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STRYKER COMMANDER SAYS VILSECK-BASED UNIT BRINGING SECURITY, HOPE TO EAST RASHID

Multi-National Division - Baghdad

CAMP LIBERTY, Iraq -- U.S. Army, Europe Soldiers are sweeping Baghdad's East Rashid district "going after the bad guys and doing very, very well and trying to give a little hope to the Iraqis ... so they don't have to live in fear any more," Col. John RisCassi told journalists and bloggers during a conference call from Iraq Oct. 12.



TECH SGT ANDREW RODIER

Staff Sgt. Eric Klausner of U.S. Army, Europe's 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, signals to an AH-64 Apache helicopter during operations in Baghdad, Iraq, Oct. 7.

RisCassi commands USAREUR's 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment from Vilseck, Germany, currently assigned to Multi-National Division - Baghdad. The Strykers are tasked with detecting and diffusing improvised explosive devices and destroying terror cells in a troubled community near Baghdad's heavily fortified International Zone.

“We have a populace down there that is basically being bullied into doing things they don't want to do, harboring al Qaeda or thugs or bad guys -- whatever you want to call them,” RisCassi said. “I talked to an older gentleman a few days ago, and he's been living there for 25 years, and he just called them bad people, and (said) this was a bad place with bad people in it.”

Those bad people have planted plenty of IEDs, the colonel said. In their first 72 hours on the ground here, 2nd Stryker Soldiers located 30 devices. “That is a weapon of choice around here ... and we take it very serious,” RisCassi said. “We go as slow as we need to, to figure this out.”

It starts with thinking like a terrorist, the colonel said. "First of all, we do a good analysis by saying, 'Hey, if you were the bad guy, where would you put these things?'"

The second part comes from befriending and enabling Iraqi citizens. "We're working hard with the local nationals; the people that live there. They don't want these things on their streets, either. So we have tips lines. We have sources, and they come forward, and they tell us where they are," he said.

While roadside bombs are familiar foes, RisCassi said his Soldiers are alert to another emerging threat as well -- houses rigged to explode.

The colonel said his troops check houses in the area "very, very hard" and employ explosive-sniffing dogs and other methods to try to identify booby-trapped houses. But the best intelligence comes from Iraqi citizens, he added. "The most tell-tale sign is someone (when) tells you, 'That's a bad house, and there's something in there,'" he said.

The Stryker Soldiers are barely a month into their mission, but are already preparing Iraqis to take over, RisCassi said, starting with local citizens who have volunteered to assist coalition forces.

"That's the big key of success here, doing what we do and then turning it over as quickly as we can to put an Iraqi face on it so the Iraqi people can see their own securing and taking care of them," he said.



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