

# Trust is key to Baghdad security says general

JIM GARAMONE

American Forces Press Service

BAGHDAD — The Coalition commander responsible for operations in the Iraqi capital is optimistic about what he has seen since operations to quell sectarian violence here started.

Army Maj. Gen. James Thurman, commander of Multi-National Division - Baghdad, said forces have been concentrating on four major hot spots.

Essentially, the concept calls on Coalition and Iraqi forces to cordon off an area and search each street, house by house, Thurman said.

Al-Doura, a mixed Shia and Sunni area, is one of the hotspots. The area had 20 sectarian murders one night before the operation started. The plan zeroes in on reducing the number of murders, kidnappings, assassinations and car bombs, Thurman said.

Al-Doura has about 135,000 people living in more than 16,000 homes. Iraqi forces carry most of the water in the operation. They search the mahallas — neighborhoods — that are causing the problems. "We've dropped the violence down to near nothing," Thurman said.

Multi-National Division - Baghdad officials said the Iraqis, backed by Coalition forces, have cleared 5,500 homes in Doura. "We have to clear those mahallas and get the cells out of there and then hold those areas, protect them and build civil capacity," Thurman said.



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Maj. Gen. James Thurman talks with a Baghdad businessman.

Iraqi security forces, supported by Multi-National Division — Baghdad Soldiers, continued their combined effort Sunday in western Baghdad's Shula and Ameriyah neighborhoods.

The combined operations on simultaneous objectives are led by the soldiers of 1st and 5th Brigades from the 6th Iraqi Army Division, and policemen from 5th Brigade, 2nd Iraqi National Police Division, supported by Soldiers from 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, and 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team.

"Security in Baghdad is the top priority for everyone working in

Operation Together Forward. We continue to work very closely with Iraqi security forces in a major effort to clear this area of terrorists and death squads," said Col. Robert Scurlock, 1st Armor Division's 2nd Brigade commander. "Iraqi security forces and Coalition forces are working side by side every day to increase security in Baghdad and help the Iraqi people return to a more normal domestic life."

The 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team gives Multi-National Division - Baghdad added mobility, flexibility and agility to maneuver anywhere in

the city, Thurman said. The unit was due to rotate back to Alaska following a year in the Mosul area. The Army extended its time in Iraq for up to 120 days and assigned it to Baghdad.

The civil work is key to getting the Iraqis to stop the cycle of tit-for-tat sectarian murders. Iraqi officials in al-Doura are clearing the garbage from the streets, dismantling illegal road-blocks and engaging with district and neighborhood advisory councils. The people in the mahallas have confidence that life will improve for them, and that the government is the way forward, Thurman said.

Once the Iraqi security forces clear the neighborhood, Iraqi police hold the area and Iraqi officials work to ensure the essential services — electricity, water and sewage — are working in those areas. Other local officials work to ensure economic opportunity in the area.

"The Battle of Baghdad is about perception and building trust and confidence in the average citizen of Iraq," Thurman said.

The general said the operation will spread to other hot spots in Baghdad. "The whole Mansour area is a hot spot," he said. "We've got a positive trend happening, but it's the will of the Iraqi people that we need to continue (to encourage). We will work closely with the Iraqi government to deal with the sectarian strife. I believe the average Iraqi is tired of violence."

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