

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH JASON HYLAND, PRT
TEAM LEADER, NINEVEH PROVINCE VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ TIME: 11:28
A.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, AUGUST 30, 2007

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): All right.
I think we might as well go ahead and get started now. So we can get Mr. Hyland
on the phone. We'll go ahead and get started. Others can join us as they log
in.

MR. : Very good. I'm passing you over to Mr. Hyland right now.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you, sir.

MR. HYLAND: Hi, it's Jason Hyland.

MR. HOLT: Well, good morning or good afternoon, in your case, Mr.
Hyland. Jason Hyland with us for the bloggers roundtable. He's the team leader
with the PRT in Nineveh. And Mr. Hyland, do you have an opening statement for
us?

MR. HYLAND: Well, you can let me know what you'd like me to introduce
things with, and I first would like to say sorry we had to postpone this a bit,
but something came up today that I had to attend. And I appreciate your
flexibility.

But if there's something you'd like me to address at the beginning, I'm
happy to do that.

MR. HOLT: All right. Well, we can go ahead and get started and
actually just kind of open it up. We've got some other folks that are joining
us here, so we can just go ahead and get started.

Andrew.

MR. HYLAND: Yeah, if you want, just to kind of orient things, I could
open with the PRT. Nineveh is the oldest PRT that we have in the country, and
it's the second largest after Baghdad. And I think that it's very -- it's a
very mature organization in many ways. I think we're doing -- if you kind of
listed the kinds of things that we're doing every day and who we're going out to
meet and where we're traveling and our activities, it would sound a lot like
what a consulate or an embassy would be doing in many places in the world.

So I think that's -- just to kind of set the stage for what we're doing over here.

MR. HOLT: Okay, sir. Thank you very much.

Andrew, why don't you get us started.

Q Great. Mr. Hyland, this is Andrew Lubin from U.S. Cavalry ON Point. Appreciate you taking the time to talk to us today.

MR. HYLAND: My pleasure.

Q Kind of a multi-part question, sir.

It would give you a chance to kind of expand on things. First of all, what is the security situation up in the Mosul-Nineveh area? And also, what are -- what's the group doing to promote, say, medium-sized industry? I know there's a lot of microloans, but you used to have an aluminum extruder up there who used to hire -- I think he had about 300 people working there. What are we doing to get the economy in the whole area up and running and kind of circulating?

MR. HYLAND: Okay. On --

Q It's almost a lead statement, I know.

MR. HYLAND: Excuse me?

Q It's almost a lead statement, but that's --

MR. HYLAND: Right. The -- on security, I think the best way to look at it is in terms of the work we're doing. I mean, we're traveling every day not just to downtown Mosul but all over the province, and we're meeting people of everything from, you know, provincial government officials to political party people to businesspeople to local leaders to different kinds of human rights groups to you name it so that the security situation doesn't keep us from going out and doing our job. And I think that the basis is definitely there for the province to keep moving ahead and getting its -- particularly its economic foundation, which had been pretty substantial, you know, traditionally here back on track.

Regarding business, that's something that's -- I'm particularly interested in, having done some of that work in -- even though I'm a political officer, I've done in the past some work with promoting American business and supporting economic development. And you're right, we have these -- we have two centers that do microloans, and that's something that will continue.

But one of the things that we've done is to look at the inventory of state-owned enterprises that are here to see ones that might be viable as private enterprises or that they can -- you know, that they can be put on a viable commercial footing and introducing those opportunities to others.

The other thing we're looking at now is trying to pull together a chamber of commerce here. There the major impediment really is the security situation, getting businesses that are going to be comfortable coming together to do that.

But I think that we're, one, looking at -- as I said, looking at companies that may have a viable commercial basis to -- either to sell in Iraq or to export, and then to see whether we can introduce them to American companies.

I know that -- you're probably familiar with the work that the Brinkley group has done here. It provided information to them about several enterprises that they've followed up on. But we'd like to continue that. There's going to be in the fall an American business group coming to Erbil in the Kurdish -- Kurdistan regional government, which is about an hour's drive from here. And we're working with the Foreign Commercial Service to have a tie-in, so that the Foreign Commercial Service people will come here as well. So we're working putting something together for that that will help create some opportunities. But that's really kind of a future thing.

Q I'd like to -- if you could get us -- get back to us later on and get back to Mr. Holt, I'd like to get involved and be there, because I'm going to be in your area about that time.

MR. HYLAND: That would be great.

Q Yeah. Is the aluminum extruder in Mosul still open? I used to -- he was one of my customers back in the '70s. I used to come up to your area, and I used to -- he was one of my active regular buyers with the state aluminum industry.

MR. HYLAND: I don't know about the aluminum extruder. I can find out about that and then get back to you through Public Affairs.

Q If you could, I'd appreciate that.

MR. HYLAND: But that's certainly not something that I've been working on.

There are a couple of big industrial enterprises that people who had been here in the past had mentioned, but when I checked into them, they're -- they had just not had the management to really keep them going. But I don't know about the case of this particular place but I'll find out.

Q Appreciate that.

What kind of other -- what other industries are there to reopen? I mean, you can't -- micro --

MR. HYLAND: Well, one -- yeah, one factory --

Q Go ahead.

MR. HYLAND: Yeah, go on. Because of the time delay, I think I stepped on the last part of your question.

Q Or I did. I said, microloans are obviously important, but the city needs to run on more than microloans.

MR. HYLAND: Yeah, the -- another factory that I visited was the -- a pharmaceutical company that's here. And I was really impressed when we went over there. You know, once you go to the production line -- I can't remember

how many lines of products that they're producing. But they're very -- they're clearly marketing very successfully to Iraqi consumers. And that's a place that I think is going to do well with just a little bit of outside support. That's something that the Brinkley group has been looking at.

But I think that the things that are really going to drive the economy here -- one, that the agricultural sector here, Nineveh, as you probably know -- it was the breadbasket of Iraq --

Q Right.

MR. HYLAND: -- and producing a broad range of products, from wheat and cotton to vegetables and fruits and a lot of different products. And that's something that -- we are now developing a concept to get a farmers association pilot going, hoping to replicate that in other parts of Nineveh and hopefully ultimately in the rest of Iraq, because the basis is there for a pretty successful agricultural economy.

For Mosul, in particular, Mosul is very well known as sort of a merchant city with a very active retail and wholesale sector, and I think for those places -- I think as the security situation improves, I think that that sector will naturally rebound. And here at the PRT we're hoping -- you know, as the situation improves and we see things where we can be helpful, that we would get in. But I think that the natural drive to do business already exists here.

MR. HOLT: Okay, thank you, sir.

Q Great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: And I'd just like to remind everybody there is a bit of a delay to the satellite phone, so kind of adjust yourself accordingly and allow him the -- allow Mr. Hyland a chance to actually hear the question before he starts his response.

So, Bruce McQuain, you're next.

Q Yeah, Mr. Hyland, Bruce McQuain QandO. I guess I'm going to ask you for a couple assessments. What is your assessment of security in Mosul since the surge -- better, worse, about the same? And what is your assessment with your ability in the province to hook up and get things done with the central government?

MR. HYLAND: Well, the -- as I was saying, the -- we're getting out every day and going all over the province and conducting business and meeting people, and our outreach to people is expanding all the time so that the -- if you look at the security situation in that sense, I think it's improving.

The other thing here which is an important factor is the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police are quite capable in this province, and they work together very well. They work together very well with the provincial government as well as with coalition forces, and that's a very big factor.

And, you know, obviously their capabilities are always going up, but this is -- these are people that are definitely taking the fight to the enemy, and I think that -- you know, because it's a dangerous situation, bad things happen, but the Iraqi army and Iraqi police are definitely very aggressive in

trying to, you know, to maintain security and to go after the bad guys when they come out.

So I think in that sense, it's definitely an improving situation. And again, we're not -- it's not keeping us from getting out to all the corners of the province.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

And Nicholas Beaudrot with ezraklein.com.

Q Hi. Thanks. And this is actually a pretty good follow-up, because I have a similar question to the second part of the QandO guy's question. A lot of the reports about bottom-up reconciliation coming out of Anbar province and Nineveh have focused on on-the-ground progress, you know, partnering up with this or that local sheikh or making more progress on reconstruction. And I was wondering if you -- sort of the what's next to this process, how do you connect the progress on the ground to some sort of national political reconciliation with the central government.

MR. HYLAND: Right. And again, I realized I had not answered the part about -- the question about central government, so let me quickly turn to that.

The focus here at the PRT is on strengthening capacity for the provincial and local governments. Obviously part of what we're doing and trying to support is better linkages between the provincial government and the central government.

And the -- for example, the governor here goes down to Baghdad once every month or every two months, at least, to meet with cabinet officials and to follow up on issues, and we support that initiative. And we also work with our embassy, where we can help to make sure that connections are made, so that -- you know, issues that the provincial government is trying to work with the central government, if there's any way we can support that, we do that.

But if you were to come to Nineveh, you have a strong provincial government that works. I mean, they have a lot of professionals who are, you know, staffing the different departments of the government who -- and working with the PRT in the past but now have a very strong capability of developing a good budget and, you know, prioritizing projects and implementing a budget.

There's a provincial council that's very active, and we go there probably -- almost every session that they have, we go there to observe. But we like to compare it to C-SPAN, where if you were to sit in on the session -- we were just there two days ago -- they're talking about kind of the bread-and-butter issues that citizens are interested in, whether it's related to security or water or electricity or specific interests of provincial council members.

And again, the -- as I was saying, the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police are stood-up organizations, so that -- I can only speak for the province that -- where I'm working. I can't speaking nationally. But from our standpoint -- and I think that local officials would agree -- the real challenge is just to keep strengthening that capacity; that the basic structure is in place, but you have to continue building on that, where, you know, strengthening the judiciary -- you know, continue to strengthen the capacity in the provincial government.

But this is a place that, you know, again, conditions all over Iraq are difficult. But I mean, with that caveat, this is a place where things -- things are functioning and where there's a lot of cooperation and communication among all the different players in the provincial -- the provincial government.

MR. HOLT: Okay, thank you, sir, and I apologize also. I kind of missed the second part of that question as well from Bruce McQuain.

Bruce, did we get you answered?

Q Yeah, thanks very much.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Matt Armstrong.

Q Hi, thank you. Good morning, afternoon.

MR. HYLAND: Morning.

Q What resources or support, rhetorical or otherwise, do you think is necessary that you're not getting now? I understand it's somewhat of a loaded question, but you're describing a lot of good things and the progress. But what can you use to really achieve this better and to possibly accelerate or just keep the high quality up?

MR. HYLAND: Well, the -- something really -- doesn't particularly doesn't pop into my mind primarily because we don't see ourselves as an organization that's here to give out money. The Iraqi government has financial capacity, that money is not the issue. And we see ourselves in the role of advising and supporting and being a partner with them in doing things, and making linkages, bringing technical advice, supporting what they're doing, but not -- we don't need, you know, to bring more money to the table. I think we're -- I think what we want is for the Iraqis to keep developing their capacity so that our role, frankly, becomes smaller and smaller. And I think our idea is to put ourselves out of a job.

And the more that -- because the money is, you know, is there in the financial -- you know, in government finances here, the important thing is for the provincial government to run -- have a very strong capacity to execute their budget and to look after the needs and for them to create those linkages with the central government so they can get their provincial needs met by the central government.

And as difficult as difficult as that is, I mean, you do -- it's important to remember that, because they're coming out of a dictatorship, these linkages didn't really exist between a kind of democratic or independent province and a -- and the central government. So in some cases, we're finding that once they figure out how to do it, the next time it's a lot easier for them to do it, but it's not something that's easy.

And we have a pretty robust staff here. We're -- in our kind of civilian equivalent of the surge, we're bringing in additional people in areas like agriculture or city planning or, you know, specific areas, and I think that can be -- that will be very helpful. But there isn't -- something we're missing -- our relations with our military partners here are fantastic. We work very closely with the embassy, and have -- and, you know, we're all on the same --

carrying out the same mission, and our relations with the people in the province are excellent.

Without really trying, I probably see the governor three times a week, and that's not with like just setting up appointments. It's because of things that we're going to together, or because we have visitors, or you name it. And we're -- you know, the PRT's work is pretty well-known throughout the province. So I think on the local level, as well, we're pretty happy.

And I -- you know, I know this sounds like a very rosy view of what we're doing, but this is actually the way it is up here. It's a pretty -- there are some good things happening up here. And I think this sort of team approach to things, not just within the PRT and with coalition forces but more broadly with our Iraqi partners, is pretty effective.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir, and we had a couple other folks join us online.

Q Yeah, David Axe is here.

MR. HOLT: Okay, David, why don't you go ahead?

Q Great.

Sir, this is David Axe with the Aviation Week group. Thanks for taking the time to speak --

MR. HYLAND: Yes, thank you.

Q Couple questions: Are you seeing any foreign investment that's not American foreign investment in the province?

MR. HYLAND: Foreign investment: Yeah, I think there's some Turkish investment, but I don't have a figure on that. And I think that would still be pretty low-level. But again I think as security improves, I think you'll see more of that probably in construction and agriculture and areas like that. But no, we're not seeing a lot of investment. But the -- I think that -- and frankly I think it is the -- security is the thing that, you know, the barrier that has to be overcome for foreign investors to come in here. I think once that, you know, gets to a certain level, I think you'll find that a lot more will come here, which I think will also contribute to a better security situation.

Q So how long do you need before you feel like you can step back and provincial authorities will be self-sufficient in managing these linkages and making these connections that you speak of?

MR. HYLAND: Well, I think in -- I mean, depending on how you -- where you set the bar, I think they're really already there. I think it's just that it can be a lot more efficient.

But if you were to come here -- let's say you came here and we took you down to Provincial Hall, and you met senior officials in the government, sort of kind of the technocrats. These are pretty impressive people who are, you know, very well educated, long experience, whether it's -- you know, whatever sector they're in, whether it's in engineering or water or budget management or what have you. There's a lot of -- there's a lot of capacity there, and I think that

the -- this sort of regular series of meetings in Baghdad, I think, over time are having an effect.

So I think the -- one, it's a stood-up provincial government. This is not something where it, you know, it needs to get to that point. It's already there. It's just a question of capacity, and I think they have the tools to do that.

And again, I'm only speaking about the province that -- where I am, but that's very much the case here.

Q Right. One more follow-up, if I could. To what extent do you think -- and this is just speculation on my part -- but to what extent do you think what's happening is a development of sort of provincial economies, like isolated provincial economies? It seems to me that the security situation would prohibit a lot of links within the country to create a sort of robust national economy versus these isolated microeconomies.

MR. HYLAND: Well, I mean, that's -- I think that the hope and expectation is that the -- what's happening -- you know, the people who are doing business here will be able to, you know, expand beyond Nineveh. I mean, they can work in some provinces, but there may be -- you know, very difficult in other provinces. So I think, again, that the hope is that that's a transitional phase.

But there's still a lot of growth to be done. I mean, this is the second most populous province in the country, and it's -- you know, even though it doesn't -- it has a long tradition of business, and even though it doesn't border on Turkey, it's quite close to the Turkish border and has -- you know, it has access to international markets, you know, through there.

So I think there's a lot of growth that could be done here before you get to that point, and hopefully there will be progress in other provinces as well while that's happening.

But I think people -- the business people in Mosul have -- you know, are kind of known throughout Iraq for being very shrewd businessmen. And I think that they're ready to kind of take that on as conditions improve.

Q Thank you.

MR. HYLAND: And one thing I wanted to mention is that in terms of linkages, one area where we we're supporting the provincial authorities is in getting a -- ultimately getting a commercial airport reopened in Mosul. Way, way back when, the Mosul airport was the second most important airport in the country. And what we're working with them on is in -- first in getting hajj flights, which are very, very important things for almost everyone in the province and in the north here too; come out of the -- use the airport facility for doing hajj flights in the winter; but ultimately, to have an airport that's, you know, running flights because that is one of the ways that you can create linkages with other parts of Baghdad -- other parts of Iraq, and then either via that or directly with the region.

Q Thanks.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you, sir.

And anyone else?

Q Yeah, Fishman's on.

MR. HOLT: Oh, Jarred.

Yes, go ahead.

Q Thank you for your time. Could you speak a little bit to -- on that same kind of philosophy, the linkages, perhaps, with Kurdistan, because we see the most amount of extraordinary capitalism and economic progress happens in the safest areas of Kurdistan, and they've had a decade in advance of everyone else. Do you see any types of projects where the Kurds will be able to extend that into Nineveh and into Salahuddin and down to Baghdad?

MR. HYLAND: Well, I can't speak directly to what they're doing, you know, what their plans are from Kurdistan. But the -- because Nineveh borders on both Dohuk and Erbil and it's quite easy to get there, to either Dohuk or to Erbil from Mosul, for example, there's a lot of interaction between the -- among those provinces. And people who are doing business there or they have another home there, or, you know, lots of those linkages, and I think that's definitely a positive for the province because it's sort of another outlet for them.

And I think you can -- I think you can expect that that will continue. So I think that is one of the kind of externalities for Nineveh that are important, and again through Dohuk to Turkey.

MR. HOLT: All right, thank you very much.

And okay, we've got just a few minutes left. Any follow-up questions?

Q Yeah, I have one. Bruce McQuain again with Q and O.

One of your counterparts described your job as a PRT generally as government, economic development and rule of law. I was wondering if you could address the rule of law portion of that and kind of update us on the status of court system and all that good stuff.

MR. HYLAND: Okay, we have a very active rule of law section here. And again the -- we're -- the way we're structured, we have a governance section and a reconstruction section and a health and education section and an economic and agricultural section, and rule of law. And in the rule of law, we work very closely with the judicial system here. And the head of our rule of law section here is a U.S., I guess, assistant attorney, a very, very experienced person from our legal community in the United States.

And we've done several things. We do a lot of training. We've strengthened their crime lab, their capacity in forensics. But again -- but I wanted to note that traditionally Mosul is a place well-known for having a strong cadre of forensic experts. So we're basically seeing ourselves as going in and kind of working with an existing capability to strengthen it.

The civil courts here are very active. One thing that had been a serious problem was that because of intimidation, some of the local judges were not willing to take on the terrorism cases.

And working with the judiciary here and with Baghdad, the central court in Baghdad has been sending basically traveling judges up here to try terrorism cases, and that's been very successful. But I think it's important to indicate, as involved as we are in that, these are the kind of legal officials of the Iraqi government who are the lead in this; we're just sort of helping them to do that.

So that's very well-developed so that we're kind of looking at, one, the specific issue of making sure that terrorism cases and other kind of grave crimes are tried in a fair but also a -- you know, that the trials actually take place and that justice is served, and then building up capacity for the judicial community, whether it's with the crime lab or various kinds of training for the different parts of the legal community, from judges to investigative judges to other experts; also working on issues of human rights and developing that capacity. And we meet with human rights groups. And these are, you know, local groups that are involved in human rights. But -- so I think we take a multifaceted approach to that, but that's one of the most exciting areas that we work in.

Q Thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Thank you, sir. We're about out of time here. Jason Hyland, the team leader with the PRT in Nineveh province in Iraq, is with us for bloggers roundtable. Sir, do you have any final comments for us?

MR. HYLAND: No, I think the final comments are going back to the beginning. I think we talked a lot about sort of the tangible sort of accomplishments or things that we work on. But I think as sort of a career Foreign Service officer, the thing that I find sort of -- it's more intangible but for me very gratifying and I think it's going to pay in long-term dividends is the amount of outreach that we have with people in every strata in this province. You know, this is -- that contact between kind of the U.S. government, particularly sort of the civilian side of the U.S. government, whether it's from -- someone from Department of Justice or State Department or AID and with all kinds of citizens, whether with journalists, government, religious figures, you name it -- I think that's going to pay a lot of dividends further down the road, and it's very, you know, gratifying to be able to do that.

MR. HOLT: Thank you very much, sir, Jason Hyland, team leader of PRT in Nineveh province in Iraq. And thank you for being with us today, and I hope we can speak again, sir. MR. HYLAND: Yeah. I'd be delighted to do that. And thank you for your interest.

MR. HOLT: Thank you, sir.

MR. HYLAND: Okay. Bye-bye.

MR. HOLT: Great. Thank you.

Q Jack, very good. Thank you very much for this.

MR. HOLT: You're welcome.

Q Have a good one.

MR. HOLT: And I'll get the e-mail exchange going for you.

Q Good. Thanks a lot.

MR. HOLT: You bet. Thank you.

Q Thanks, Jack.

MR. HOLT: You bet. Bye.

END.