

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH BRIGADIER GENERAL STEVEN HUBER,
COMMANDER, JOINT TASK FORCE PHOENIX SIX VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM AFGHANISTAN
SUBJECT: TRAINING AND MENTORING THE AFGHAN NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES TIME: 9:30
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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG, (Office of the Secretary of Defense for
Public Affairs): I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense
Bloggers Roundtable for Tuesday, June 2, 2009. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer
Cragg with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs and I'll be
moderating the call today.

A note to the bloggers that are participating. Please clearly state
your name before asking your question.

Today, our guest is Brigadier General Steven Huber. He's commander of
Joint Task Force Phoenix Six, and he will be discussing the training and
mentoring of the Afghan national security forces, discussing the ultimate exit
strategy in Afghanistan for U.S. forces. And without further ado, sir, I'd
like to turn the floor over to you if you'd like to start with an opening
statement.

GEN. HUBER: Okay, thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to be here.

Just an opening statement, I guess, a quick introduction. I'm an
Illinois guardsman leading the effort here in Afghanistan for Task Force
Phoenix. We are the eighth Phoenix. As you probably know, it is a guard
initiative. We bring about 3,000 from Illinois to the fight. There are add-ons
from our sister services, USAR, IRR, TRAP, people who thought they retired got a
letter in the mail, our coalition partners, as well as local nationals and
contract civilians. So it's about 7,000 people that lead up Phoenix.

As for myself, guard for 30 years, started out as a private, worked my
way up. Literally got talked into OCS and, you know, here I am. Born and
raised in Chicago and now live in a small town near Rockford, Illinois, it's in
the northern central part.

So glad to be here. I look forward to your questions.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, thank you, sir.

Let's go with Jeff Dressler. Jeff, you're first.

Q General, thanks for joining us. I'm Jeff Dressler from the Institute for the Study of War.

I just had a quick question for you this morning. With the planned expansion of the army to 134,000 by 2011, how do you see the incoming brigade combat teams over the next several months helping in achieving that goal? And ultimately do you think 134,000 will be sufficient or do you think it's going to be more around the 250,000 number that some folks are throwing around?

GEN. HUBER: First of all, I think the additional soldiers, mainly the 4th Brigade out of the 82nd, which is going to be the second brigade to fall under Phoenix, is going to be a great help to allow us to meet the requirements to staff the different ETTs and PMTs, that's embedded training teams and police mentor teams.

Building the Afghan army to 134,000 is certainly going to be a challenge with those numbers. If it goes higher, I predict they'll have to add more to the mentoring and training mission.

As far as whether or not that's enough, it's really hard to tell. I think on the Afghan army side they're doing pretty well with operations. So it's really hard to tell if they need to go beyond the 134,000, although I guess I could say, you know, the more the better.

Q Sure. Thank you. LT. CRAGG: Okay let's go to the other Jeff. Jeff, you're next.

Q Hi, General, this is Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes.

I'm wondering, with the change in strategy in Afghanistan, does that change the training that Afghan troops and police officers are going to get?

GEN. HUBER: Thanks Jeff.

No, I don't see any change in the training. At least we're not changing anything under my tenure. We are still going through the process of equipping them, training them on the new NATO equipment -- for example, the M-16 as well as Humvees, things like that.

I don't see any change in that, at least in the near future. We're still trying to get them to stand up. Many are already at CM-1 and able to do independent operations. And others are at CM-2, able to do those operations with some help.

(Cross talk.)

GEN. HUBER: -- still in the process of buildin -- you know, bringing units online, candax online and the different course, but I think overall they're doing pretty good so I don't really see any change in our training techniques or strategies.

Q Do you have any statistics on how much equipment the Afghan security forces have? How many M-4s or M-16s? How many Humvees? Just so we can get an idea of what they've got now?

GEN. HUBER: No, I don't have any statistics in front of me. I mean, I certainly could look that up.

I'd say they're about a third of the way through of issuing the M-16s and replacing the AK-47s. Humvees, we've just started turning over those to them in lieu of their pickup trucks, which they really love and prefer to drive. But I don't have any hard numbers for you.

Q Okay. Nothing to quantify the one third of the way of going through with the M-16s?

GEN. HUBER: No, not at the -- no, I'm sorry, I couldn't.

Q Okay, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Let's go to David. David.

Q Hi, this is David Axe from War is Boring. Thanks for taking the time to talk to us today.

My question is do you see a wider need for a militia-type auxiliary force like the public protection force? GEN. HUBER: Do I see a wider need for it? No. And I'm not really familiar with that public -- I know it exists, I know what you're talking about but it's really not in my lane so it's really kind of hard to answer your question.

Q Well, it sort of ties indirectly with the standing up of the Afghan army -- national army and national police. You don't see any need for more auxiliaries to bolster the national security force numbers?

GEN. HUBER: Well I guess it would help. As I said earlier, the more the merrier. This is more on the police side that you're talking and, again, I'm not really familiar with it. So it's really kind of tough to answer your question.

Q Okay, then let me turn the question around.

Do you have adequate numbers of ANA and are you able to add to those numbers fast enough?

GEN. HUBER: Am I able to add -- I missed the last part of your question.

Q Are you able to add to those numbers fast enough?

GEN. HUBER: Oh, fast enough?

Q Fast enough.

GEN. HUBER: Yeah, I don't know. Some would argue no, that it's, you know, it takes a while. But training and fielding of units and equipment does take a while, even in the United States.

So, I would say we're certainly on track with the goals that we've -- that have been stated. They want to reach -- they want 34 by, you know, late 2010 early 2011. And then they're talking about it going further, you know, the numbers that you heard earlier. So I would say we're on track.

Q Okay, well I have a follow up after we go through the round.
Thank you.

GEN. HUBER: No, go ahead. Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, thanks David.

We'll go to Sean.

Q How you doing, General Huber? This is Sean Polay, I'm with
IEGA.org (?).

I know, actually, I just lost my platoon sergeant who just volunteered
to join you at CJTF Phoenix and he's part of the group that volunteered to heard
over and be a member of the ETT mission.

Can you give us a rough number, sir, of the 7,000 in a task force,
about how many are actually on the ETT teams, as well as the PMT's? GEN.
HUBER: Yeah, well first I'm very sorry about your friend.

Q No, actually, sir, he volunteered to come over to see you.

GEN. HUBER: Yeah, but you say you lost him?

Q Well, no, no, I lost him as my platoon sergeant at the PL meaning
--

GEN. HUBER: Oh, so he's over here. Okay.

Q Correct, sir.

GEN. HUBER: Well, hey, I'm glad to have him.

Q (Chuckles.) Hey, you're lucky to have him, sir.

GEN. HUBER: All right. Numbers -- good -- numbers. The majority of
Phoenix is dedicated to the ETT and PMT mission. And that includes the
contractors, there's about 1,200 local nationals we hire that are interpreters
and most of, I'd say 90 percent of them are downrange working with the ETTs.

The other contractors include KVR and MPRI, Dynacorps. MPRI is
basically support to the different posts, you know, life support. And then the
other two MPRI and Dynacorps they're actually mentors. So there's probably
another couple thousand there.

Coalition forces, you're talking, that's kind of hard to say raw
numbers but as far as military folks that we have dedicated to that I'd say it's
in the 80 percent range and the rest are up here at Phoenix.

Q Great, sir. Thank you. I appreciate it.

GEN. HUBER: Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Thanks Sean.

Let's go to Bob.

Q Hi, sir. Bob Michael with The Mudville Gazette.

This is kind of a background question, I suppose. How would you describe, how would you characterize the difference in the missions between the Afghan national police and the Afghan national army? And kind of an immediate follow-up, is there a process in place that would determine whether a specific task was appropriate for one organization or the other?

GEN. HUBER: Well, army and police missions are slightly different although there's a lot of overlap. So a lot of things we train to them are similar. But then police work is certainly different than military work. Military focuses on doing operations and the police, they focus on protecting a particular district. For example, focus district development concentrates on taking a whole district, training them, equipping them, giving them uniforms and then bringing them back into the district supporting them while they do typical police work.

I hope that answers your question.

Q So if I'm getting an understanding correctly here, I guess, maybe the police are in a permanent standby mode waiting to react to something and the army. On the other hand, maybe there's leading forward, planning, and executing operations.

GEN. HUBER: Yeah, that'd be a good way to describe it.

Q Okay. Got it. Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, we're going to go around the horn one more time.

Let's go to Jeff Dressler. Jeff.

Q Thank you.

General, are you seeing any issues with respect to the officer/NCO divide in the ANA? Are you seeing that or any particular leadership issues, I guess particularly with top and midgrade officers in the ANA?

GEN. HUBER: Yeah. I think the older officers, most of them being Soviet trained, it's a little harder to get them to, you know, get away from that model of being top down. The younger generation, they get it a little quicker, a little easier to train.

As far as the NCO corps it's still in its infancy here. As I mentioned, the older ones they really don't understand how to use NCOs as -- you know, as we in the United States understand it.

We just, as a matter of fact, today opened the new NCO academy for sergeant majors and first sergeants, and I think that's a huge step towards building an NCO corps that actually runs the army or makes it operate and then allowing the officers to do the planning and guiding of the military.

You know, they've got a long way to go I would say and it's going to maybe even take a generation or two for them to totally get it.

Q Right. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thanks Jeff.

The other Jeff. Q Hi, General, Jeff with Stripes again.

Even with the additions to the Afghan security forces it still looks like the number of indigenous and NATO troops will be below what the counterinsurgency doctrine calls for for having relative to population.

Is there -- why is it that it seems that the number of troops available is less than what is called for?

GEN. HUBER: That's more of a political question or a policy question, I really can't answer that.

Q Okay. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, thanks Jeff.

David.

Q Hi, General, David Axe again with War is Boring.

So are you seeing ministerial development sort of commensurate with the development of the ANA and the ANP? In other words, are you seeing the reforms and the capacity building on the government side that are necessary to sustain the Afghan security forces after we are gone?

GEN. HUBER: Again, you're not in my lane. That's way above Phoenix. I really don't deal with the minister of Defense or the minister of the Interior. So that'd be a question more apt for U.S. -- (inaudible) -- or Alpha.

Q Okay, I'm sorry.

The way that this roundtable was advertised to us was as a -- the topic was supposed to be the development of Afghan security forces and I guess -

GEN. HUBER: Right.

Q -- we thought it was a broader thing than what it actually is.

So I guess, for that, I'm done. Thank you.

GEN. HUBER: All right.

LT. CRAGG: Thanks David. I know that he signed off.

Let's go to Sean.

Q Yep, hey sir. I'll try to keep it on target with this one.

GEN. HUBER: Okay.

Q My question is going to be a little more with how the Task Force Phoenix works in -- side by side with ISAF forces? So, how have you seen that worked out in terms of your trainers with, say, an ANA company working on the same mission with ISAF forces, whether it be coalition or American?

GEN. HUBER: Not too much mixing. It's either the ETT comes from the U.S. and is embedded with them or it comes from a coalition force. There's not too much mixing.

I would say the Afghans prefer the U.S. because we're willing -- we don't have as many caveats, national caveats, as some of the coalition forces do. That can restrict them to go out on missions or even just go outside the wire.

So is that where you were going with the question?

Q Yeah, I guess, sir, my question really just had to do with, you know, with ANA forces who had the embedded trainers were actually rolling outside on missions with ISAF forces together or if it was just you guys operating independently? GEN. HUBER: Pretty independent but we do roll out with the Afghan national security forces.

Q Okay, that was my question, sir. Thank you.

GEN. HUBER: Sure.

LT. CRAGG: Thanks Sean.

Bob.

Q Thank you, sir. With the number of brigades and individuals training and preparing stateside for deployments to Afghanistan, given the operations that are in place and the expansion of the operation I'm expecting there's a pretty good learning curve going on right now.

Is there a process in place to get lessons learned and information, kind of cycled rapidly back to the stateside with a focus on training of the folks that are coming in there? Is there an ongoing and continuing process of information flow?

GEN. HUBER: Yes. We cooperate with organizations like CALL, Center for Army Lessons Learned, out of Leavenworth and we capture some of those lessons here too within Phoenix. We talk to folks as they roll in, about mid tour, and then at end of tour with most of the tours being anywhere from 10 to 12 months in duration. And then we get them back to the school house. Right now the main school house for ETTs is at Fort Riley. I know that's moving or in the process of moving to Fort Polk. But we get some of those lessons learned back to the school house so they can make adjustments.

Some of the things we're hearing is that the soldiers want more tactical training, more cultural awareness training and more -- (inaudible) -- training.

Q Good. Thank you, sir.

GEN. HUBER: Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, before we end for today, does anybody have any last minute follow up questions?

Q Yes, one last one. This is Jeff with Stripes again.

General, do you have enough troops to do your mission?

GEN. HUBER: Right now, no. We do not have enough resources, meaning manning, to meet all the requirements to cover down on all of the candax or police districts that we're asked to do. That causes us to make smaller teams and some, very few, but some districts or candax go uncovered or are delayed in getting their mentors. Now, that's going to get solved by the second brigade coming in and we should be then on track to have enough for current requirements. But I predict if they go beyond the 134 (thousand) there'll probably have to bring in another -- a third brigade in dedicated to the Phoenix mission, which is the training mentoring mission.

So, to answer your question, right now, no but it's going to be, in a couple of months with the second brigade coming in, that's going to solve itself.

Q And that second brigade is 4th of the 82nd?

GEN. HUBER: Correct. And the other -- the first brigade replacing us is the 48th out of Georgia.

Q Okay. So with the 48th Georgia and the 4th of the 82nd that will allow Task Force Phoenix to do all of its mission requirements?

GEN. HUBER: Yes.

Q Okay. Thank you much.

LT. CRAGG: Okay. If no one has any other follow-on questions I'm going to go ahead and turn it back over to Brigadier General Huber, if he'd like to end with a closing statement.

Sir, the floor is yours.

GEN. HUBER: Okay. Well, thanks, first of all, for all of you being here and participating in this. I appreciate your questions and your interest in what we're doing here.

I think all of the Phoenix mentors and trainers are working very hard. As I travel around, morale is pretty high, they're very proud of what they're doing and I think everyone back home can be proud of what they're doing here too.

I've seen many successes. There are challenges such as illiteracy and some language barriers, but they have watched the ANSF grow, gain new equipment and stand up some new candax. So there are successes here as well.

So, again, once again, just thanks for your interest.

Q Thank you.

Q Thank you.

Q Thanks sir. LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. And a note to everybody on the line. If you go to the Defense link on the bloggers link you'll find a audio file from today, a transcript as well as the story.

Again, thank you, sir. And thank you to the bloggers who attended.
This ends today's call.

GEN. HUBER: Thank you.

Q Thank you.

Q Thanks, General.

Q Thanks.

END.