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Battle Continues 'With Speed, Not Haste' in Fallujah

By John D. Banusiewicz
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WASHINGTON, Nov. 9, 2004 – The hunt for insurgents and terrorists in Fallujah continues "with speed, not haste," a top U.S. commander in Iraq said today.

Army Lt. Gen. Thomas F. Metz met with the Pentagon press corps through a video feed from Baghdad. Metz commands Multinational Corps Iraq, and reports directly to Army Gen. George W. Casey Jr., who commands Multinational Force Iraq.

"We are operating according to our plan, and so far we have achieved our objectives on or ahead of schedule, not only in Fallujah, but also across Iraq," the general said.

Metz praised the work of Iraqi forces in the operation, saying they have performed "admirably."

"I am confident they will continue to be extremely effective against the insurgents in today's battle and the ones to come," he said.

Although Operation Al Fajr has gone well so far, Metz warned it probably will involve "several more days of tough urban fighting."

"The fight in Fallujah is far from over," Metz said. "We are proceeding with speed, not haste, to maintain the initiative, and we are using caution and precision in order to minimize civilian casualties and damage to the city."

Metz said the enemy's outer defenses have been destroyed. "They are fighting in small groups as our forces press the attack," he said, attacking coalition forces with small arms, rocket-propelled grenades and indirect fire.

In an attempt to sway public opinion, the general said, insurgents are spreading misinformation, and they are damaging infrastructure with the intent of blaming the damage on coalition forces. He predicted victory in the operation and the return of Fallujah to legitimate authority.

Metz refused to discuss specific numbers of casualties on either side, but he did say coalition casualties have been light. "I am pleased with that," he said, "but I also am humbled by the sacrifices that those young soldiers and Marines offer our great country in this operation."

Enemy casualties have been significantly higher than expected, Metz said, and "very few" civilian casualties have resulted from the operation.

"We felt going in that at least half, if not 75 percent, of the citizens have left Fallujah," he said. Not many of the remaining civilians have been seen on the street, he added, attributing that to the curfew imposed by interim Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi.

The general revealed that in planning the operation, he and Casey were working with an estimate of 2,000 to 3,000 insurgents in the city. "As we've progressed, we feel like we've encountered the portion of those that we anticipated to this stage," he said. Coalition forces are working hard, he added, to jam the enemy's communications and disrupt their command and control.

Metz said that while he doesn't know whether fugitive Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi is in Fallujah, coalition forces are looking for him there. But, he added, it's "fair to assume" Zarqawi has fled.

"I still have the intel capability to hunt him in the city as we fight," the general said. "But we think he moves around Iraq, (and) we are keeping the intel capability looking for him outside of Fallujah also." Zarqawi is believed to be the driving force behind the insurgency and terrorism in Iraq, and the United States has offered a \$25 million reward for information leading to his death or capture.

Once legitimate authority is restored in Fallujah, Metz said, the business of preparing for the upcoming Iraq election can move forward.

"I believe that we have every chance to conclude this operation and put the governance and the security in Fallujah to help those people register and get them ready for the election," he said. "I think because Fallujah has been the cancer, that when the cancer is removed, it will impact other places, especially Ramadi, especially Baghdad and other parts of the (so-called Sunni) triangle.

"So we are over 60 days away," he continued. "We have time to really put forth an effort in these towns. And I remain confident that we will be able to have successful elections here in the country late January of this coming year."

Metz emphasized the pride he feels for coalition servicemembers and Iraqi security forces serving in the operation. "However," he added, "no hard-fought battle is without casualties, and I just would like to send my heartfelt condolences out to those soldiers and Marines, coalition forces and Iraqis that have lost their life, and the condolence to their families for their sacrifice to help Iraq become free."

Biographies:

[Lt. Gen. Thomas F. Metz, USA](#)