

Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable With Brigadier General Rock Donahue, Director, U.S.-Forces Iraq J7 Via Teleconference From Al Asad Air Base, Iraq Subject: Engineering Efforts in Iraq, Including the Current Status of U.S. Bases and Where They Will go by 31 December Time: 10:31 a.m. EDT Date: Thursday, September 15, 2011

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PETTY OFFICER WILLIAM SELBY (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday, September 15th, 2011. My name is Petty Officer William Selby with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating the call today.

Today we are honored to have as our guest Brigadier General Rock Donahue, director of U.S. Forces Iraq J7, who will discuss engineering efforts in Iraq, to include the current status of U.S. bases and where they will go by 31 December.

Sir, we have two bloggers on the line. And bloggers, please remember to clearly state your name and blog or organization in advance of your question, respect our guest's time and keep your questions succinct and to the point. And if you are not asking a question, we ask that you keep your phone on mute.

With that, sir, if you have an opening statement, the floor is yours.

BRIGADIER GENERAL ROCK DONAHUE: Well, thank you. And good afternoon from al Asad Air Base, Iraq. And good morning to you all; I guess we have got Dale and Christian with us today. And it's great to be here.

I am the director of U.S. Forces Iraq-J7. And that's the Engineering Directorate. And as the senior U.S. engineer in Iraq, I'm responsible for providing what we call full-spectrum joint engineering support to U.S. Forces-Iraq stability operations and assisting both the Department of State and the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq to ensure their success.

Now, prior to assuming my current role here in January of this year, as part of my background I commanded the Army Corps of Engineers South Pacific Division, headquartered in San Francisco, California. And previous to that, I was serving here in Iraq as the director of what was then called Multinational Corps Iraq C7, from February 2008 to April 2009, during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

A little bit more about full-spectrum joint engineering. It really comprises six key tasks. Protecting the force and providing assured mobility, we wrap that into one task, and that really is all about route clearance and military bridging. Second, developing Iraqi security force engineer capability. Third, providing base environmental and facility support. Fourth task is providing general and geospatial engineering support. The fifth task is really enabling base transitions. And the sixth task is posturing engineer forces.

Currently our priority engineer effort here in Iraq is enabling base transitions, which remain on track and in accordance with the security agreement of 2008. U.S. forces in Iraq now reside on 41 bases. Twenty-eight of those are U.S. and 13 are partnered. And since the height of the surge of January 2008, we've transitioned 464 bases to the government of Iraq.

So to give you some perspective, in January of 2008 we resided on 505 bases, and we started this calendar year on 82 bases. So we're about halfway through where we need to be by the end of the calendar year.

We conduct base transitions in a transparent and consistent manner through the government of Iraq's receivership secretary, and that individual's name is Mr. Hussein al-Asadi (sp). He is the prime minister's single point of contact for coordinating transition of bases to the government of Iraq.

Bases are transitioned in working order, with the infrastructure in place for our Iraqi partners to operate. And this base transition process, which we can get into in more detail, really encompasses a series of 48 specified tasks -- there are hundreds of tasks, obviously, but 48 specified tasks really embedded in four parallel transition processes: real estate management, property distribution, contracting and environmental oversight. And depending on the size of the base, the process can take anywhere between three months to nearly a year.

With respect to environmental oversight, we adhere to the security agreement of 2008, which is really focused on protecting the natural environment and human health and safety of personnel. We also comply with U.S. Central Command Regulation 200-2, entitled "Contingency Environmental Guidance." Obviously we comply with USF-I operations orders. And we have environmental SOP, or standard operating procedures, here in Iraq.

So for each base, we perform a series of environmental site-closure surveys, and we implement a corrective action plan, called a CAP.

We've got six environmental response and cleanup teams, called ERCTs, and we've got environmental managers that are aligned with each U.S. division.

In the past year we completed a cleanup actions portfolio of over 600 environmental sites.

And at this juncture with a little over three months to go until the end of the calendar year, we assess the 41 remaining bases require about 500 environmental sites that need some sort of closure or cleanup or transfer. Forty-nine of these 500 sites will be transferred to the government of Iraq as is for what we call continued like use, and they include sites such as firing ranges, wastewater treatment plants and lagoons. The remaining sites will be cleared and cleaned or mitigated by the responsible unit, by contractors or by our environmental response and cleanup teams.

Two types of waste here in Iraq: regulated waste and solid waste. Let me handle the first one. Regulated waste -- we use that term here. We don't really refer to hazardous waste. We call it regulated waste or environmentally regulated waste. And that is supported by two hazardous waste treatment centers located at two of our prominent bases here. The one that will continue into 2012 and beyond is at COB Speicher, and that will remain open until all of our regulated waste has been properly treated or disposed of. And that'll remain open until the end of March 2012.

So to give you some perspective on regulated waste management, since 2008 about 154 million pounds of oils, fuels and coolant have been processed, and over 50 million pounds of regulated waste have been treated.

The second category, as I mentioned, is solid waste. And it's disposed of through incineration or in approved Iraqi landfills. There are currently 50 incinerators operating in Iraq, 19 for regulated medical waste and 31 for solid waste.

Often we get asked about recycling. We recycle 30 percent of our regulated waste, which is primarily used oil, used coolant, oil filters and lead-acid batteries. We've recycled more than 12 million pounds of regulated material since Operation New Dawn began last September.

Additionally, we partner with the government of Iraq and local firms to recycle metal, wood, plastic and other commodities.

As far as reconstruction is concerned, to give you some perspective, since 2003 U.S. and coalition forces completed over 70,000 projects in Iraq in support of reconstruction efforts and building Iraq's civil and institutional capacity. As the lead construction agent, the Army Corps of Engineers, referred to often as USACE, they completed more than 5,000 projects valued at over \$8.4 billion.

These projects added more than 7,000 megawatts of electricity to the Iraq power grid, increased oil production, established medical facilities which treat thousands of Iraqis each year, and, of course, increased civil and institutional capacity by providing hundreds of new, upgraded or repaired schools, roads, bridges and railroads, as well as aviation and port facilities.

Finally, we continue to strengthen the Iraqi security forces -- the ISAF -- through multiple partnered training events and engineer equipment fielding initiatives, to include the establishment of 14 field engineer regiments and a strategic bridge regiment within the Iraqi army.

We also enabled Iraqi army specialty engineer training at Taji, which is the home of their engineer school. There's a bomb disposal school at Besmaya. There's also a geospatial information services school and a power-generation school. We've fielded hundreds of pieces of engineer equipment, including construction equipment, military bridges and route clearance vehicles with bomb disposal robots.

So really, gentlemen, the bottom line is we're committed to completing our mission here in Iraq on time and to standard, in accordance with the security agreement. We do that through really a magnificent team of joint full-spectrum engineers, a great partnership with our Iraqi engineers and really a great team of service members and civilians who continue to build strong here and achieve the engineering excellence that we desire with honor and success.

So thanks for your time. That concludes my opening statement. It's good to be with you, and I look forward to our discussion.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Sir, thank you very much for that opening statement.

We have Dale on the line first. So go ahead with your questions, Dale.

Q: Good morning -- good afternoon, General Donahue. This is Dale Kissinger from militaryavenue.com. My first question is --

GEN. DONAHUE: Hi, Dale.

Q: Good morning, sir. My first question really is concerning the projects that the Corps of Engineers completed, worth \$8 billion. Can you tell me what the -- what the best success or the biggest story that you'd like to tell the American people about how their \$8 billion was spent?

GEN. DONAHUE: Well, as I said, over 5,000 of those projects really enabled Iraq's civil and institutional capacity. There are a number of projects: public works and water, benefiting millions of people; medical facilities, both large and small, treating thousands of Iraqis each year; a lot of schools, over 1,600 school projects; and of course transportation, roads, railroads, aviation and ports. So, Dale, really it covers the full spectrum of the civil capacity arena.

But I would -- I would have to say that generating electricity, which is really the essential service -- you're adding 7,000 megawatts to the Iraqi grid -- and again, all of the projects that enabled the public works and water infrastructure here in Iraq, and the schools have really been success stories with the Army Corps of Engineers.

Q: So basically, quality-of-life issues would be at the top of the list?

GEN. DONAHUE: Yeah, civil capacity we call it, Dale. We refer to it as building Iraq's infrastructure and its civil capacity and institutional capacity.

Q: OK. Thank you very much, sir.

GEN. DONAHUE: Sure.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And go ahead. GEN. DONAHUE: And thank you for your service, Dale. I've read your bio.

And again, it's always great to talk to veterans. You're helping tell our story here. And so I appreciate all that you're doing with your organization.

Q: Oh, well thank you very much. I appreciate that.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Christian, you can go ahead.

Q: Thanks. General Donahue, an outstanding opening statement there packed with statistics. If you could do me a favor and have your PAO or someone send over some of that information, particularly the part between the six tasks and the 48 tasks, four processes part of your speech -- or your opening statement, I'm particularly interested in the numbers that you outline and the number of bases you have currently occupied, the number that you have mitigated, the number that are -- that have been transferred, the number that have been -- to the Iraqi government, the number that have been sort of swept clean, that kind of thing.

It was very fast and I wasn't able to kind of job that down. If there's a way that you could forward that basic information, I'd really appreciate it.

GEN. DONAHUE: Sure. I'd be more than happy to do that. And the USFI public affairs officer with me now, he'll go ahead and send you that.

If I may, I can I just cover some of the high points a little bit slower? Would that help?

Q: Well --

GEN. DONAHUE: It really is a wonderful story here. I mean, again --

Q: No, I know. I know --

GEN. DONAHUE: -- to start with the macro picture -- go ahead, I'm sorry.

Q: No, I appreciate that, but -- I get it that it's a huge job, but I want to ask some macro questions here, OK? So -- and I'm going to -- I ask this first question with all due respect, OK? I have been to Iraq several times, have spent lots of time from -- all the way from 2003 to my last trip over there was 2008. I've seen it in a lot of different forms and transitions. I've been all over the country.

My big, macro question -- and again, I ask this with all due respect -- it seems like you're putting a lot of effort into cleaning up these places in a country where it's not that clear to me that they're really interested in keeping themselves clean, if you know what I mean. Like I'm sure if you pull out of the -- go outside the wire at one of these bases that you've mitigated, there's trash all over the street, the buildings are in disrepair.

Why are you going through all of this work and all of this time and all this expense to essentially make one clear, clean, environmentally mitigated space in a country that clearly hasn't spent a lot of time caring about it in other parts of the country?

GEN. DONAHUE: Well, I think the simple answer I'd give you, Christian, is because it's the right thing to do.

And as I said, there is some confusion about our standards here. We've got to go back and remember that the security agreement of 2008 really requires us to protect the natural environment, to focus on human health and safety of our personnel, and it's the right thing to do. We're going to leave our -- this environment here cleaner than we found it. I think that's -- that's part of our culture here. As I said, we started at the height of the surge with our biggest footprint, about 505 bases in January of 2008, and we're down to 41.

And so I think our processes are fair. I think they're disciplined. And again, we are in compliance with not only our own orders and SOPs, Christian, but also with CENTCOM Regulation 200-2. I mean that that is the -- that is the regulatory guideline that is specified by U.S. Central Command.

So in accordance with the security agreement, regulations, the policies and SOPs, we're doing the right thing by protecting the environment and --

Q: OK.

GEN. DONAHUE: -- and our human health and safety.

Q: OK. How --

GEN. DONAHUE: And quite frankly, I think there's probably a second if not a third order effect here, and that is, we're showing the Iraqis what right looks like.

Q: Yeah.

GEN. DONAHUE: That's part of what we do here. I don't disagree with your assessment. You've been here, obviously. You've got extensive experience here in Iraq. We see the same thing.

Q: Yeah.

GEN. DONAHUE: But we're going to do the right thing. And we're going to show them what right looks like and then teach and train and lead them into taking care of the infrastructure, taking care of the environment so that these facilities, the environment and the infrastructure will be sustainable.

Q: In mitigating -- and I call it mitigating, which -- I use that as a loose term to include all of the things that you do to sort of -- to make a base ready to transfer to the Iraqi government. In how many -- since 505 bases in 2008 to now the 41 bases, how much have you spent, and how many personnel have been devoted to that effort, roughly?

GEN. DONAHUE: Well, again, I don't -- I don't have a number figure for you, Christian. I can tell you that we maintain, again, six environmental response and cleanup teams. Each of those teams has got 13 individuals associated with it. We've got 11 environmental managers here in Iraq. Those are distributed throughout the operational environment. We don't refer to it as battle space anymore. We've got two U.S. divisions remaining here in Iraq. We can get you the dollar figure. I don't have that at hand.

Q: So --

GEN. DONAHUE: I've got the rough order-of-magnitude numbers for the size and scope.

Q: So -- I'm sorry.

GEN. DONAHUE: We started in July with about 800 environmental actions that needed some level of attention. In the month of August alone we closed 45 of those actions. We're down to about 498 here about middle of September, and we're going to drive that down to zero by the end of the year.

But as far as how many --

Q: So the people that actually --

GEN. DONAHUE: Go ahead.

Q: -- that actually do the work to clean up the base, is that the occupants of the base, or is it your engineers that do it? Or is it that your engineers sort of supervise and make sure that it's being done to a standard? I just am trying to get a picture of the manpower that is involved --

GEN. DONAHUE: Yeah.

Q: -- in cleaning up one of these bases.

GEN. DONAHUE: Right, and that's a fair question. And so let me just try to give you some perspective here. We've got, as I said, 498 sites that require some type of action. And so the way that that breaks down is 158 of those sites would be mitigated -- by the way, that is the right term, so you don't need to say "use it loosely." That is in fact the right term here in Iraq. We don't remediate; we mitigate. So you're right on.

So 158 of those sites would be handled by contractors. The base itself, the unit on that base, the organic assets they have, about 255, or just over half of those actions, will be handled by the units with their organic assets. Our environmental response and cleanup teams would handle 36 of those actions, based on the complexity of those actions. And then, of course, 49 of those 498 sites would be transferred to the government of Iraq, as we say, as is. Those could be lagoons, they could be firing ranges -- something that the government of Iraq wants.

So I think the bottom line is, when you look at the percentage of the assets required to mitigate those sites, of the 498 that we have mid-September now, well over half are going to be handled by the units on those bases themselves. And then a large majority remaining would be handled by contractors. A small majority -- or minority, as the case would be, would be handled by the ERCTs. And then, of course, we'd transfer about 49 or 50 of those sites.

So that would give you some sort of relative picture of how this breaks out as far as who does the work. A lot of it is done by the organic assets within the units themselves, because they live on the base, obviously, and then when you've got large actions that need attention, we send up the ERCTs. And of course, we've got a fair number of contractors here and they do some of that work.

Does that help?

Q: Yeah, that helps. And -- Dale, I'm sorry -- one more question, General Donahue, before I pass this back over to Dale, because I don't want to run out of time. Switch over to your route-clearance mission. Give me -- give us a perspective of the IED threat right now on Iraqi roadways and MSRs, what you're seeing; any new sort of overall TTPs on what you're -- how you're dealing with this, you know, with whatever threat is left.

GEN. DONAHUE: Yeah, again a good question. Obviously, assured mobility is a big part of our mission here in Iraq from an engineering

perspective, keeping the routes open, protecting the force. Just to give you some perspective, since about 2005, engineers have really conducted more than about 55,000 of these route-clearance patrols, more than 6 1/2 million kilometers of roads cleared. And then, of course, we've removed since '05 over 4,300 IEDs.

And so that's a pretty heavy task. About 50,000 kilometers are cleared a month, Christian, over 400 missions. And so we continue to work with JIEDDO back in -- you know, back in Washington, D.C.

We incorporate the latest technology here as far as the counter-IED efforts. But we've got a low IED found-and-cleared rate now based on the success of our forces over the past year. But again, when you think about over 4,300 IEDs removed since '05, 55,000 route-clearance patrols, that's a lot of -- lot of (reps ?) with assured mobility.

Q: How many did you find in the --

GEN. DONAHUE: And of course we are developing, as I mentioned in my opening statement -- we're also really trying to improve the Iraqis' ability to clear routes. They take a slightly different approach, but we are partnering with the Iraqis as they do route sanitation and their version of route clearance. And so we do have some partnering that goes on.

Q: What do you mean by they -- (inaudible) --

GEN. DONAHUE: So again, the big part of our mission obviously as we transition our bases and we responsibly draw down and withdraw forces of keeping those routes open. (Inaudible.)

Q: What's different about their approach?

GEN. DONAHUE: I would say up front they take more of a route sanitation approach, as opposed to route clearance. Ours is a very deliberate mission, of course, with our Buffalos and Huskys and our RGs, the way we configure our forces. It's a combined-arms operation. We're teaching the Iraqis some of those techniques. We're fielding their units with the ILAV with the interrogator arm; that's the improved light-armored vehicle.

So we're giving them capabilities to conduct this operation, but again, it's a matter of approach and a matter of doctrine. So we're teaching them the way that we do it. They've got a slightly smaller formation. And again, we're trying to -- we're trying to teach them a more proactive approach, as opposed to being reactive in some -- in some cases.

Q: Thank you, General Donahue.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: And Dale, you can finish it off with a few questions.

Q: OK. Thank you, sir. My question -- first question is that I saw an article -- Major General Handy had commented that the Iraqis were looking at buying F-16s. Have you prepared any particular installation for the arrival of Iraqi F-16s?

GEN. DONAHUE: Well, again, we continue to transition our bases here. I'm not exactly sure where those F-16s will go. That delivery won't be for a few years now, so again, I don't know exactly where the Iraqis are going to put those F-16s. I know that that action is under way, but I don't know exactly where they'll go, Dale.

Q: OK. All right. And then my last question is, it's been really hot in D.C. concerning the drawdown and how many troops is a safe number. Are you having any overall security concerns for your contractors and our soldiers that are serving and will serve up to December 31st?

GEN. DONAHUE: Well, again, we continue our mission here, Dale, in accordance with the security agreement. It expires at the end of the year, as you know. Until we're directed to do something different, we're going to continue to approach our responsible drawdown, our base transitions in accordance with that security agreement. The negotiations are under way. You're reading about that in the press. Again, in the J7 here, we're going to continue our mission until we're directed to do something otherwise.

So we continue to protect our force. That's always paramount in our minds, as far as the safety of our service members and civilians, protecting the force, working with the Iraqi security force as we transition bases.

So that's where we're at right now as far as our full-spectrum engineering mission here. And again, we've got a -- we've got plenty to do between now and the end of the year, and so we're very -- we're very encouraged by the direction the Iraqis are going. We believe we're going in the right direction. Security continues to improve steadily. We're cautiously optimistic about the future. But again, until final decisions are made between the two governments, we continue to execute our mission here in accordance with that security agreement of 2008.

Q: OK, sir, thank you very much. And one last question here with this. Do you have any ideas of what -- (of alarm call and the chance ?) that you might have before December 31st to meet your goals?

GEN. DONAHUE: Well, Dale, as you know, based on your extensive experience in the Air Force, you know that there always seems to be a task list longer than you've got time. I mean, that's just the nature of the business. You know that. I've read your bio. You've been around the world. You know -- you understand fully these expeditionary environments. And so, you know, I often get asked, you know, what keeps me up at night. And kind of off the cuff, I'd tell you not much, because by the time I get back to the hooch, I'm falling asleep because the days are long and the nights are short. You know how that goes, as well.

But in all seriousness: really, just trying to transition all of these bases on time and to standard. We've been here for over eight-and-a-half years. There's obviously been a tremendous amount of sacrifice here. On September 1st, we just celebrated the one-year anniversary of Operation New Dawn. You know, we're not looking at calendars any more, Dale; we're all looking at our watches. And so we realize how many days are left, and it's hard to believe that we're already talking about days left. Some are even calculating hours -- only because it gives us a perspective of how much we've got left to do, not that we're counting down the time.

So it really is a matter of getting all these tasks done to standard and on time so that we can enable U.S. Mission Iraq. And again, we know that that presence exists here. There is an embassy here, of course. There'll be a U.S. Mission Iraq post-2011. And so we want to enable their success. And we're doing everything we can, as I touched upon in my opening statement, and Christian sort of alluded to it.

But we are going to have about 11 enduring sites. We don't have any enduring bases, but we will have 11 enduring sites as part of a footprint here in Iraq. Those are in support of Department of State and the Office of Security Cooperation in Iraq. So of the 41 bases we have left to transition, 11 of those, as I said, will transition as a site in support of Department of State or the U.S. embassy and OSC-I.

So what we're really trying to do is to enable their success. And there are some construction requirements associated with those enduring sites with respect to force protection and the like. And so we work hard at that each day.

Q: Thank you very much, sir.

GEN. DONAHUE: Does that help?

Q: Yep, it does. Thank you very much, sir, and godspeed for the next few months in your time.

GEN. DONAHUE: Well, thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Sir, I appreciate all your answers today.

And to the bloggers, thank you for your questions.

Do you have any closing comments today, sir?

GEN. DONAHUE: Well, thank you very much for the opportunity to spend some time with you. And disappointed that Yo (ph) couldn't join us, but you just -- you just need to know that we're committed to finishing the first-rate work that we started here. In fact, here in the J7 at the end of every briefing we've got a slide that says the test of a first-rate work is that you finish it.

And that's a daily reminder to each and every one of us that the work that was started here back in 2003, we're down to the final -- the final leg, final leg of the journey to finish the first-rate work.

We believe that we are providing the government of Iraq and the Iraqi people really an opportunity, an opportunity to be more sovereign, more self-reliant and more safe. And that's really what we're committed to.

And so as we depart here at the end of the calendar year on the 31st of December and Operation New Dawn concludes and U.S. Forces-Iraq inactivates, this is really going to be a transition to the State Department and they're going to continue the mission here in a cooperation state -- a cooperative state with the government of Iraq to -- again, to ensure that they can become a more stable, sovereign and self-reliant nation. And so that's what we're committed to here.

And so it's been a pleasure to be with you today. We will in fact get the opening statement to you, and if there are any facts that you'd like some clarification on or a follow-up, the Public Affairs Office will go ahead and direct those to me and my staff and we'll be more than happy to share that with you.

But we've got a tremendous team of service members and civilians here committed to finishing the first-rate work, providing the government of Iraq the opportunity to really carry on as a more stable, sovereign and self-reliant nation.

And again, it's been a pleasure to be with you this afternoon and we wish you all the very best in telling our story. Thank you.

PETTY OFFICER SELBY: Again, thank you very much, sir. And thank you to Dale and Christian.

Today's program will be available online at dodlive.mil, where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call, along with source documents such as the audio file and a print transcript.

Again, thank you to everybody on the line. This concludes today's event. Feel free to disconnect at this time.

Q: Thanks, General.

Q: Thank you, General. GEN. DONAHUE: Thank you very much. Have a good day.

END.