

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT COLONEL DANIEL SWANSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR FUTURE PLANS AND FORCE GENERATION, COALITION ASSISTANCE ARMY TRAINING TEAM, MULTINATIONAL SECURITY TRANSITION COMMAND-IRAQ, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ TIME: 10:00 A.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 2008

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OASD PA): And I'd like to welcome Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Swanson to the Bloggers Roundtable. Lieutenant Colonel Swanson is the deputy director for Future Plans and Force Generation for the Coalition Assistance Army Training Team at the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq. And Colonel Swanson, the floor is yours. Do you have an opening statement for us, sir?

LT. COL. SWANSON: Good afternoon -- or good morning, everyone. It's certainly a pleasure to be here with you this morning.

As my introduction states, I am the deputy director for Plans and Force Generation with MNSTC-I and specifically with CAATT, the -- did somebody just join us? Q Yes. Good morning. Richard Miller from Talk Radio News.

LT. COL. SWANSON: Okay. Good morning.

As I was saying, I'm also with -- specifically with CAATT, the Coalition Army Advisory Training Team. My duties and responsibilities is force generation of the Iraqi army. And that is based upon the prime minister's initiative to build a force to combat the insurgents. With that, the prime minister realizes that the fighting force he needs is not such as -- a force consisting of armor, field artillery and those type things, but his enemy are the insurgents. He needs to fight with ground forces, rifles and infantry force.

So as we build or force-generate the Iraqi army, we are focusing on, as you may have heard already, the term "COIN force," a counterinsurgency force.

The prime minister has stated that his end objective to his counterinsurgency force is 13 divisions, each division consisting of four brigades. And each one of those brigades is a three-battalion brigade. His division headquarters is where he has his enablers. His military police, his bomb-disposal companies, his motorized transportation regiment, his engineers and his signal forces are within those division headquarters. And that is -- as we build, those are the units we build or force-generate.

When we force-generate an organization, normally we force-generate at that brigade level. And we generate a force of 2,438 members to that brigade.

A battalion consists of 750 personnel, so you can do the math. The fighting force is 2,150 per brigade, and then the remaining would be his brigade headquarters and staff.

At the end of 2008 we will have completed the build for his brigades. We will have built his four brigades for each one of his divisions. And when I say build, it's a joint effort between the MNSTC-I CAATT staff along with the minister of Defense and his M-7, which is his force generation personnel.

Are there any questions at this point?

MR. HOLT: All right, let's see what we've got. DJ, why don't you get us started?

Q It's DJ Elliot with The Long War Journal. I was wondering, your topic intro talked about 135 percent for the first through fourth divisions. And I've seen elsewhere where it said second through fifth divisions up north getting them. Are you adding an extra battalion to these, or are you just over-strengthening the existing battalions?

LT. COL. SWANSON: No, we're increasing those strengths to -- 135 percent is our goal to get us to a -- units of battalion and of course the brigade and the division overall to the 135 percent strength. The remaining divisions and units, our focus is on 120 percent. And, you know, that's where our goal is.

So that's where the prime minister has directed that growth to be, at those units.

Q And I was wondering -- like I said, I'd seen in the 9010, they were talking 2nd through 5th Division, where your topics is 1 through 4. Which one is it?

LT. COL. SWANSON: Well, it's 2, 3, 4 and 5 is where we're aiming on that 135 percent strength; 2, 3, 4, and 5.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And Marisa?

Q Hi. Marisa Cochrane, Institute for the Study of War. I'm curious as to how the performance of the brigades generated through unit set fielding has compared with the brigades generated before the program was implemented.

LT. COL. SWANSON: Okay. It's a good question. My -- I've been here since last July, so my comparison between unit set fielding and what was done before that would not be fair. But I -- but my comments on what unit set fielding does -- and if I could explain how a unit is built at the lowest level -- and please bear with me as I go through this, but you know, if basic combat training is where the jundi begins, or the private, that soldier, and when we generate a unit, we first begin a BCT, and out of that BCT cycle, basic combat training, the soldiers in that first BCT cycle then go on to a MOSQ, or military occupational skills qualification course.

Running in conjunction with the MOSQ course is a second BCT class. And also running in conjunction with that MOSQ class and BCT is a course we call rejoiners. Rejoiners is where, when soldiers are recruited for a unit, the focus is also on NCOs and officers from the former Saddam regime. If a soldier

can report to the recruiting station with evidence of being a prior service NCO or officer, he then becomes a part of that rejoiners class. Okay?

And now I'm going to answer your question, I hope. Once they complete that basic training, MOSQ and rejoiners class -- keep in mind these individuals have all been -- they may not know each other except those that have been in their class. So we bring them to unit set fielding. That's the first time officers and NCOs will be introduced to their corporals and privates. So that's where one of the real benefits comes into play, at the beginning part of unit set fielding, is the leaders are introduced to their soldiers, soldiers are introduced to the leader. And that is when the unit is formed. So if you can imagine, then, with that vision of, for the first time, soldiers meet each other, that's what the cohesive build about unit set fielding starts, the first day when they're organized, when that squad leader meets his squad for the very first time or that platoon sergeant meets his platoon for the very first time.

That didn't happen previously, previous to our unit set fielding concept. That's what goes on now.

And that's when the soldiers, during unit set fielding, become cohesive, and that they go through drivers training, weapons qualification, crew serve training, a combat lifesavers course. The squad leaders go through a combat lifesavers course.

So the unit set fielding piece of that not only brings them -- gets them their equipment and gets additional training, but that's the first point in their brigade life cycle that they meet each other as a cohesive unit.

Did that answer your question?

Q Thank you.

LT. COL. SWANSON: Okay.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

And Jarred.

Q Yes, sir.

Thank you for your time.

First off, is there a way we could get a PowerPoint presentation of the breakdown of the different brigades and divisions and where they're stationed, I mean, the publicly available information, just so we can start to get out that though? People here in America don't really have an understanding of even the way that the army is set up, so I think that could be helpful.

And then my question would be, could you talk a little bit about the recent developments of the past 10 days, with the operations in Basra and throughout the Shi'a lands, how you view the Iraqi army proficiency, lessons to be learned and the overall feeling that you get in watching how things unfolded?

LT. COL. SWANSON: Yeah.

That's pretty tough for me to comment on in that I'm in the force generation side and, you know, that's an operational consideration. MNF-I's public affairs office would be able to provide documents upon a request to them.

I'd just, you know, what I can say is that the brigades in the fight down in Basra -- one was a force generated unit. We're in the process of force generating another 14th Division unit, which will go through -- which is currently in their basic training. They'll be soon starting their -- (inaudible) -- and their unit set fielding in the near future.

So you know, the division in Basra, the 14th Division, is certainly a unit that we've been force generating. And we'll continue to provide -- as I stated in the opening statement was that, you know, we're generating a lot of soldiers through each one of our basic training cycles. We generate -- our goal is 14,500.

Of course, not all those soldiers, in a cycle, would be a part of our force generation, specifically a unit build. The remaining soldiers would go toward replenishment. And that's back to the question about 135 percent. It's those, above and beyond the force generation in a cycle, that become a part of that replenishment to build 220 percent and 135 percent.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

All right. And Charlie?

Q Yes. My question -- it's very similar to Jarred's -- is that -- any lessons that you've picked up in the group that is -- that did go through your programs on their operations in Basra?

LT. COL. SWANSON: You know, there's lessons learned, and they're all in the works right now. You know, once those lessons are learned and -- you know, adjustments can be made. But I sure -- you know, it's too early to -- for me to speculate of the outcomes of forces that we might have generated going through there. But certainly, you know, lessons learned is a good -- or a good way for us to -- if we need to adjust fire on our force generation cycle, we certainly will. But it's difficult at this time to speculate of -- you know, the dust hasn't settled yet. So we'll just have to see how that turns out.

Q Okay.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir.

And Richard Miller.

Q Yes, good morning, Colonel. Question: An op-ed piece recently appeared by one of your colleagues -- it was either in The Post or The Times -- that essentially called for a vamping up of -- ramping up, rather, of U.S. added forces in Iraq specifically for training (for GW ?) units, such as the ones you're describing. And I'm wondering if you might comment on whether you think we have enough U.S. forces right now to go in on small embedding teams in order to stand up this force that you're describing.

LT. COL. SWANSON: That's a tough question for me to answer, in that, yeah, I can see -- here what I'm at, at CAATT, it's a big mission for us, and we do have a force with our CAATT unit, the Coalition Army Advisory Training Team, that we have members embedded at the schools to observe, participate, coach,

teach, mentor the Iraqi army as they conduct the training. You know, has that been ramped up? No. It will remain in a constant level, in ensuring that we have the coach, teach, mentor. And once we've achieved that goal, then sure, we of the CAATT will stand down. But you know, that's -- I certainly can't make that decision. That's -- you know, for our government to make those decisions for us. But we have coach, teach, mentor embedded in the schoolhouses. MR. HOLT: All right. We had a couple other(s) joined us -- who else is with us?

Q Jack, Andrew Lubin.

MR. HOLT: Okay, Andrew.

Q Yeah. Colonel, I apologize for calling in late. Yesterday's New York Times, some other newspapers talked about how Iraqi logistics still aren't doing well. In fact, they're running out of bullets and other munitions down in Basra. Can you discuss that a bit, please? I mean, we've been hearing for the past year that the logistics are getting better and better and better, but apparently they're not.

LT. COL. SWANSON: Well, you know, I haven't seen the article and it would be difficult, but I can say that, you know, I think it's -- we call them enablers, as far as the force generation. That's where my next focus is. As I said, we are building logistics -- or location commands which are a logistics base that will be at each of the division headquarters. Those location commands will be there to provide a level of maintenance and level of -- all the classes of supply -- the one, the three, the five -- those classes of supplies to sustain their army.

That it's improving and it continues to improve. You know, there are challenges out there, and that's what we're facing and focusing on in the force generation of the location commands, and also at our schoolhouses, mechanics. You know, they receive training to sustain the Iraqi army. So, you know, the Iraqi -- it is working through some of the issues that have been reported, but certainly I see an improvement in their logistics.

Q But sir, if I could follow up on this, I mean, when we were interviewing different people for Fard al-Qanun back during -- you know, a year ago, we're hearing the same stories; don't have enough bullets, don't have enough water. I understand it takes a while to train a mechanic to be a mechanic, but bringing them enough bullets is more common sense than training, isn't it?

LT. COL. SWANSON: Well, that's certainly out of -- you know, that's -- you know, I deal with the force generation side of this, and all I can say is that we're generating and supporting the Iraqi logistics and sustainment program through what we force generate. One of the schools is our al-Watir (ph) school, is a supply course, not only at the jundi level, but also at the NCO and officer level. So the training goes on, and we continue to put those supply personnel out at schools.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: Okay. And sir, would it be fair to say, Colonel, that in your area of expertise, your area of operations there, or your domain, that you're focused more on the force generation and training the soldiers to be what the MOI is designing as far as their force structure?

Would that be fair to say, that you're not necessarily part of a force structure model, but the force generation for that structure?

LT. COL. SWANSON: Correct. And the only thing I need to correct is that I work with the minister of Defense and not MOI, minister of Interior. But yes, that is -- what you said is exactly true.

MR. HOLT: Okay. Yeah, that -- sorry, I misspoke there. Yeah, I meant Ministry of Defense.

LT. COL. SWANSON: Yes.

MR. HOLT: But any other follow-up questions?

Q Yes. Richard Miller, Talk Radio News. Colonel, one last follow-up -- and I'm just curious if you might know what the wash-out rate is in terms of Iraqis who start within the schooling programs and don't make it through graduation?

LT. COL. SWANSON: No, I don't know the exact number. I know that the Iraqi candidates or recruits are vetted. They go through a vetting process. But the exact, persay, wash-out number -- no, I don't have that information. You know, it's a challenging course, but I don't know that number. I'm sorry.

Q All right. Thank you, sir.

LT. COL. SWANSON: Thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay, and Colonel, we're running short of time, here. So do you have any closing thoughts for us or closing comments for us?

LT. COL. SWANSON: It's been a pleasure talking with all of you. Hopefully I've been able to share some new information with you.

I've been here now a little over nine months and it's been an interesting experience. I retired, actually, from the army in January 2001, and felt the need to get back into working with soldiers again. And I just started back in the 1st of July. You know, during those nine months I've been here, I've certainly seen the improvements. I've certainly seen -- what I would say -- more smiles on the face of the Iraqis that I deal with.

There are many challenges ahead of us. This war is certainly a challenge. And it's not over, but I hope to build the Iraqi army so that they can sustain, maintain and fight their battles, which they are doing, and standing up to the plate and doing that for the Iraqi people.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much, Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Swanson, deputy director for Force -- or Future Plans and Force Generation for the Coalition Assistance Army Training Team for the Multinational Security Transition Command-Iraq. Thank you very much for being with us, sir.

LT. COL. SWANSON: Thank you.

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