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‘Fight for Intelligence’ is Key to Mosul Campaign, General Says

By Gerry J. Gilmore
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Feb. 13, 2008 – Intelligence operations and contributions by Iraqi soldiers and police are key factors in the campaign to defeat al Qaeda and other insurgents who have fled from Baghdad into Mosul and other parts of northern Iraq, a senior U.S. military officer posted in Mosul said today.

“The key is really getting out into the population” to gather information about insurgents’ operations, Army Brig. Gen. Raymond A. Thomas III, deputy commander of Multinational Division North, said during a conference call with military analysts.

The U.S. Army’s 1st Armored Division, based in Wiesbaden, Germany, provides the headquarters element for Thomas’ command, also known as Task Force Iron. MND North is responsible for parts of northern Iraq, including the cities of Balad, Kirkuk, Tikrit, Mosul and Samarra.

Coalition officials point to Mosul, a city about 225 miles northwest of Baghdad, as the place where al Qaeda and other insurgents driven out of Baghdad during surge operations are likely to make their last stand.

In fact, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki announced Jan. 25 that a major offensive would be launched against al Qaeda operatives and other insurgents who had taken refuge in Mosul and its environs.

The successful fight for Baghdad, which is mostly Sunni and Shiite in ethnic makeup, featured heavy contributions from concerned local citizens’ groups, Thomas pointed out. Mosul, however, is more ethnically mixed, he pointed out, compared to Baghdad’s population. Mosul’s population features Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians, Turkamen and Christians, as well as some Sunnis and Shiites, he said.

There are now about 1,200 members of concerned local citizens’ groups in the Mosul area, Thomas said. However, he added, Mosul’s complex ethnicity makes for fewer numbers of local anti-insurgent groups, as compared to the thousands of Sunni volunteers who had fought insurgents in Baghdad and Anbar province in western Iraq.

However, the 2nd and 3rd Iraqi army divisions, comprising 20,000 soldiers, are posted in the Mosul area, said Thomas, who praised the ability of newly promoted Iraqi Army Lt. Gen. Riyadh, who will coordinate the two divisions' actions in concert with coalition operations. And about 20,000 members of the Iraqi police force are available in the region to fill the gap caused by fewer concerned local citizens groups, Thomas said.

Also, ongoing meetings between municipal and central government representatives are identifying important reconstruction projects that will benefit Mosul's citizens and other people living in the region, Thomas reported.

Meanwhile, joint U.S.-Iraqi combat outposts are being rapidly established across Mosul's neighborhoods and in the surrounding area, the general said.

"We've already had folks come up to us and say: 'We're glad you're here. We're hoping you're staying. Here is where the bad guys are or have been. Please keep them out of our neighborhoods,'" Thomas said.

Such interaction with Mosul's citizens is producing "its own form of human intelligence, which we're absolutely taking advantage of," the general pointed out.

"It is a fight for intelligence, and we're pressing by every means to 'see' the enemy as clearly as possible and pursue them as effectively as we can," Thomas said.