

MULTINATIONAL FORCE IRAQ PRESS CONFERENCE WITH GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS, U.S. ARMY, COMMANDING GENERAL, MNF-I

■TOPIC: ONGOING SECURITY OPERATIONS

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GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, good morning. "Salaam aleikum, sabah el-kheir," and "shukran jazilan" to all of you for being here today. It's great to see you and particularly good to see so many familiar faces.

As you all know, I've been on the ground for about a month now, have had a chance to go on patrols in Baghdad and elsewhere, to have visited with commanders throughout Iraq and to have had a number of meetings with Iraqi leaders.

This morning I'd like to provide an update and some impressions from my first month's activities, and then I'll take some questions.

We're now several weeks into the initial stages of Operation Fard al-Qanun, the Iraqi name for the Baghdad security operation. On one side, of course, are Iraqi and coalition forces and the shabal (sp) Iraqi, the Iraqi people, who just want to get on with their lives. On the other side are the enemies of Iraq, extremist groups like al Qaeda Iraq, radical sectarian militias and violent criminals. The latter categories include those organizations that sought to drive a wedge between Sunni and Shi'a, and that sparked and then carried out the sectarian violence that caused such damage in Baghdad in the wake of the Samarra mosque bombing a little over a year ago.

Regrettably, some of these groups are still carrying out their barbaric acts. In fact, we believe that they have sought to intensify their sensational attacks in recent weeks to provoke renewed sectarian violence and derail Operation Fard al-Qanun before it can be fully implemented.

Iraqi and coalition forces are steadily building their strength to support the operation in Baghdad. The last of nine Iraqi surge battalions and the second of five U.S. surge brigades have just entered Baghdad. This buildup will continue throughout the spring, with all U.S. and Iraqi forces dedicated to the mission in place by about early June.

As our military effort surges in the greater Baghdad area and in Al Anbar province, a complementary effort will be carried out on the civilian side in the form of a joint Department of State/Department of Defense initiative to double the number of Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq from 10 to 20.

As with the military effort, the focus will be on Baghdad and Al Anbar Province. These PRTs will draw on civilian and military expertise to help the Iraqis build capacity in the provinces and support local initiatives.

Meanwhile, other efforts, including one focused on the rule of law, will assist certain Iraqi ministries in Baghdad as they work to improve their capabilities and capacity.

We are, in any event, still in the early days of this endeavor, an endeavor that will take months, not days or weeks, to fully implement, and one that will have to be sustained to achieve its desired effect.

While too early to discern significant trends, there have been a few encouraging signs. Sectarian killings, for example, have been lower in Baghdad over the past several weeks than in the previous month. There also appears to have been less sectarian displacement in the past month; in fact, some families have returned to the neighborhoods from which they were displaced, although in small numbers so far. Iraqi and coalition forces have uncovered stockpiles of explosively formed penetrators in Diyala province and in Baghdad, with 96 weapons caches found in the Multinational Division Baghdad area alone in the past two weeks. Additionally, two major car bomb factories have been destroyed on the outskirts of Baghdad. Hundreds of extremists have been captured or killed, including some mid-level members of al Qaeda Iraq and other extremist groups. And we have destroyed several trucks equipped with heavy machine guns used for engaging our aircraft.

Beyond Baghdad, moreover, a number of tribes in Anbar province have in recent months finally said, "enough," and begun to link arms against extremist operatives who have killed their sheikhs and sought to poison their young people's minds.

Meanwhile, Iraqi leaders have moved forward on some important pieces of legislation, most notably the draft national hydrocarbon law, which treats Iraq's petroleum revenues as a national asset to be shared equitably among Iraq's provinces and regions. The government of Iraq has made several budgetary advances in recent weeks as well, to include earmarking \$7.3 billion for security-related expenses and over \$10 billion for capital investment in vital infrastructure, pushing 2.4 billion reconstruction dollars directly to the provincial governments, and conducting the conference yesterday led by the deputy prime minister, Barham Salih, on spending that money appropriately for the Iraqi people.

At the same time, tragically, there have been violent, sensational attacks. Schools, health clinics and marketplaces have all been attacked. Car bombs have targeted hundreds of innocent Iraqis, including dozens of Sunni Arabs leaving a mosque in Al Anbar province. Suicide vest bombers killed over three dozen students at Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad. Fourteen Iraqi policemen were killed execution-style while bound and blindfolded last week. The Iraqi vice president was wounded by an assassination attempt, though thankfully and impressively, he remains undaunted and is already back on the job.

And in recent days, Shi'a pilgrims were killed in a barbaric manner by thugs with no soul, but the pilgrims continue to march.

Coalition and Iraqi soldiers and police have had some tough days as well. It is such violence that Iraqi and coalition forces will work together to reduce in the months ahead, recognizing, to be sure, that some sensational attacks inevitably will continue to take place, though every effort will be made to reduce their number by identifying and destroying the networks and facilities of the bombers, and by interdicting those who would visit such violence on the Iraqi people.

We and our Iraqi partners recognize that improving security for the Iraqi people is the first step in rekindling hope. The upward spiral we all want begins with Iraqi and coalition forces working together and locating in the neighborhoods those forces must secure. This concept features Iraqi and coalition soldiers partnering with local police to establish joint security stations, such as the one we began establishing in Sadr City on Monday, as well as combat outposts to ensure continuous presence in local communities. It also includes the establishment of checkpoints, the hardening of marketplaces, the conduct of patrols, and the execution of operations to capture or kill

terrorists and criminals. Importantly, Iraqi and coalition forces will not just clear neighborhoods, they will also hold them to facilitate the build phase of the operation and help Baghdad's residents realize aspirations beyond survival.

As citizens feel safer, conditions will be set for the resumption and improvement of basic services. This is hugely important. Indeed, Iraqis have often ranked the provision of services ahead of security in importance. And it is vital that the ministry representatives in the neighborhoods are able to provide for their constituents. Also, as security improves, commerce will return and local economies will grow, thereby providing an opportunity for the energies of a resilient and talented people to be expended in increasingly productive endeavors.

Each step in this process helps reinforce the desired momentum, and over time, the government and its ministries will be able to gain the population's confidence and support by demonstrating the capability to deliver.

It is not in our power to turn back the clock to the day before the Al-Askariya Mosque was bombed. We can, however, in partnership with our Iraqi colleagues, help improve the security situation and enable the Iraqi people to control the demons responsible for the vicious sectarian violence of the past year, demons that tore at the very fabric of Iraqi society.

Indeed, our operations will endeavor to provide Iraq citizens and leaders a chance to mend that fabric. If we can do this -- and I do believe that Iraqi and coalition soldiers and police will be able to improve levels of security for the Iraqi population -- then the Iraqi government will have the chance it needs to resolve some of the difficult issues it faces, to develop the capacity of its institutions, to improve the delivery of basic services to its citizens and to reconcile the differences between the factions that are the stakeholders in the new Iraq. Our effort, thus, will be to provide the Iraqi government an opportunity to shape the future of a new state in an ancient land.

I have now served in Iraq for nearly two-and-a-half years. There have been plenty of ups and downs during that time, periods of optimism and periods of frustration. I've been privileged during my time here to serve not just with the new greatest generation of Americans and countless outstanding coalition troopers, but also with enumerable brave and selfless Iraqi leaders, soldiers, police and citizens. In fact, a number

of Americans, noting that experience, have asked me whether Iraq's leaders and people can put the good of Iraq ahead of personal agendas and sectarian interests. I believe that they can, though it will not be easy given the sectarian violence that changed the situation here so dramatically, over the past year in particular.

But putting Iraq above personal and sectarian agendas will be critical as Iraqi leaders and the Iraqi people grapple with some very tough issues in the months ahead. If they can do this -- and again, I believe they can -- Iraq's leaders will be honored as the founding fathers of the new Iraq, and Iraq citizens will be respected as a wise and courageous people. Beyond that, the shabal (sp) Iraqi, the people of Iraq, will finally enjoy what they so richly deserve after years of hardship -- a just government that truly serves all Iraqis.

Thank you, and now, I'll be happy to take your questions.

Right here.

Q (Through interpreter.) (Name inaudible) -- from Al-Iraqiyah. General Petraeus, after three days of Fard al-Qanun operation we have noted that this operation focused on Rusafa more than in the Karkh side. Could you please explain this?

GEN. PETRAEUS: In fact, our forces -- the second of our five surge brigades is in fact moving into Karkh right now -- in particular, into the southern area of Karkh, the Rasheed districts east and west. Also, we'll allow additional forces to thicken their presence in the Mansour district, and over time Ghazalia, Khadimiya and so forth.

Right here.

Q (Name and affiliation inaudible.)

General Petraeus, we have noted that the Multinational Forces have come slowly to Iraq. When are the total number of the coalition forces completed to carry out the security plan?

GEN. PETRAEUS: The combat forces that we will be introducing should all be here by early June and into location by early June. And the major elements are five Army brigades and then several different Marine formations: two battalions and a Marine Expeditionary Unit that will total somewhere around 4,000 forces that will go into Anbar province, as well. I should point out that although the focus, the priority, clearly is Baghdad, anyone who knows about securing Baghdad knows that you must also secure the Baghdad belts, in other words, the areas that

surround Baghdad, in particular, those that are on the routes into Baghdad -- from the southeast for example, from Kut through Salman Pak, Suwayra and so forth; from the south, the area of the "Fiyas," so-called, Latafiyah, Mahmudiyah, Iskandariyah, Yusufiya and so on; from the west, from Fallujah, Abu Ghraib, that area, Kharma; from Taji and then from Khan Banisad and the other areas to the northeast.

So all of those areas will have to get attention. We are receiving our brigades at about one per month -- the U.S. Army combat brigades. Iraqi forces will continue to grow during this time as well, largely as some of the formations are brought up to full strength. Although I should point out that the final -- three of the final four battalions that entered Baghdad on the Iraqi side were above 90 percent, too, actually over 100 percent. And the final one that is just entering will be brought up to 100 percent, as well.

So they've done well in that regard.

Yes.

Q Can you expand a little bit on what is being done for the rest of the provinces, specifically Diyala, in the Fiyah (sp) area? We haven't heard anything about what might be done to secure those areas.

And then also, could you tell me what you would say to the Iraqi people who have told me -- and I'm sure many other reporters -- that they've lost all faith in this government, they've lost faith in the Multinational Forces. They don't trust that this can secure Baghdad; it will be like the other plans, and they're sick of claiming their family at the morgue now.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, first of all, as I just mentioned -- in fact, the belt areas obviously have to get attention, and that includes portions of Diyala province; in fact, Baqubah is on one of the sectarian fault lines and in fact is an area of concern right now. And those areas over which we have concern will see additional forces flowing into them.

Beyond that, with respect to your second question about the Iraqi people, I think they will just have to watch and, you know, judge us by our actions. As I mentioned in my remarks, we do intend to hold, we do intend to stay. I think if you have been driving around Baghdad and have been on a number of patrols with our soldiers, visited the joint security stations, walked through the Shorja market the other day, which has been completely hardened, as you may know, and in which vehicles are

only allowed to travel very early in the morning to put the goods into the marketplace and then -- and must leave during the course of the morning activities -- again, I think, you know, you have seen that our soldiers are living in the neighborhoods they are securing, and that really is a principle of counterinsurgency operations, of operations that you have to carry out. And of course we're dealing with more than just insurgents here. I mean, we're dealing in some cases with violent criminals, with what you really would call terrorists and certainly, in some cases in -- extreme sectarian militias as well.

So -- and our soldiers, by being in the neighborhood -- interestingly, the leaders in particular have said in some cases that after about five days or so, they go from what in some cases before was an information deficit about that area to information overload, literally, where they have all kinds of people providing them information and tips and so forth. And they literally have an analytical challenge now rather than an information challenge.

And I think also, obviously, they have to watch the actions of the Iraqi leaders.

I think, in fact, that having talked with a number of the leaders that met again last night with Prime Minister Maliki, that they will see that he and the government will be, in fact, striving to be leaders for all Iraqis and responsive to the desires of all Iraqis. And I think you should just -- again, they should give them a chance.

I reminded our U.S. Senate that this is the fourth Iraqi government in three and a half years, following the collapse of every Iraqi institution in the wake of liberation. And I think it shouldn't be completely surprising that there have been challenges in terms of capacity and capability. But it is reassuring to see some of the actions literally in recent weeks, actually, with respect to the hydrocarbon law, with respect to Prime Minister Maliki meeting recently with former officers. He did that, I think, last week. The meeting yesterday on budget execution for the provincial governors, other provincial authorities, ministers and ministry representatives -- those are -- that's the right focus. They have it, they got it. And again, I think we should watch actions in terms of reconciliation, and so forth, again, in the weeks ahead as the Council of Representatives reconvenes, and so on. So.

Right here.

Q (Through interpreter.) Moufid Hamid (ph) from Al-Sumariyah. You are partners with the Iraqis in providing peace in Iraq. There have been some violations in Mosul, some prisoners escaped from the prison. and there have been some security violations in Basra; many prisoners escaped from this prison. And many security violations in Dura, and many Iraqi Shi'ite pilgrims were attacked in Dura. How do you explain this? Aren't you responsible about that? You talked about joint security station in Sadr City. With whom did you talk in Sadr City? And some people reject the American presence in Baghdad. With whom did you negotiate to open this joint security station in Sadr City?

GEN. PETRAEUS: With respect to the prison outside Mosul, that is a facility that is guarded completely by Iraqi Ministry of Justice guards. And I, in fact, did discuss that with Prime Minister Maliki last night. He is very concerned about it. He has directed an investigation. The Iraqi army and police did respond in the wake of that.

There are reports that they have actually captured some of the -- of those who got away but were awaiting really much more in the way of specifics on that.

With respect to the issue in Basra, there are differing accounts and views on that particular situation. And in view of that, the prime minister directed an investigation, asked that we join, that the coalition join in that to make it a joint investigation. That is what is being done, and we await their findings and then bringing that back to us.

We share the horror and the sorrow and the sadness at seeing the pilgrims attacked. We personally think that the Iraqi security forces who are in charge of this particular operation have actually done quite a courageous job. In fact, they have stopped several would-be car bombers on the outskirts of Karbala. There are other cases reported in which they have disrupted or interdicted others who wanted to attack.

And I think you have to remember -- I'm told that there are perhaps as many as 5 (million) to 7 million pilgrims all over the roads between Najaf, Karbala, Hillah, Baghdad, and all converging on Karbala. It is an enormous task to protect all of them, and there is a point at which if someone is willing to blow up himself, particularly perhaps disguise himself, and use a vest rather than a vehicle, the problem becomes very, very difficult indeed.

But we have actually been quite impressed by the actions of the Iraqi security forces in performing the security task. It is one that they wanted to do and have done. We stand ready to assist and have volunteered that, but in fact that it will only be as requested, and that has been the agreement so far.

With respect to the joint security sites that have gone in in all the different locations in Baghdad, they have all been done after coordination and discussion with the leaders of the Iraqi security forces, of the mahalas -- the districts -- as well, and that has been the case in each of the cases of these sites. So.

Right here.

Q Soraya Nelson with National Public Radio. To follow up on the pilgrims question. A number of people that we spoke to yesterday were lamenting the fact that Mahdi Army wasn't there to help. That in the past, security has been much better for the pilgrims. And in fact, up until now we have the highest death toll since the marches resumed -- or the pilgrimages resumed post-Saddam Hussein.

Do you think that there is role for Mahdi Army in this sort of manner? Or what would you say to these people who would like to see them come back?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, you know, ultimately, that's a question for -- truly for the Iraqi government, for its authorities and certainly its security force leaders.

You know, many of our -- of the coalition countries have a variety of auxiliary police or other functions. The challenge, of course, is that some of these organizations have participated in true excesses, and they have been responsible, some of them, some the extremist elements of them -- and I think that the challenge has been to determine, you know, how do you incorporate those who want to serve a positive -- in a positive way, and as neighborhood watches, let's say, but unarmed in our own communities, but without turning into something much more than that?

And the tragedy in Baghdad for anyone -- and you all drive around it far more than I have in the past year -- I must tell you that I was taken aback by what I saw in driving around Ghazalia, parts of Adhamiya, parts of Mansour, parts of East Rashid, the Dura area and so forth. And some of that certainly, clearly, is the result of extremist sectarian militias. And I think that is the concern about employing them.

And so that's why we are where we are. They have certainly contributed the -- additional national police, the local police, the army and all the rest are out there.

But I think it's also important to note that this is apparently far and away, according -- we met with Abdul Aziz al-Hakim the other day, for example, and he told us that this is just vastly bigger than any of the other marches as well. So the sheer numbers of people to protect are much larger also this year.

Back there.

Q General, Andrew North from BBC. Are you going to call on Congress? Are you going to ask the president for the surge to carry on much longer, i.e., into 2008, and this particularly because you're seeing -- what you're seeing in the first few weeks of the Baghdad security plan in effect is displacement; the violence is moving outside the city; and you are realizing you need more troops than you originally thought?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I would not buy that characterization that we're realizing we needed -- what we did was, we focused the combat formations. And what has been asked for subsequent to the combat formations is the typical enablers that go with combat formations. And so it's -- you know, if you're going to have five additional brigade headquarters, you probably need a division headquarters to help with their command and control. You need additional aviation assets, additional military police, additional military intelligence, the whole gamut of enablers. And that is what has been -- and that was always anticipated. And I think that all of those have been provided through Central Command to Washington.

We are also very heartened to note Georgia contributing an additional combat brigade as well, and then there's some other countries that are contributing additional trainers -- Australia, prominently, 70 additional. And that doesn't sound like a large number, but 70 highly qualified professional trainers have an enormous multiplier effect when added to the institutions that are being developed by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense.

The discussion about -- I mean, first of all, we're still trying to get these forces in here, and the focus, of course, is getting them in. We have always anticipated that the -- some of the bad guys would go other places, and the Iraqi and coalition forces will go after them. And just -- so just keep watching that over the course of the next few months. But again, as I

mentioned, this is months; this is not days, it's not weeks, it is months. It will be all the way until early June before we even have all the force in position, and those forces will in some cases be outside sort of the confines of Baghdad proper.

We are examining, however, already the options that would exist for how long to continue the increased level of forces, and it could -- you could ask that you increase them, actually, for good reasons as well as, perhaps, not good reasons. One would be to reinforce success. In fact, the reason that we have asked for the additional forces in Anbar province is because of some really positive developments out there, where in province that six or eight months ago almost seemed hopeless to some people has now become a source of some hope, in fact; where tribes in Ramadi have one after the other after another volunteered to join the local police and have all of a sudden become a very, very serious force for al Qaeda-Iraq to reckon with and, in fact, have been going after al Qaeda-Iraq. And there's really only a small portion of eastern Ramadi that is still viewed as having some extremist elements in it. The same has taken place in Hit, same to a degree in al Qaim, and previously Fallujah has long -- for some time has been, you know, the best gated community in this particular region.

So those discussions have been ongoing. In fact, I happened to meet with General Odierno earlier this week and his staff with my staff to examine those options. I have mentioned to the secretary of Defense and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs that we are doing that. There's no surprises in that. It's something that we would -- obviously, he'd like to resolve it, you know, well in advance of when you might have to make requests or take actions. And that's the process that we are -- that we're going about.

Right here.

Q (Through interpreter.) (Name inaudible) -- from Al Hurra. Could you confirm to us, please, that there is a dialogue between the American officials and the Mahdi Army militias and some armed groups like the Islamic Party in Iraq? Can you confirm these negotiations? And the secretary of Defense asked to send more military police to Iraq. What will be the role of these military police? And since that you have been here for one month in Iraq, do you think that you need more forces here in Iraq?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I couldn't get the last question, but let me just answer the first two. And let me talk about it in a general sense.

In an endeavor like this one, the host nation and those who are assisting it obviously are trying to determine over time who are the irreconcilables and who are the reconcilables. And they're on either end of the sectarian spectrum, of ethnic spectrums, political spectrums and so forth. And of course, what the government is trying to do, what those supporting the government are trying to do are to split the irreconcilables from the reconcilables and to make the reconcilables part of the solution rather than a continuing part of a problem, and then dealing with the irreconcilables differently. And that is certainly what the government of Iraq is doing and what those who are supporting the government of Iraq -- what the coalition is also doing, in very, very early stages.

With respect to the military police, they are for a variety of different tasks that our military police serve, everything from security of detention facilities to route security and mentoring the police and so forth.

Right here.

Q (Through interpreter.) Ahmed Mahdi (sp) from Al-Furat. About 2,200 military police will come to Iraq. When will they arrive? And what will be their mission?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Again, the additional police will be arriving in a few months, and they will perform the gamut of missions that military police here do perform, everything from assisting in the detention facilities to performance of police mentoring and other tasks.

Right here.

Q Graham Smith, NPR News. You had said that you always anticipated that there would be additional combat enablers needed. I'm wondering, first, whether you already anticipate there will be more additional requests for troops; and secondly, if you decide that this is not effective in terms of ending the sectarian strife, what's the plan B?

GEN. PETRAEUS: I do not right now. But let me just tell you that, you know, when I sat down with the secretary of Defense and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs before taking the job, and reaffirmed very recently by the chairman, they have said when you determine additional requirements, tell us. And, you know,

my job is to understand the mission very clearly, make sure we have the same understanding of it, and then to request the forces that we need to perform that mission.

Their job -- the jobs of the organizations in the United States is to provide those. In some cases, it may be that they can't provide them; then our job is to say, well, if you can't, here's the risk that is incurred. And at some point, the risk may be so much that you say, well, we probably should discuss the mission again.

So that's sort of the philosophy of this, just to ensure that you know what I know. And right now, I mean, I actually asked General Odierno this morning -- we sat down, and right now we do not see other requests looming out there. That's not to say that some emerging mission or emerging task will not require that; and if it does, then, of course, we will ask for that.

So -- what was the second part of that?

Q What's plan B if --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Oh, yeah. Our focus -- and this is not just rhetoric -- but I mean, our focus right here, right now truly is -- and remember, I've been on the ground for a month -- I mean, it is to get these forces on the ground, to have dialogue with our commanders to see how we're doing, to share best practices, to develop the tactics, techniques and procedures and refine them and so forth among the commanders in Baghdad and then the commanders in the outlying districts and so forth. Because again, this -- you know, the JSSs, the combat outposts, all this -- and actually staying right there is a different approach certainly than was employed in the past couple of years. But it is important, if you're going to secure the population, to be in the population.

Now, I think the secretary of Defense recently said something along the lines of -- you know, it would be irresponsible for him not to be doing some thinking about various what ifs. And as we develop here, certainly I would think that we would look at possible what ifs in the light of how things are going here, but that's -- and then we'd have dialogue with him, obviously, during that time.

We have a secure video teleconference about every other week with the secretary of Defense and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs and on the off weeks typically with the president and the Principals Committee of the National Security Council staff, so

there's quite good dialogue there and there's good discussion back and forth on that, I can assure you.

Right here.

Q Lauren Frayer with the Associated Press. Once the additional American troops come in, are in place in early June, we'll be at a certain troop level. Your second in command, General Odierno, some military officials have said that his assessment that that troop level should remain constant through February 2008, nearly a year from now. Is that an assessment that you share?

And second, Diyala province -- you mentioned that some of the troops earmarked for Baghdad may go into Khan Banisad and some other areas of southern Diyala. Right now there's only one brigade in charge of all of Diyala. Might you send additional troops to Diyala semi-permanently, and if so, how many, and when?

GEN. PETRAEUS: And would you like specifically where they're going to go and what their targets are going to be? (Laughter.)

Let me answer the last question first, which had to do with Diyala province. The answer is that very likely there will be additional forces going there. And, you know, obviously I'm not going to tell you specifically when, where and all the rest of that because we'd like to have that as a surprise to some folks who are there.

With respect to the assessment that General Odierno has made, I don't know that you would call that yet a "recommendation." As I mentioned earlier, we sat down and we have looked at options. Again, we're some months from starting -- from saying, okay, let's continue at this level, or determine what else we might do. But I very much wanted -- in fact, I asked him to start laying out options because it is something that we would like to be considering early, rather than as the decision starts to stare us in the face. And so we've done that. I have certainly not reached a conclusion yet about that.

I think you generally think that if you're going to achieve the kinds of effects that we probably need, that it would need to be sustained certainly for some time well beyond the summer. But again, we'll have to see in our experiences over the next few months as we get the troop density that is needed, as we start to operate in some of the areas that affect Baghdad. Because again, these car bomb factories tend to be -- I mean, we destroyed one in Salman Pak, as you know, southeast of Baghdad,

another one in the Kharma area northwest of Baghdad. They tend to be in the outskirts in these very rural areas, small villages and outlying houses and farms, and so forth. And we clearly have got to find as many of those as we can to destroy them and then, obviously, to interdict those that are still able to be built.

Right here.

Q (Through interpreter.) (Name and affiliation inaudible.) Recently, there have been some violations by the armed groups of Baghdad security plan. Does this mean that the armed groups have good intelligence to gather information and more than the ability of the United States?

My second question: We said that there have been some new devices to detect car bombs. They will be installed in Baghdad, but this didn't happen. What's the reason?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Actually, in fact, there have been successful operations to both locate car bomb factories and destroy them, as I mentioned, in Salman Pak and Kharma literally just in the last three weeks alone. In addition, a large cache of explosively formed penetrators west of Taji, 140 of those -- that's 140 different of these very, very lethal improvised explosive devices, the components for those, and as I mentioned, nearly 100 caches of other sizes and shapes just in the Multinational Division Baghdad area in the last two weeks alone.

There are -- there have been some of the -- the cells have also -- the individuals in various cells some of them have been detained. But clearly there is much more work to do in this regard because, as you rightly observed, there have been people blowing up car bombs in places in recent weeks, and we do think that this is, in fact, an effort by extremists, perhaps the same groups of extremists that blew up the mosque in Samarra and ignited this real unleashing of sectarian violence that took place. And they're trying to do that again, we think, and it would be logical. They see the Baghdad plan beginning. They're not sure how long it's going to -- everyone is still waiting to see what really is going to happen over the course of weeks. And what will happen, I can tell them, is they're going to see more coalition and more Iraqi soldiers and police over time.

I think they're beginning to sense that now. You also have the Arba'in celebration with, you know, tragically a very large number of civilians on the roads who have been targeted and are very, very difficult to protect all of them in the extent of this -- these vast marches. But obviously, the effort will

continue, and it literally is continuing right now. In fact, we think we got some cell members as recently as yesterday.

Right here.

Q Damien Macaroy (sp) from the Daily Telegraph. You said that you were quite shocked by some of the things you saw when you were driving around Baghdad. I suspect one of the things was the difference in relative prosperity between Sunni and Shi'a neighborhoods that seems to be in a switch in recent years.

Could you talk a little bit about how much your task in the surge will be to protect Sunni neighborhoods so that they aren't almost completely wiped out in Baghdad?

GEN. PETRAEUS: The goal of the operation, of the Iraqi and coalition joint operation, is to protect all neighborhoods. And in fact, citizens from all sects, ethnic groups and religions have been hurt, been damaged, been killed, displaced and so forth during the course of the past year, in particular. When I left 17 months ago now, there certainly was not the kind of emptiness in some of the neighborhoods of Baghdad, as I mentioned earlier, Ghazalia, Dora, Adhamiya, Mansour. But again, all around Baghdad there are certain neighborhoods, and they typically were the so-called fault-line neighborhoods, mixed neighborhoods and so forth.

Again, a primary goal of this operation is to secure those neighborhoods, to try to restore confidence in those who live there that they can return home, that shopkeepers can reopen their businesses, that markets can begin to flourish again and that kids can go to school without being kidnapped and so forth. And that obviously is the goal of the operation. But it is explicitly to protect all Iraqis, and that includes, obviously, Sunni Arabs, Shi'a, Kurdi, Turkmen, Christian, Yezidi, Shabak, you name it. I mean, all will be included in that. And that's very much the goal.

Right here.

Q (Through interpreter.) (Name inaudible) -- from the NBC. I have two questions. The first question is about the additional forces which will guard the detention facilities. Why do you focus on the detention camps? Why don't you give this task to the Iraqi security forces?

Second question: You said that the host country can determine who are the reconcilable groups. But everybody should be under the supremacy of law, and all military activities should be

cancelled. So how are these people going to be part of the solution?

GEN. PETRAEUS: First of all, there -- you asked about detention facilities, coalition and Iraqi. And in fact there is an effort ongoing -- in fact, it's part of the rule of law effort that I mentioned -- that will assist Iraq and the Ministry of Justice in expanding its detention facilities.

The fact is that Iraq has a very, very small capacity in that regard, compared with any of the other states in the region or even just to a state of the United States. And so the assessment of leaders and so forth is that there -- especially as you have a security crackdown that does target these extremists, that a number of them need to be detained and to be put into the correction system. And so that is an effort -- there is an effort ongoing to do that, just as there is an effort ongoing to expand the U.S. capacity for detention.

And in fact, in one of the locations -- in fact, several of the coalitions -- we are actually helping to train Iraqi corrections officers. In some cases, they are training alongside our soldiers and will transition to take over some of the detention facilities you can see, again, in the years hence.

So there's a short-term capacity increase effort ongoing, and there's also a longer-term plan that has been being executed and will also be reinforced to increase the Iraqi capacity over time as well.

With respect, again, to the -- you know, the idea of the reconcilables and the irreconcilables, this is something in which the Iraqi government obviously has the lead. It is something that they have sought to -- in some cases, to reach out. And I think, again, that any student of history recognizes that there is no military solution to a problem like that in Iraq, to the insurgency of Iraq. Military action is necessary to help improve security, for all the reasons that I stated in my remarks, but it is not sufficient.

A political resolution of various differences, of this legislation, of various senses that people do not have a stake in the success of the new Iraq, and so forth, that is crucial. That is what will determine in the long run the success of this effort. And again, that clearly has to include talking with and eventually reconciling differences with some of those who have felt that the new Iraq did not have a place for them, whereas I think, again, Prime Minister Maliki clearly believes that it

does, and I think that his actions will demonstrate that, along with the other ministers.

I mean, if you look at the hydrocarbon law is an enormous statement that the oil that is in certain regions, the wealth from that, the revenue from it, will be shared with all Iraqis. It is a national resource, it states that. And that, arguably, is a very significant statement, compromise even, because some could have tried to have kept that to a particular region rather than sharing it with all. And I think that kind of legislation is what the Iraqi people are looking for. That is also, for what it's worth, what people in the United States are looking for, to see, again, is there the will, the determination to come to grips with these very tough issues that makes our enormous effort of the coalition members to help them achieve the security in which that kind of effort can go forward more successfully than when they're literally consumed with concerns about the security challenges of the moment.

Right here.

Q Alex Kingsbury from U.S. News & World Report. I'm wondering if you can just talk a little bit about the battlespaces outside of Baghdad. As the forces are surged into the capital, the commanders in these other areas seem to be doing more with less. I'm wondering if there's a change in tactics or strategy in the way that they're dealing with their areas of operation?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Yeah, I certainly wouldn't say it's more with less at all. In some cases it will be more with more. And I think that over time, that that will be the case. But if -- you know, if you walk your way around the map, you know, again, there are challenges in the fault line areas, as I mentioned to the northeast, the north, and around the throat of Baghdad, if you will. And again, those certainly will have to be addressed in the coming months. There is a question about additional forces for Diyala. We're going to watch Diyala and see what happens there. In some other locations where there clearly are threats, there seem to be, nonetheless, Iraqi forces hanging tough in the face of those threats. The prison incident northeast of Mosul notwithstanding, the division commanders in Nineveh province have been quite resolute.

In fact, I met with the governor, Governor Kashmula, and the police chief two days ago. They were here for the budget execution conference.

I think -- you know, this is a governor who has lost his brother, his son and several other relatives to the extremists,

and he is undaunted. And he had with him the police chief, who is quite tough, determined. One of his police stations was attacked with a car bomb the other day, and they rebuilt it across the street the next day.

So in some of those cases, again, we think that they're just going to continue to build. We need to just continue to assist, maintain the forces that are there. But those are cases where your adviser teams can really continue to make a huge difference, rather than having to add, say, even a significant number of additional coalition forces.

And the same can be said for some of the other locations. And then certainly, I think, as you get below the throat of Baghdad, that although there are, you know, a variety of internal political and in some cases security issues in the provinces south of Baghdad, that by and large Iraqi forces can sort those out; Iraqi political leaders can sort them out -- in some cases, of course, where they have already shifted to provincial Iraqi control and we are in overwatch. In others, over the course of this coming year, that will certainly take place as well.

And then you have the situation in Anbar province. And as I mentioned, Anbar is an intriguing location right now. Where I was -- again, "taken aback" was my word for what I saw in parts of Baghdad. I was heartened by what I saw in Ramadi, by what I've heard described about in Hit, where again Anbaris, the members of those tribes, have said, enough, and have banded together, raised their hand, joined the police forces and in fact are standing and fighting again al Qaeda Iraq. And you can start to see, by the way, for what it's worth, an identity emerging among them that is, again, very heartening to someone who has been here since the beginning off and on and watched things go up and down in Anbar province -- frankly, mostly down during a variety of periods. So that's, again, a very, very interesting development in that regard.

So -- right there.

Q (Name inaudible) -- from the Kuwaiti News Agency.

General Petraeus, the report said that -- the Iraqi report said, quoting the ministry of interior, that scores of leaders of al Qaeda organization have been detained the day before yesterday in Tikrit, in Baiji and Lailan. Among them is Muharib al-Jabouri and two brothers of Abu Omar al-Baghdadi.

There have been some reports that said that Muharib al-Jabouri is he himself Abu Omar al-Baghdadi. Do you have any

information about this? Did you take part in these military operations?

Second question: the reports said --

GEN. PETRAEUS: Let me try to answer that one first, if I could.

The question is, I think -- and it's a little hard to hear the translation, but the question, I think, had to do with operations against various al Qaeda and other extremist organizations in the provinces in particular to the north of Baghdad.

And in fact, there have been a number of operations in those areas and in Anbar province as well, specifically in Ramadi also over the last three or four weeks. And that was what I was referring to when I mentioned that we have in fact captured or killed a number of rank-and-file and also mid-level leaders of the various, again, affiliates, if you will, and also of al Qaeda Iraq itself in Mosul as well, and including some very, very large caches in the Mosul area. So those operations have been ongoing. A number of them have been joint operations. Some have been unilateral, but they have been ongoing.

So -- let me just let one other person -- right next to you, right there.

Q (Through interpreter.) Laith al-Ahamdi (ph) from (Al-Iraqiyah ?). General Petraeus, this Operation Fard al-Qanun didn't accomplish its mission. Do you have any alternative plans? We heard about alternative plans. Could you please inform us about them?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, again, Operation Fard al-Qanun is just in its early stages. I mean, we are literally a few weeks into the operation right now. It will take months before all of the forces are on the ground from the coalition side. Iraqi forces will continue to build during that period. There are literally thousands and thousands of Iraqi soldiers and police and others that are in training, and there will be rotations of Iraqi units through Baghdad as well.

And what we need to do is to assess the success or the lack of success of the operation as we go along. We already are determining where increased security measures have to be taken. Operation Safe Market, for example, was one of the early efforts to wall off some of the larger markets, the more vulnerable

markets in the Baghdad area, and that operation does continue; and then protection of various neighborhoods.

And again, this is just going to continue. I mean, we are in the early stages of this, and I have been on occasion bemused by people saying, "Hey, you know, how's it going? Have you won yet?" And the answer is we've just started. Just the second of five brigades is coming in, and again, this is going to continue. It's going to be determined. Our soldiers are resolute. They want to see this succeed, as do their Iraqi counterparts, and that is exactly what we're endeavoring to do.

And with that, let me just say thank you. This is, again, the first of these. We'll do them periodically over time. I will allow General Caldwell sitting back there to continue his great performance on the weekly basis or however frequently it is that he comes out here and sees you -- more often than that, I guess. And -- but you'll see me as well, and we are now going to do the usual press activities that I think you would expect from an MNF-I commander.

So thank you, all, very much.

END.