

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS' ROUNDTABLE WITH COLONEL DONALD BACON, CHIEF OF STRATEGY AND PLANS, STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS, MULTINATIONAL FORCE IRAQ SUBJECT: UPDATE OF THE PROGRESS IN IRAQ MODERATOR: CHARLES J. "JACK" HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE PUBLIC AFFAIRS TIME: 12:00 P.M. EST DATE: TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2007

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MR. HOLT: We can get started now. And I'd like to welcome Colonel Donald Bacon, the chief of Strategy and Plans, Strategic Communications for Multinational Force Iraq with us to the Bloggers' Roundtable this morning.

Thank you for joining us this morning, Colonel.

COL. BACON: You're welcome.

MR. HOLT: And the floor is yours. We're ready when you are.

COL. BACON: I'll make some opening comments. First, just to let you know, I'm not a public affairs guy by trade. I'm an EC-130/RC-135 operator with the Air Force, but I do enjoy trying to explain what we're doing and getting our story out.

And just some opening comments: First, just looking at the trends, before we get into the -- I know we're going to talk about weapon caches and the October rollup, but let's also look at the trends that were updated today and it's -- the trends are continuing to look good, basically holding at the same levels in recent weeks.

And just to go through them real fast or just to give you a quick summary: We're happy that we've been seeing some significant improvement in the violence trends and all the various kinds of attacks, but we'd also say it's still not adequate. We've got more work to do. Baghdad in Iraq is still a dangerous place, but it's less dangerous than it was a year ago. We'd also say that AQI -- or al Qaeda in Iraq -- has been hurt, but they do have capabilities to conduct attacks and they can reconstitute if we don't keep the pressure on them.

Looking at overall attack levels, they're as low as they've been since January of 2006 -- so not quite two years. I think it's important to look at that because, you know, there were articles out last week saying that this was the deadliest year in Iraq. And it certainly started out that way. And with our surge -- bringing in 30,000 more troops and putting them out in the neighborhoods and attacking al Qaeda strongholds -- surely raised our casualty numbers up in the April-May-June time frame, but since then we've seen a decrease each month and now we're at almost a two-year low.

Looking at just individual categories here: We've had a decrease in attacks by 55 percent since the surge of operations began in June. And you look at the attack levels, northern Iraq has the worst levels. About half the attacks are up there in the Mosul area and in the Tigris River valley. The IED attacks have also decreased by 55 percent since the surge in June. Civilian deaths are down 60 percent -- 75 percent in Baghdad, so a good sign there. But where you get that change from 60 percent to 75 percent is some of the car bombs that were -- occurred up in the Nineveh province that really bumped up the non-Baghdad numbers there a little bit. The coalition force casualties have decreased 55 percent. Iraqi security force numbers are down 40 percent. They're taking about 50 percent more casualties than we are -- just so you can, you know, for contrast purposes.

In all, what we would say -- that these numbers are still too high, but we're pleased that they're going in a better direction. We know we've got a lot more work to do. We think the Fard al-Qanun needs to continue. We've got to keep these operations ongoing. So enough of that on trends. I just wanted to give you those numbers as they were updated today. We also talked about weapons caches recently and tried to look at what we've done this past year and I want to give you a summary of that, if I may. Last year in the entire year we found 2,667 weapons caches. As of 31 October of this year we've found 5,364 caches -- already double of what we found during the entire last year. So a big increase there. And for us that's significant, because we know that these are fuel, if you will, that al Qaeda and the (special ?) groups use to attack our forces, the Iraqi security forces and civilians.

And why do we think that we're finding more caches? First of all, we think the surge has surely helped. It's taken us in areas that al Qaeda has controlled, and so it's given us more access to where they were storing these weapons. The Iraqi security forces are more active. They're finding a lot of these caches. I wish I had a good breakout of what they've found. I don't offhand, but just like two weeks ago they found a cache in Fallujah area that contained over 1,000 mortars. Today they found two truck bombs, in fact, in Tall Afar. So they're very active. And the third reason we would say is the Iraqi citizens are helping us find these caches. They're giving us over 16,500 tips a month. And also, we have these concerned local citizens that are playing a big role in finding these things. And I'd glad to talk about that in the Q&A about the CLCs. It's something that I've been working on and enthusiastic about.

I'll give you a little data -- just one data point, if I will, on the CLCs and what they have done with the caches. In MND-Central in the month of October, General Lynch announced that they found 72 caches. And of that 72, the CLCs found 40 of them. So you can just see in one area the impact that these CLCs are making.

Now, we would like to talk a little about the Iranian origin of some of these caches. We do find EFP stockpiles -- or the explosively foreign penetrators -- and also the rockets that are Iranian origin. So we have found quite a few of those. In October we found in Saidiyah 120 EFP stockpile, 100 mortars, 30 rockets -- all of Iranian origin. Shortly thereafter, in Husseiniyah, we found 10 EFPs and lots of components to build more.

But here's the interesting thing that we would like to stress is that Iran has, in September, promised Iraq that they would stop and try to be a supporting role here to stop the violence here in Iraq. And as we studied these caches, they were both older than the September timeline of when, you know, they

made that promise. So really, we haven't found any caches as of late that we can attribute that they arrived in-country after Iran made that promise to Iraq. And when we look at the overall EFP attack trends and rocket trends, those numbers are going down. So we have some promising beginnings here, but we're going to stand pat and just watch and want to see Iran follow through on their promise. So right now it's a little early to say, but so far we haven't seen any current stockpiles that recently arrived. The third thing I'd like to chat about is the October al Qaeda rollup that we do. We do this every month. At the end of the month we look at what kind of leaders have we captured or killed, you know, through our operations. And looking at October, we captured or killed 43 al Qaeda leaders. And just to give you a breakdown of these: six of them were emirs -- that's what the al Qaeda themselves call these guys. These are leaders at the city level or higher. And our highest level capture was the Diyala province emir. We also captured a Duluiyah, which is a city near Baiji. We also caught an Emir from Baiji. Also, the Emir from the five farms area, which is in southern Baghdad. We also captured a religious emir. And these are the folks that sort of -- the espouse the Taliban vision and use that for motivation. We also captured six or killed -- captured or killed six cell leaders. That's the next tier down. And interesting enough, I would point out that two of these were Abu Ayyub al-Masri's bodyguard leaders. So I'll let you draw some inferences from that, but not a good sign if you're al-Masri and your key bodyguard leaders are being captures.

We also captured or killed 14 foreign terrorist facilitators. And these are the people that are bringing in -- predominantly via Syria -- the foreign terrorists in this country. And that's important for us to go after these networks, because the suicide or the foreign terrorists conduct over 90 percent of the suicide bombings in Iraq. Only about 10 percent or less are actually done by the Iraqis. And for every two suicide bomber -- or excuse me -- for every two foreign terrorists that come in the country, one of them will be a suicide bomber. So it's a 50 percent ratio for these foreign terrorists to become suicide bombers.

And we've worked hard on this for the last two or three months.

One of the biggest operations that we had was back in September when we were able to kill Muthanna, who was the emir for al Qaeda on the northern Syrian border-Iraqi border there that oversaw the facilitation of these foreign terrorists coming in over that part of the border. We will tell you, though, that we know al Qaeda's trying to reconstitute these networks and we're having to keep going after them. But if we go after these, we'll find that the suicide bombings and some of the suicide car bomb and suicide vest attacks will go down and they have this last month.

We also captured or killed three car-bomber leaders, six logistics and weapons facilitators. Those who are doing the smuggling operations. It's something that's not as well tracked, but it's important to us is the eight -- we also tracked, captured or killed eight media courier or communication-type al Qaeda leaders. And it's important to go after these folks, because they're the ones who do the propaganda and they use that propaganda for videos on the websites and so forth to bring in money and also to recruit foreign terrorists in the country. So we know that we have to go after this propaganda network to try to cut off that flow. And going after the communications and the couriers are also important. So eight of these total.

Also, as an aside, we captured two Jaish Mohammed leaders. And this is an insurgent group and we caught these up in Mosul. We captured the Mosul emir

for this group, as well as their key financier from Mosul. And the Jaish Mohammed group is a -- they're made up or consist of former regime elements -- Ba'athists. They have sort of an off-and-on relationship with al Qaeda, but they're not as prone to doing the high visibility attacks that al Qaeda does. They're more focused on attacking coalition forces or Iraqi security forces.

Just to put it all in perspective: For October, like I said, it was 43. Back in September we captured 29 leaders. In August we captured 25 or killed 25. In July we captured or killed 18. And I could go farther back, but it looks like we've been having increasingly more success going after the leadership. So that's a good sign for us.

That concludes my opening comments and I will try my best to answer questions. MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much, sir.

Jarred, why don't you get us started.

Q Yes, sir. This is Lieutenant Fishman. Thanks for your time. I work with Colonel (Al Afeeda ?) at Stratcom at the Pentagon right now.

COL. BACON: Oh, great. I've been assigned twice at Offutt, so you mean at Stratcom that's headquartered out of Offutt?

Q No. I'm at the JRIU and the JCN.

COL. BACON: Okay.

Q But I've been kind of doing this positive news reports out of Iraq, which I could certainly to one of you or one of your subordinates if you'd like. We can do that through Jack later on. But my question for today is we've seen several reports in the last few days about Sunni insurgents or, quote, "former insurgents" battling al Qaeda forces. In one point north of Baghdad killing about 18, at another point south of Baghdad, I guess -- Mahmudiyah or something like that -- killing about 15. So we're starting to see this trend of not even having U.S. forces or Iraqi government forces, but actually Sunni. I guess the concerned local citizens groups going, ambushing al Qaeda.

What is this trend that you're seeing and how do we kind of maintain that momentum and how do we bring them into the formal government process as well?

COL. BACON: Well, this is a very good question and it's something that I am involved with.

Like you say, it's the concerned local citizens. Right now we have a little under 70,000 of these concerned local citizens and -- let me just back up a little bit. You know, when the coalition forces or the Iraqi security forces go into an area that al Qaeda has controlled -- like we'll say Arab Jabour or Baqubah -- an area that al Qaeda's controlled for a long time. After we clear that area, if we just left, it would be very likely that al Qaeda would move back in. So you've got to hold these areas.

And the tactics that we've been using is bringing in the local volunteers and putting many on contract. I'd say about half are on contract where they're getting a stipend. And out of that 70,000, we try to put each one of them through a biometric screening and testing to make sure and so we just have them on record. And that provides more security down the road in case, you

know, these folks -- any of them want to go back into insurgency-type lifestyle. At least we have a lot of their biometrics and stuff and that's important for Iraq. But half of them are on contract. And about 25 or 20 percent of them want to eventually join the police department or the army. What this does, it allows us to hold the areas. In Arab Jabour, you know, there's a large number of these volunteers now that -- they're helping guard the city and they won't let al Qaeda back in. Same thing in Baqubah. And there's approximately 200 of these organizations that have been set up to guarding their local area or their infrastructure in their area. And it has been very hard for al Qaeda, then, to move back into these areas. And what you're seeing is some of the reports of this where these volunteers are rebuffing al Qaeda attacks and repulsing them.

Just the long and short of it: It's thickening our lines and it's allowing us to hold areas that we have taken. And it's important to also know that we are working at each of these CLCs under an architecture of the Iraqi security force control. Some of these will become army or police recruits down the road. All the CLCs work with the Iraqi security forces or the coalition forces, depending on the area. They're not rogue elements doing their own thing. And when it does happen we try to fix that, but there's very few evidence of it. But there is -- it's going to take some time to get the government of Iraq totally comfortable with this, but most of the elements that we've talked to are embracing it, because they can see the impact that's going on here.

Does that sort -- does that answer your question?

Q Yes, sir. Thank you. And I guess for the rest of the presentation, speak to them actually going into combat operations almost unassisted with U.S. forces, which seems to be a relatively new development as well.

COL. BACON: Well, sometimes when they're holding their area they are being attacked by al Qaeda. And on their own, they will repulse them, but they'll be calling us for support. And lots of times we come with air support or we try to get some forces in there, but there's been other situations where they've done it on their own.

I will tell you that al Qaeda has made these CLCs if not their primary target, one of their top two targets because of the effectiveness of them. This is a key to keep squeezing al Qaeda into smaller and smaller pockets and, you know, and we're continually tightening that noose on them.

Q Great. Thank you, sir.

MR. HOLT: And Matt --

COL. BACON: You're welcome.

Q I thought there was somebody on before me.

MR. HOLT: Go ahead, Matt. Q This is -- hi. Good afternoon. This is Matt Armstrong on MountainRunner. Thanks for taking the time.

COL. BACON: You're welcome.

Q I want to talk a little bit -- talk a little bit about strategic communications. I heard you talking about the successes against functional

attributes and very little about motivation. There's just a little bit on the struggle of mind and wills -- though the CLC efforts being notable difference.

How are you communicating the effort in your opening statement to the locals? Are you developing organic information pathways? Are you developing and enhancing USG info pathways? After all, you're not winning if the people don't know that you're winning.

COL. BACON: And you're talking about the Iraqi people?

Q Yes.

COL. BACON: We're trying to do more there. We realize -- we know that the key is the support of the people. So we're trying to work a lot more closely with the media here. I will tell you that we think we've got more work to do. I won't paint the rosiest picture. I think we know that we have our work cut out for us and we've got to do better at reaching the Iraqi TV and radio, as well as their print media. But their primary source here is TV. That's what the Iraqis rely on. But we need to get all the modes.

I think I would tell you that -- and I wish it would have worked maybe better this way, but I will be candid with you and say probably what helped us out the most was the terrible deeds that al Qaeda had done. Wherever they were in control or where they had their forces at, you will find the torture houses, the execution fields. They were forcibly marrying tribal daughters, which did not play well with the Iraqis. When they caught people smoking, they were cutting off people's fingers. In Anbar Province, they were beheading children. And you can just go up and down the line. Wherever they've been, that kind of behavior was going on. And their vision is one of a Taliban-like future for Iraq, and that's not been embraced as well.

So I think, early on, we weren't reaching people too well. But when you look at what al Qaeda did, the Sunni tribes, particularly out in Anbar, but now we're seeing it spread, found their behavior repugnant and their vision repugnant, and they started looking our way. Now I think we're doing a better job reaching out to them and communicating as well at this point, and we're trying to do a much better job reaching out to the media.

So I would say that I think we got a slow start, but I think we're doing better. But part of the big change here in where we see the CLCs is the fact that the folks do not like al Qaeda and what they stand for, where they've been. They've done terrible things.

So, I don't know. That's my attempt to answer your question. How did I do?

Q If I could have a follow-up. If AQ is doing a bunch of bad things, how are we communicating it, and how are we assisting that knowledge to get out there? And is there -- and I haven't seen one, but is there an equivalent STRATCOM plan, strategic communication plan for Iraq like the one that was just promulgated by England or signed by England maybe a month ago for Afghanistan?

COL. BACON: Well, we do have a strategic comm plan here, and it's merged both with a western focus and an Iraqi focus. And we are working with the Iraqi government in their own plan. So we work with them in trying to develop a strategy. I will tell you we're working a lot closer in communicating

with the Iraqi media. We meet with them two or three days a week now presenting stories like we're talking about here.

So I will tell you that we're trying to do a better job at it, but we do have a strategy here with MNF-I itself. It's a single strategy but, you know, it's got different components to focus on Iraq as well as focus on western media.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Bill.

Q Is that me, Jack?

MR. HOLT: Yes, Bill, right.

Q Okay, yes.

Colonel Bacon, there's been reports that you believe that al Qaeda in Iraq has been largely pushed out of Baghdad and in many of the -- (inaudible) -- areas. Do you have an assessment on where you think al Qaeda is attempting to regroup within Iraq? From the open-source side, it looks like elements in the north, in Ninawa and Tanin (sp) Province and the Hamrin Mountains and in eastern Diyala. Would you agree, disagree with that assessment? And then I'm going to have a quick follow-up question.

COL. BACON: Well, I would say yes, generally, and let me explain. Al Qaeda has been weakened in Baghdad and in the Balts (sp) area, but they have not been totally defeated. But they have been weakened. But we still see where they conduct attacks. Today they conducted an attack in southern Baghdad and were repulsed by the Concerned Local Citizens, as well as the Iraqi security forces.

So we know that they're capable of conducting strikes. There are still attacks going on in Baghdad, but at a much reduced level. So we don't want to -- I guess this needs to be a balanced picture. It's better, but it's not where we want it to be.

Having said that, we do see where they have -- it seems like they've migrated more to the north, like you were saying. Mosul area, we see -- I won't see increased attacks, but the continuation of high-level attacks up in that area. And we have seen a little bit in the Hamrin Mountains, as you mentioned, and in that part of Diyala. And that's probably the two key areas, the Ninawa Province, where Mosul is at, and a little bit up in that Hamrin Mountain area, where we're seeing pockets of activity. And we are conducting an operation that started last week called Iron Hammer that involves three coalition force brigades and three Iraqi divisions in these areas to go after these pockets of activity.

Q Okay. And real quick, the capture of two of al-Masri's personal bodyguards. Does MNF-I believe they're closing in on senior al Qaeda leadership, including al-Masri and leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq?

COL. BACON: We think we're squeezing them, and I think we're having success. And we're hoping for more continued success soon.

MR. HOLT: Okay. (Inaudible.)

Q I'm going to pass for now. I'd like to just hear what the other questions are.

MR. HOLT: Okay, sure.

Charlie. Charlie Quidnunc?

Okay. How about Ward?

Q Yeah, thanks, Jack.

Colonel Bacon, thanks for talking to us. So we have a rate of progress that I imagine is being compared to a rate of planned progress. So two parts to that frame. One is, are we on, above or below the line of planned progress? And at what point does this equal redeployment? You know, when do we anticipate that we'll be out of there in numbers that are significant? And then I have a second question about morale, but let's deal with the first one, sir.

COL. BACON: I can't say that I've seen a benchmark plan where we wanted to say, "We want to see these level attacks by this month." But our intent with the surge was to get out into the areas that al Qaeda controlled and to put forces not just in garrison areas but put them out in the neighborhoods so that the local communities know that there's security nearby. And the intent from that was to drive down these rates of violence. And we wanted to concentrate first on Baghdad and go from there. So I think that strategy is on track, though I haven't seen where this is a by-month date benchmark plan, so I'll caveat that.

In the regard of how the strategy that I've read, it seems to be working, or appears to be working to me. I will tell you that -- what was the second part of that question?

Q Well, I'm just wondering at what point do we reach -- I mean, because you're dealing in numbers, right? You're offering metrics.

COL. BACON: Right.

Q And so I don't know if that's just apples-to-apples comparison with previous metrics, but is there at some point a number that equals success? I guess, distilling my question down, that's the essence of my question. COL. BACON: I know it's a commander's decision. And all I can say is that General Petraeus and General Odierno have determined that the numbers have been reduced to the level that we can bring back five brigades without replacing them. So it'll take us down from 20 brigades back down to 15. And we'll be doing that over the course, starting, I believe, in December, all the way through spring time frame. And at that point in March, we will relook at how we're doing and see if we can do even more.

Q Okay. And second, again, on the CLC initiative, I don't know if the other bloggers are the same, but this is the first I've heard that label used. And, you know, at a glance, it sort of smacks of a uniquely American approach to a coin issue. You know, it's like packaging. It smacks of marketing to me.

So what's the difference between a CLC and any other citizen?

COL. BACON: Well, the Concerned Local Citizen is the overall program name that we've given it. But I will tell you, in each area they have their own name. Some of them are what the Iraqis themselves -- you know, the Awakening is what the folks in the Anbar have been calling themselves. And some of the -- each neighborhood will have their own name. Sometimes they'll call themselves more general names, like Iraqi security volunteers or infrastructure guards. But just from our MNF-I standpoint, we've called them Concerned Local Citizens because we do have contracts and it's part of a bigger plan.

But not every Iraqi is calling himself a concerned local citizen. Sometimes they call themselves by a local name that they've given themselves in that group.

Q But, I mean, what do I have to do to get this label if I'm an Iraqi local? And in attaining this label, am I now a target for AQI? And what are you guys doing for force protection around this new label?

COL. BACON: Well, the fact is that the concerned local citizens are part of the force protection plan. They're helping provide security in these villages and the infrastructure. Without it, al Qaeda would move back into these areas, if we didn't have our forces there. So, you know, that is part of the coin strategy, as you were mentioning.

To become part of the ISV -- or, excuse me, the CLCs -- our intent is to give each one those biometrics. So that's the key thing. That's one of our first goals. And most of them are put under a contract, but the contracts vary from area to area. It's part of a -- it's a division-level program. So, you know, the various units out there are making agreements with these local leaders and building contracts. So that's how it works. It's more of a division-level process.

Q Would it be possible for us to see some of the language in these contracts? Is that unclass?

COL. BACON: No, I have not personally seen them. I've got the general numbers. I know where there's more of these CLCs. I guess I can inquire and find out.

Q Yeah, I mean, I'd like to see how that reads, just a representative one, what the language is.

COL. BACON: One of the stipulations in each of these contracts, if I understand this is right, is that they do swear allegiance to the government. And so that's -- I know that's one of the primary parts of the contract. But let me see what I can do.

Q So these are administered by American forces or Iraqi forces? Who handles the local -- COL. BACON: A little bit of both. It was really a U.S.- initiated thing, but we're working with the Iraqis to take over as much as possible of this program.

Q So the Americans --

COL. BACON: The goal is 20 to 25 percent to get them actually into the Iraqi security forces.

Q So Americans are making contracts with local Iraqis that they swear allegiance to the Iraqi government.

COL. BACON: Correct. And I will tell you that we're trying to incorporate, the best we can, the government of Iraq, as well as the provincial leaders or local Iraqi leaders into this process. But it really did start out initially as a local security solution where our forces were at.

Q Colonel Bacon, could I chime in really, really quick?

Q I have a question first, though. This is Richard Lowry.

Q Okay. All right.

Q I have two short questions that may require a little bit longer answer. And one is, do you have any statistics on Iraqi refugees returning to Baghdad? And the second question is, what do you do with these guys after you capture them, the insurgents? Is there a revolving door? Are they back on the street soon, or are they out of service for a long time?

COL. BACON: Okay, your first question again?

Q The first question was, do you have any statistics on refugees returning to the Baghdad area?

COL. BACON: Okay. All I can tell you is what the Iraqi government has been talking about. I heard their spokesman earlier this week, or maybe late last week, talk about 40,000 approximate refugees have returned. And then I saw a lower number.

Personally, the MNF-I does not have those stats. Obviously that's more of a government of Iraq thing. But I will tell you that the government of Iraq is pleased that the security situation is improving where they're starting to see these displaced people come back. But that's what I can tell you on that.

And your second question was, what do we do with the al Qaeda when we capture them? I've actually had a chance to visit our detention centers. And, you know, we basically hold on to them. And if there's enough evidence to prosecute, they go into the Iraqi court system as fast as the Iraqi court system can do it. And what I've been finding is that process takes about a year for them -- once we capture them and we have enough evidence, it takes about a year, or maybe less, actually, to get through the Iraqi court system.

There are situations where we're not ready to prosecute but we think we have enough evidence not to release them. In that case, we do that. Each Iraqi detainee gets -- I think it's two reviews a year, but I have to double-check that. But we review each case. And if we think that they can be released, we will do that. But we give each one a close review. But I will tell you, we won't release them unless we think we're safe to do so.

MR. HOLT: Right. And I can tell you that you can check on our Bloggers Roundtable web page on DOD, that we did an interview about a month or so ago -- I believe it was back in the first part of August -- Major General Stone talking about that very subject. So if you want some more information, you can check out the General Stone interview there on the Bloggers Roundtable and Defense Link.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: And I think, Charlie Quidnunc, you were still --

Q Yes.

MR. HOLT: You're with us? Okay.

Q Colonel, hi. This is Charlie Quidnunc at the Wizbang podcast. My question has to do with where are all these explosive materials coming from? And we do a great job of measuring when we've found a cache. But it's the unfound ones that are of so much concern to me. If all of the explosives in Iraq were available to these guys, how much more do they have left? And what about ammunition dumps and things like that?

COL. BACON: That's a good question. I wish I knew that answer. I would say they're -- you know, we've been working hard to find these caches and destroying them when we do. Where they came from? Some of it belonged here before the war and some of it's come in through various channels. Obviously some of it has Iranian origin on it. So it's a combination of previous weapons as well as newly smuggled-in weapons.

Q Thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And, sir, I know we're about out of time here.

Bill, I think you had one more follow-up.

Q No, no. I'm good. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. All right, sir.

Sir, any closing comments for us? COL. BACON: Well, I think, you know, I appreciate the questions on the Concerned Local Citizen area, because I think that that is something relatively new; it's not just this week, but recent months this has become a prominent item, and it has made a tremendous impact on the security here.

And I will tell you that we are working hard with the Iraqi government to make this fully an Iraqi government program. And so we're working on that transition. We have senior -- or the national- level leadership working with us on this, as well as at the local level. So I know there are some questions about that, and I just wanted to clarify.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. And, yeah, if you've got any -- if you guys have any follow-up questions or anything, just send them to me. I will forward those on up through MNF-I to Colonel Bacon and we'll get that back to you.

Sir, thank you very much --

COL. BACON: I hope I've been able to be helpful with the information tonight.

MR. HOLT: Yes, sir, some really good information. Thank you very much for being with us and taking the time. We appreciate you coming by. Let's see; I think you said you were leaving in January?

COL. BACON: I get two weeks' leave in January, but my year will be up in May.

MR. HOLT: Okay, sir. Well, maybe we can speak to you again here after the first of the year when you get back from leave and kind of see how things are going and take stock.

COL. BACON: Okay. If you'll have my back, I'll do that.

MR. HOLT: You bet, sir. We'd love to have you back. Thank you very much.

Q Thank you, Colonel.

Q Excellent. Thanks, Colonel.

COL BACON: Bye-bye.

END.