much for having us  
here.

I'll go around and introduce everybody. The audience has  
changed a little bit on this end because some people dropped out. Who we  
have here with us now is myself, Major Mike Lebreck, logistics officer;  
Major Jeff LaPlante (sp) is an infantry officer; Major Jeanette Ruth  
(sp), medical service; Major Aaron Hotard (sp), engineer; Major Kevin  
Keller (sp), air defense; Major Rich Dunbar (sp), field artillery; major  
Jeff Salem (sp), who's an EW from the Air Force who's sitting in with us;  
and then, finally, Mr. Paul Carlock (sp), who's an armor officer.

As you said, Lindy, we all have a great deal of experience  
serving overseas, both in Iraq and the Afghanistan theater. Most of us  
have at least two deployments, if not more. And again, like you  
mentioned before, we can talk pretty candidly about a lot of issues, to  
include, you know, participation in MiTT teams, use of armor over in  
Iraq, and various other experiences.

So with that, I'll go ahead and open it up for questions. Thank  
you.

MS. KYZER: Okay, Sondra, (sp), did you have a question?

Q Yeah. Maybe -- I'll ask if anyone wants to comment on  
sort of we hear about some tension with some officers as far as having to  
do more policing duties than soldiering duties, and what is the line  
between being a soldier and being a policeman. And we hear a lot about  
that. And I was just wondering if maybe they can share some of their  
experience and how they feel about that and if they think they're doing

too much policing versus being soldiers or if that's even an issue at all.

MAJ. LAPLANTE (sp): This is Major Jeff LaPlante (sp), an infantry guy, and I just came off a MiTT team.

I think it's a wide range of things. The MiTTs are performing more soldier duties by training the new Iraqi forces to take the lead and police their country and enforce their laws. On the opposite side, the combat armed forces are just enforcing security and assisting the police force.

In Iraq specifically, I think the big push has been to put the Iraqi forces out in front, and we serve at their pleasure, ensuring to back them up as they need our help. That has been a big change over the years from our initial entry and then also when I was there in 2006 (at the changes to that ?).

Q And is doing policing duties, is that something that is viewed negatively with a lot of units, or is this something that is not culturally a problem for soldiers?

MAJ. LAPLANTE (sp): I don't think that it's necessarily the policing aspect. I think it's just a tough mission. We train a lot for force-on-force ground combat prior to these operations coming up, and now that we are more interactive with the civilian populace, it makes the mission a lot more difficult. So it's not so much the policing itself; it's just a tough mission to accomplish; a lot of junior soldiers who are in the spotlight. On the average day, you know, you've got 10 or 12 patrols out there with different media agencies recording them and filming them, so soldiers feel that pressure. They're trying to do their best, but they also don't want to look like -- they don't want to screw up in front of thousands of people.

So there are a lot of different aspects that place pressure. I have never myself heard anything about "Hey, why can we not -- why are we still policing?" Because there really is no combat force-on-force role out there. It's a peace-enforcement role.

Q Okay, great. Thank you so much.

MS. KYZER: (Inaudible) -- did you have a question?

Q Yes, I was hoping to throw this out there. A couple of years ago, former Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl had a kind of provocative proposal that after coming back from Iraq, he argued that the Army should create basically a dedicated corps of trainers so that they could foster counterinsurgency capabilities and other relevant skills in an era of asymmetric and largely ground-based combat in foreign military partners so that the United States really doesn't have to get involved in more and more costly, prolonged and bloody ground conflict.

It's not been an idea that's really been embraced. A lot of existing structures have been said to basically incorporate that wisdom

while not necessarily requiring, you know, this new capability to just be created and structured to exist around it.

I was wondering what your experiences particularly dealing with training your Iraqi, and perhaps Afghan partners in some cases, sort of brought you to bear. Where do you think this lesson kind of goes? Do you think that existing structures are sufficient? Do you think that there's a danger of having people basically be too specialized, as you would be, you know, in other fields that might drain some capability in other core Army disciplines, or if you think it's just the right way to go?

MAJ. LAPLANTE (sp): That's a good question. This is Major LaPlante (sp).

My experience on a MiTT team -- I guess each person's experience is a little different, just like a soldier's experience. We all go out to different brigades. I was with the 21st Iraqi Army Brigade out on the Iranian border for the past year. And each brigade has its own mentalities and its own unique differences, so each person has their own different outtake on it.

The first part of it, where you talked about a structure, there actually is a structure built in. The basic mission of the Special Forces, U.S. Army Special Forces, is to train indigenous forces. I think the issue we have right now is the need is exceeding the current capabilities. We have too much need for the few forces that are in existence, and the Army is trying to recruit and train additional SF units.

As a middle-ground stopgap, we've created these MiTT teams, which I took part in, where we train, for example, at a brigade level. We train 10 individuals to go out and operate on their own and support this Iraqi army brigade and improve their operational ability.

It is working, depending on the brigade and depending on the team. There is about a three-month train-up, so we try and jam a lot of training into a little amount of time.

But keep in mind that most of these units were started from scratch, so we're teaching basic soldier skills. We're not at the level where I'm teaching them out to do a double envelopment and try and attack a unit from four different sides. I'm teaching them basic soldier marksmanship, discipline, basic battle tracking. So the tasks themselves are ingrained in officers and senior NCOs, as they are trained to the force.

So that allows us to utilize what experience we had before. And, you know, as anybody who's taught, you tend to learn something a little better when you're teaching somebody else. So that system is working for now. I think the problem that we're experiencing on the other side of that is that does have a huge drain.

My team had three majors, a lieutenant colonel and six -- well, five E-7s and a captain. And that is more rank than most battalions

have. So when you take that many high leaders out of the fight pool for these other units, it starts to drain on their leadership. So it's an issue of trying to ensure that we compensate for that and make sure the units are still filled.

We do have one of our classmates in our section who's actually working on a master's thesis, Major Chad Vaughn (sp), and he's looking right now at do we need to create another branch; do we need to create specific indigenous-force trainers that their only job is indigenous force. Special Forces do that, but then they also do high-profile targeting and raids, so they're a multipurpose force. Do we need to create one specific? And I am sure in the coming months we'll have a better idea, as he does the analysis of whether that is a need in the Army.

Q If it would be possible to get contact information for the individual, that would really be great, because it's something that I'd like to continue reporting on.

MAJ. LAPLANTE (?): Through Lindy.

MAJ. LEBRECK: Yeah, this is Major Mike Lebreck. Lindy, I can send you Chad's e-mail address and you can pass that on. MS. KYZER: Great. I'm happy to do that.

Q I appreciate that, gentlemen.

MS. KYZER: And I know we had a couple of folks join us since we got dialed in. Is there anyone else on the line?

Q Yes, Andrew Lubin. I dialed in right at 1400.

MS. KYZER: Okay. Sorry, we got started a little early. We were antsy to talk to these guys. Did you have a question, Andrew?

Q Well, without a doubt. Gentlemen, Andrew Lubin here, Leatherneck Magazine.

Gentlemen, one of you mentioned earlier that your soldiers were nervous having media and various people on the ground with them. Why would that be? They're doing nothing wrong. What did they have to be -- what would a media guy make them nervous about?

MAJ. HOTARD (sp): Hello. This is Major Aaron Hotard (sp).

Just the media training, like five, 10 years ago -- more 10, 15 years ago -- the media training wasn't something the military focused on. It's just basically a no-comment. The transition in the media training, it's come of age in the past more five years. Soldiers aren't normally -- young soldiers aren't normally used to be in the forefront or speaking for the Army. They're more trained at their level, doing what they're told.

So it's a transition that we're going through right now. But each unit has a public affairs unit, and that public affairs unit is training the young soldiers how to do it. So it's an improving piece that we're continuing to work.

Q Well, let me throw this out again. First of all, I spoke -- I was out at Fort Leavenworth in August. I spoke -- I was the keynote speaker at the Media in Military symposium. When I embed with a Marine unit, they don't kind of care who I talk to, what I say, as long as I'm not overly stupid and I don't report current op, which makes sense, because I'm with them, and so if there's a problem, I'm shot too.

When I go with the Army units, same age group, maybe the same FOB, whole different mindset. It's like they're concerned that I might ask something -- "Hey, son, do you like it here?" Well, shit, he doesn't like it here. Neither do I. They're afraid that he'll give me an honest answer, whereas Marine Corps attitude is "We don't care what you ask, because you're here." Is there an institutional difference that we have to be concerned about?

MAJ. KELLER (sp): I don't think so. I'm Major Kevin Keller. I'm the air defense officer. I would say I don't think there's really a major institutional difference there. It could have been, you know, more unit-dependent in that situation. But just to comment, you know, it goes back to a recent NPR article that I was listening to where they were interviewing several or the embed was reporting on some of her experiences with an Army unit.

And I think there's -- and you'll find this, and it's really more individual-dependent -- but there could be some distrust out there because of some of the tendencies or some of the previous incidents where things were misrepresented in the media. So I think that's more of the issue.

Q But Major -- and Lindy, then I'll turn this over to the next question -- I'm the oldest of the bunch in the group. You know, I was in junior high school when Vietnam was there. Those days are long gone. (A kid's ?) a specialist who's, what, 20 years old. You guys, you Army majors, you're 35-ish. And the only media person who does something totally stupid in the past eight years was Geraldo Rivera from Fox, you know, drawing a map in the sand. This is old news, isn't it?

MAJ. KELLER (sp): Well, I don't know if he was the only one. So, you know, I just -- you know, I can't really think of some solid examples right now. Again, I'll just --

MAJ. LAPLANTE (sp): Yeah, for example -- Major LaPlante (sp). For example, I've had to stop media personnel from taking pictures of my soldiers wounded or when I lost soldiers. Geraldo wasn't the only one. Soldiers don't want -- they worry about the families in the rear. And we've had mistrust issues before with media personnel taking pictures and trying to put it on the news before that soldier's family is even notified.

Now, again, that's individual basis. But then also think about it. The average media person is trained to be in front of a camera. The 20-year-old just out of college or just out of high school who just joined the Army, he's not -- he didn't want to be a reporter. He wanted to be a soldier. And he hasn't really been trained to be in front of a camera. So when a guy you just met maybe a month ago throws a camera in front of your face and tells you that "Hey, tomorrow morning you're going to be on the CBS morning show," that's going to be a little nerve-wracking, you know.

Q Okay.

MAJ. LAPLANTE (sp): Facing another guy shooting at him, he's gotten used to that. Facing that camera and knowing everybody in the nation's watching him, he's got 3 million viewers about to judge what he's about to say. That can be nervous.

Q Okay, fair enough. Lindy, I'll pass it on. Hopefully, if there's time, I'd like to talk to you guys later on about this.

MS. KYZER: Okay. And I know we had a couple of other folks join us. Anyone else on the line?

Q Yes, my name is Tom. I have a question if I may, please.

MS. KYZER: Yeah. Go ahead, Tom.

Q Sure. I remember when Major General Rick Lynch got back from Iraq, and I was listening to a press briefing that he gave. He commanded the 3rd ID. And one of the things he said was, before he gave his troops extended R&R, he wanted to give them -- he said he needed to give them a month retraining them for high-intensity warfare.

So my question is, on the Army's -- you know, has this created a problem? In other words, the troops, are you going to become proficient at counterinsurgency or supporting the Iraqi military, but then out of practice if it were for high-intensity warfare, and vice versa? Am I misreading this? Or it just struck me that that was -- you know, units -- you have to train the whole unit for one or the other, and then if the situation changes, they had to go back and retrain. How has the Army addressed this issue?

MAJ. LEBRECK: This is Major Mike Lebeck here. You know, that is an ongoing issue that we have to -- we always have to keep in the forefront of our minds, because you are right. It's an issue (when we ?) become too specialized, especially in the counterinsurgency fight. And we have to be proficient at numerous skills.

With that, you know, the way we approach training centers, whether it be the Joint Readiness Training Center down at Fort Polk or the National Training Center, they tailor those scenarios that we'll go through for our unit validation to encompass an entire breadth, whether it be counterinsurgency, more so the legacy engagements, as we like to

view them; you know, the conventional nation-state on nation- state involving armored forces and things like that.

So I don't necessarily think that we're so specialized now that we cannot continue -- cannot successfully or cannot win an engagement where it was a conventional fight. I just think it just adds more to our plate and some additional skills that we need to focus on and be proficient at.

As you know, anybody that reads anything in the media, the counterinsurgency fight is the flavor of the day. However, we fully acknowledge that we can't become so specialized in that realm that we forget about our core competencies as an Army.

Q Thank you very much.

Q Can I ask another question?

MS. KYZER: Go ahead, Sondra (sp).

Q Thank you.

Before I ask a question, I just wanted to clarify. I think it was Major LaPlante (sp) that said the Army is recruiting more SF units. Is he talking about Special Forces?

MAJ. LAPLANTE (sp): Yes, ma'am. We're growing more Special Forces units.

Q Oh, okay, okay; just wanted to make sure.

And the question, as far as the counterinsurgency, we hear a lot from Secretary Gates, from Admiral Mullen. We hear a lot about interagency work and they want to get more integrated with the other agencies in government, getting more civilian support for the military.

Now, from your experience, do you find that it's helpful to have more experts like lawyers or infrastructure experts and just in general different types of expertise that, according to what we hear from them, is what is necessary to make the mission more successful? So what kinds of perspectives can you share on that?

MAJ. CARLOCK (sp): This is Major Paul Carlock (sp), armor officer.

To answer that question, I think it's important -- the most important thing in a counterinsurgency fight is the political realm. The military can only do so much. We have to work closely with the political elements, and that be the State Department or the Department of Justice or even nongovernment organizations like the Red Cross.

So it's important that we mix our experience in the combat realm with state-building. And that's really what we're doing in Iraq and

Afghanistan is helping the Iraqi and Afghanistan people to rebuild their state after, you know, years of conflict and to stabilize it.

So, you know, I agree with what you said. It's important and it's something that we're not normally trained to do, but we have to do it. We have to become better working joint with Department of State, Department of Justice, or whoever that would be.

Q So you're saying that it's important. In your deployments, in your recent deployments, have you experienced that you have had the support from civilian agencies, that it was helpful, or is that something that's still wishful thinking?

MAJ. CARLOCK (sp): This is Major Carlock (sp) again. You know, I can only speak for myself and my unit. I was in the 1st Cavalry Division in Baqubah. And we never did get as much support from the civilian side as I think we needed, and part of that problem is they don't have enough people; they don't have enough resources. And I think that's been stated by our leaders of the Department of Defense. And even the secretary of State herself has said, you know, the Department of State needs more personnel, needs more training, so they can be part of the fight, because it really is a national fight.

To be successful in Iraq and Afghanistan, really you have to bring all elements of national power to work on the problems there, and that's diplomatic, military, economic. So I think the main problem is -- and it's sort of outside our lane here -- but the State Department needs more people and needs more resources so they can be, you know, a full partner in the efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Q And a little bit earlier, you talked about when you train foreign troops, and that's becoming more of a significant duty for the Army now. And as far as having enough people to do that, do you find that you have to hire more contractors to do that, or do you find that the Army can fill all the necessary jobs for trainers?

MAJ. DUNBAR (sp): This is Major Richard Dunbar (sp), field artillery.

Q Yeah.

MAJ. DUNBAR (sp): I actually had the opportunity to work with some Iraqi security forces during Operation Iraqi Freedom -- (inaudible) -- in 2005. And the support that we had with the military personnel, I felt, was sufficient. We trained in a variety of ways, to include operations, some logistics, and we did a variety of medical training.

Q Okay.

MAJ. DUNBAR (sp): In terms of the Iraqi security forces, the ones that I worked with personally, they showed a lot of improvement over the period that we were there. They showed a lot of initiative. Some of the soldiers that I dealt with were very courageous and they looked forward to their mission and wanted to fight to defend against terrorism.

Q Okay, thank you.

MS. KYZER: Okay. And anybody else on the line who hasn't asked a question yet or -- go ahead.

Q Yeah, Andrew Lubin here. (Inaudible) -- got a cannon cocker on the line also? Somebody here from field artillery?

MAJ. LEBRECK: This is Major Mike Lebreck. Major Rich Dunbar (sp) is our field artillery expert.

Q Great, sir. Good. My son's an artillery man also. Sir, in the Marine Corps the last couple of years, they've been firing at night and doing provisional infantry during the day. There's a concern they're losing their basic artillery skills.

Same in the Army? And, if so, how are you addressing this?

MAJ. DUNBAR (sp): Well, the last time I was there was part of surge of forces in 2007 with the 3rd Infantry Division. I was actually part of the division staff.

The artillery is going through a different transition point. The soldiers on the artillery pieces aren't shooting as much. Primarily it's illumination rounds and those type of things, maybe some counterfire. But they're not using those skill sets they learned in basic training as much as they used to.

Q I know that. So are they losing -- what's the Army doing to get those skills back again?

MAJ. DUNBAR (sp): Well, in home station, the units continue to maintain their mission focus. They have to conduct certain exercises to stay certified on those weapon systems. So the training is going on. However, when they deploy into a theater, depending on where they are, they may not use those skills as much. But they do maintain good situational awareness. They are trained, and they know how to perform that mission.

Q Okay, thank you.

MS. KYZER: And any other questions from folks on the line?

Q Lindy, this is Mary Marcos (sp).

Earlier this week, Colonel Chris Robertson, who's the director of the Officer Personnel Management System Task Force, stated that the Army is currently several thousand captains and majors short, mainly due to officers not re-enlisting, as multiple deployments do not allow them to take developmental assignments or school and education time.

I'd like to get an idea of what your all's thoughts are on that. And is this an issue that you have struggled with at all?

MAJ. LEBRECK: Ma'am, Major Mike Lebreck.

I think most of us involved here were part of the officer retention bonus, which, if somebody's not aware of that, it ended in 2007, I believe. It was a one-time financial offer for captains of certain year groups to remain in the military. It was very successful, to the point that they ended it, so they were able to retain the target number that they wanted to get.

As far as -- I can't comment specifically on the actual number that we are short or projections of what we will be short. For the most part, I would say that, yes, the deployment cycle has taken its toll on the officer corps. However, there's still a lot of professional soldiers, great soldiers, that remain in the Army.

Just from a personal experience, I graduated from the military academy in 1999, as did -- Major Jeff LaPlante (sp) here is my classmate as well. Of that year group, which would have been -- would have finished their commitment to the military forces in mid-2003 with the five-year commitment they had from that graduation, about 75 percent of our classmates -- I would say 70, 75 percent of our classmates have left the military for various reasons, whether it be, you know, deployment cycle, desire to earn more money on the outside world.

As far as our role as majors now, though, I say what the Army focuses our efforts are on -- focus our efforts on is to retain those young captains and lieutenants that we identify as future field-grade officers. So there is a recognition that we do need to retain those good officers and that we make a concerted effort to keep them in, whether it be sending them to grad school or whatever the possibilities are.

I'm not sure if that answers your question. I'll hand it over to Major Jeff LaPlante (sp).

MAJ. LAPLANTE (sp): And as Major Lebreck was talking about our classmates, I know most of my classmates who got out spent a couple of years out in the civilian sector and decided they wanted to serve again and have come back in. So the numbers -- I don't know if they capture all that in itself.

MS. KYZER: Okay. And are there any other questions out there?

Q Yeah, I have one more. Gentlemen, Andrew Lubin again.

There's a monograph going around commandment staff. I forget the major's name who wrote it. It talks about how the infantry tactics and expectations in Iraq, firing at, say, 200 yards are being reversed for Afghanistan. Are you familiar with the monograph? And what is the -- why are people up in arms about it?

MAJ. LEBRECK: Sir, we're not familiar with -- Major Mike Lebreck, sir. We're not familiar with the monograph. Are they saying -- I don't understand. What is the monograph referring to? Is it

engagement at that close a range? Q Yes. In Iraq, the -- and I didn't write it; I'm paraphrasing. I haven't read it either. This is what I heard from a friend of mine at Military.com who says, "Andrew, get me a copy of it," that the infantry were trained to be fighting at 200 yards, which was a shame, because most engagements in the cities were on street corners and 50 yards, whereas in Afghanistan now they're being trained for -- it's a bigger country, wide-open engagements. Instead of being trained for 200-300 yard shoots, they're being trained now for 50 yards, and that the Army is behind the times in the wrong theater.

And apparently, from what I'm told, this has created quite a stir down at Fort Leavenworth. And if I could get a copy, that'd be (brilliant ?), but I thought you guys might have heard about it. I just got the call on this yesterday, by the way.

MAJ. LEBRECK: Sir, I'll take a look around -- this is Major Mike Lebeck. I'll take a look around. And if I can get a copy of it, I'll definitely forward it to Lindy to pass on to you.

Just speaking for my own personal experience, our focus actually for those going to Afghanistan was actually (KB ?) or known-distance shooting, which was anything -- you know, distances up to 300 meters and beyond, up to 500 or 600 meters, as well as focus working with sniper teams for even longer shots, obviously, with their weapon systems.

Q Right. So that's separate. He was just talking infantry tactics in general.

MAJ. LEBRECK: I'll hand it over to Major Jeff LaPlante (sp), our infantry guy, to talk about that.

MAJ. LAPLANTE (sp): I spent a couple of years as a live-fire instructor out at JRTC. And depending on the rotation, we adapted the engagement criteria. I think this might be alluding to some units that were identified for Iraq and then were changed to Afghanistan. Maybe that was the issue. Given I'm not reading the monograph, I'm not sure. But there is a distinct difference in shooting styles that we train, depending on whether they're going to Iraq or Afghanistan, because of those engagement distances.

Q Okay, great. Thank you very much.

MS. KYZER: Last call for any questions out there.

Okay, well, you get to wrap up with one from me, then. That's what you get.

I basically -- a lot of talk is happening right now, and I know this is in the brief -- (inaudible) -- provided about the drawdown happening in Iraq and then the movement towards Afghanistan. Can you speak -- I know that's a really broad topic, but can any of you speak to that, the efforts going on there, any familiarity with the drawdown that's happening now, and have any thoughts or perspective from your specific experience?

MAJ. LEBRECK: This is Major Mike Lebreck, Lindy.

Yeah, that is the major topic of the day, obviously, because as we shift our forces and our main effort to Afghanistan based on the new policy, as far as the aims of the Afghanistan surge under General McChrystal, the ISAF commander, I mean, as most people are familiar with, the intent is to bring more stability to those -- to that environment, to Afghanistan, obviously, focusing on this resurgence of the Taliban and actually beating that back, as our focus has been more on Iraq over the past few years.

In my personal experience, the units that I have served with, and that I just came with, has placed a preponderance of its force into the Afghanistan theater to meet those demands and to bring that stability to the Afghani people.

I'll kind of open this up to everybody else to see if they have anything to add from their personal experiences.

MAJ. KELLER (sp): This is Major Keller.

I returned from Iraq. I was on division staff back in May of last year, '09, is when we returned. I can tell you that the conditions are probably for our withdrawal at this time. I think, from my perspective, what I was seeing was a capable army who's capable of securing the majority of the population centers. The south in Iraq was pretty quiet, pretty stable. There were still some spots. And as I think you can see from some of the reports coming out of Iraq for the last couple of days during the elections, that there's still work to be done. But overall, I think the conditions in Iraq are set for our withdrawal and to refocus on Afghanistan.

MS. KYZER: Okay, if that's it, I'll ask if there are any concluding remarks or anything else you want to add from any of the folks in the room, anything we didn't touch on today. Or are you ready to be done?

MAJ. LEBRECK: Lindy, we just want to thank you for this opportunity and for everybody out there. Lindy, like I mentioned to you, we'll try to put another one of these together with a different audience. So, you know, I think it's definitely beneficial. It's great for us to get our experiences out there and talk to some people in the press, kind of give them more perspective from the ground level. And I appreciate the opportunity for everybody.

MS. KYZER: Well, thank you, sir. Thanks to everyone for joining us on the line and for taking some time out of your day. Thanks for those who listened in.

This concludes the Roundtable. END.