

PRESS CONFERENCE:

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REPORTERS:

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

REAR ADM: Good afternoon and As-Salāmu `Alaykum. This afternoon I'm pleased to be joined by Brigadier General Mark Gurganis, the ground combat element commander of Multinational Force West. First, I'd like to describe several events from this week that underscored the tactical momentum attained by the coalition and Iraqi security forces. And I'd like to highlight the completion of several civil projects as well. The Iraqi security forces continue to demonstrate courage and operational competence as they protect their nation's citizens. On Monday in Masra village located in Ninawa province, Iraqi security forces thwarted a suicide car bomb attack. When a vehicle failed to slow down as directed, Iraqi security fired on the car and it exploded. Three members of the Iraqi security force were martyred defending their post, and three innocent civilians were killed. But the alert actions of the Iraqi security forces prevented a much larger loss of life. On Tuesday, near Samarah, Iraqi security forces with the assistance of U.S. special force advisors acted on specific intelligence and intercepted a vehicle carrying thirty-five (35) 155-mm artillery rounds at a traffic control checkpoint. The vehicle and artillery rounds were subsequently destroyed. On Wednesday in Mosul Iraqi police repelled a coordinated small arms and truck bomb attack conducted by al-Qaida conducted by their command post. The Iraqi police held their ground, returned fire, stopped the truck, and disabled the bomb. On Thursday south west of Taji, Iraqi army scouts working with U.S. Special Forces conducted a series of raids detaining an al-Qaida in Iraq cell leader and fourteen (14) other individuals suspected of conducting attacks against coalition forces, of transporting weapons, and facilitating foreign fighters. Also on Thursday in Baghdad's Rashid neighborhood, coalition forces

detained four (4) members of a criminal rocket-firing cell, seized thirty-six (36) Iranian-made 107-mm rockets, four (4) of which were wired and ready to fire, the rest of which were still in their original wrapping material. Since this particular operation began in Rashid, seventeen (17) suspected criminals have been detained, including group leaders, organizers and financiers, as well as the seizure of twenty-four (24) weapons caches. On Tuesday, twenty (20) miles southwest of Baghdad a concerned citizens group discovered and turned in more than 1200 pounds of homemade explosives. Over the past twelve (12) months the local Gargulig tribal leaders have begun to coordinate daily with coalition forces to secure the area and to encourage the male population to serve in the local security forces. And after years of damage and neglect, Iraq's infrastructure is being repaired one project at a time. Last week in Saba Nissan, a renovated school opened its doors. The four-month repair effort, headed by Iraqi city council members and local contractors and assisted by the coalition, rebuilt the school, repaired broken walls, built new classrooms, and constructed a new playground. Students and teachers also received books and new school supplies. Also, this past Sunday in Baghdad, soldiers from the 1st Cavalry Division, representatives from the Baghdad Provincial Reconstruction Team, and scientists from the U.S. Department of Agriculture took a step towards improving the future of farming here in Iraq by assisting Iraqi agricultural scientists at the University of Baghdad's College of Agriculture, by delivering soil testing kits and water analysis equipment. Improved security in the Abu Ghraib area created the opportunity to meet at the College of Agriculture's campus. On Monday the village of al-Huda obtained a reliable source of clean

water. Mayor Abu Bahar and Sheikh Shanno cut the ribbon on a new freshwater pumping and filtration station, marking the completion of a project that began in July. The pumping station project, initiated by local village officials who worked closely with Iraqi security and coalition, employed thirty-two (32) local workers during the construction phase. I've highlighted just a few of the on going reconstruction and redevelopment projects underway throughout Iraq. These efforts, coupled with the increased capability of Iraqi security forces, mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, are important steps the Iraqis, supported by the coalition, are taking to protect the Iraqi people, provide basic services, and improve the Iraqi infrastructure. This will take time, patience and commitment. And significant security challenges remain. Local and regional governments are uniting with national leaders to fight terrorism and bring criminals to justice. And nowhere is this more evident than in Anbar province. In order to tell you more about both the progress achieved and the challenges that lie ahead, I'll pass the microphone to Brigadier General Mike Gurganis from Multinational Force West. Mark, welcome.

BRIG-GEN: Thank you. As-Salāmu `Alaykum and Ramadan kareem. Thank you for the opportunity to address you this afternoon and then the opportunity to answer any questions you might have regarding any of our operations, economics, or governance questions from the al-Anbar province. If you would allow me to give you just a brief operation overview to let you know some of the things going on in the al-Anbar province now. As Admiral REAR ADM said, I command the ground forces in al-Anbar, and one of my primary duties is the arming, training, and equipping of the Iraqi security forces to include the army

and to include the police as well in working with the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police as they take on more and more of the responsibilities in al-Anbar. As you've also heard recently about 2200 United States Marines have left the al-Anbar province. They were part of the original surge forces. But as part of a normal redeployment of forces they have departed and will not be backfilled. This unit represented about half the surge forces in the al-Anbar province. And what's encouraging about this is the battle space that they occupied north of Fallujah near the Lake Tartar region has been backfilled and is now occupied by the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Iraqi Army Division. This brigade was formally in Fallujah, but due to the improving conditions in Fallujah this brigade has moved completely out of the city, and Fallujah is in the hands of its police, combined with some marine advisors that are still working with the police in Fallujah. But the entire army brigade has moved out and has assumed that battle space up near Tartar Lake. The soldiers of this 2nd brigade are securing a very difficult area of al-Anbar. And this is a region that also forms one of the outer belts of Baghdad. And so the work that they're doing up there now significantly increases security not only in Ramadi and Fallujah but also here in the city of Baghdad. Also operating up in the Tartar region are members of the Iraqi highway patrol. They have a highway patrol station that's up on the route there being used to screen vehicles coming in and out between Ramadi and Samarah. They're protecting...one of the key things they're doing up there is they're securing an economic corridor and allowing commerce to pass into and out of al-Anbar freely. And lastly our 7th Iraqi Army Division, which is one of the newer divisions, certainly the newest one we have in al-Anbar, is progressing and

maturing at a rapid rate. They have reached almost 100% of their strength now. And daily the Iraqi soldiers in that division get stronger and stronger and more capable of securing the borders of Iraq, also securing and participating in the counterinsurgency fight. I anticipate that this division, with the progress they've made, will be ready to transfer to the Iraqi...control of the Iraqi ground forces in the very near future. Okay, with that, sir, I'm ready to take any questions that come my way.

REAR ADM: We'd like to open it to questions. Yes, sir.

REP1: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: First question is...to what extent do you think the weapons smuggling do you think are reduced from Iran to Iraq ever since the operations in Diyala started against al-Qaida? And you've spoke now that you've found so many homemade explosives. Do you think that the weapons from Iran stopped? This is the first question. The second question...there are some informations given by one of the disbanded Baath party confirming that Izzat al-Duri is now in Iraq, without even specifying where he is. But it's suspected that he's in some place. Do you have any information about the exact location of al-Duri?

REAR ADM: Keep the microphone. I need to clarify something. Can you...so you're asking about al-Duri, the old Baath party figure.

INT: Yes, yes. There are some statements by one of these...

REP2: There are some reports by some ex-Baath party leaders who just said that Izzat al-Duri is in Iraq.

REAR ADM: Okay, to answer your first question. I wouldn't necessarily make any association between the homemade explosives caches that we've found and weapons that have been smuggled into Iraq. I don't see any association there. Uh, we have seen and we talked about the smuggling and the presence of weapons and munitions that have come across the border from Iran into Iraq. There have been public statements made and in public agreements between the leaders of Iran to the government...the leaders of the government of Iraq stating Iranian desire to help secure borders and create stability here and we in the multinational force look forward to confirming the excellence of the Iranians in complying with their publicly stated position of wanting to help security here in Iraq. Right now we don't see that the actions and the words necessarily match up. The second question that you have about al-Duri...that's the first I've heard that there are reports that al-Duri might be back here. He's obviously a figure; if it's the person I'm thinking of, he was a face card back in 2003, if he's the senior member of the Baath party that you're talking about. I don't have any information about him being back in the country. Thank you. Yes sir.

REP2: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Abu Dhabi TV. During a bombing for Al-Dora neighborhood there were civilian casualties. And the second question, how could you be sure that the person that had been killed al-Tunisi is actually from Tunis, or Tunisia?

REAR ADM: First of all, the operations that took place in Rashid, al-Dora, we had surveillance assets that were airborne that had watched mortar crews launching weapons, firing weapons from the rooftops of houses in the Rashid area into other neighborhoods of Baghdad, against other innocent Iraqis. And then we saw these weapons crews,

these mortar-firing people move from house to house. We tracked them. And we ultimately would up engaging them. So this was a step that was taken to protect the people who live in Iraq here in Baghdad from the indiscriminate fire from these mortar shells that were being launched from the rooftops of houses in the Rashid, al-Dora, area. In fact, that's...in my opening statement. We did follow them and find this one place where we actually found rockets that were still in their original wrappers, and four of them that were all ready to fire. We do not have any reports of civilian casualties. We have carefully looked at this over a number of days now. And we do not have any reports that we can confirm of civilian casualties. But I would note that this is also a very clear example. In no case whatsoever is there ever an intentional targeting of civilians on part of the coalition. That is not our purpose. We are here to protect the people of Iraq, not to target them. I can't say the same thing about the nature of the enemy that we're fighting who intentionally and indiscriminately fires weapons against people in Baghdad and in Iraq. And the nature of this enemy is also such that they hide behind innocent women and children. And so when we do engage them, and there are possible opportunities for there to be weapons that impact against those people but they're in the midst of innocents as well. So they endanger the population that they actually are operating in. And that's their tactic. And that's the way they try to incite resentment against the coalition. I think it's a clear example of the nature of the enemy that we're fighting, that we have these kinds of things to deal with. And I'm sorry; I forgot the second part of your question.

REP2: Speaking in Arabic.

INT: During operations when Abu Usama al-Tunisi was killed, how can you be sure that he's a Tunisian?

REAR ADM: It was through a number of different intelligence sources that we had in terms of the background and the way that we have...if you've noticed over the months, we will have this matrix, or we'll have picture of different people in the Iraqi, of al-Qaida in Iraq, where we have these lineups, if you will. And each one of these people that we track, we are very careful about where they came from and how we have come to the point where we are targeting them. And so we keep a very careful intelligence file on the people that we assess are conducting these criminal activities inside of Iraq and targeting innocent civilians. So it's an intelligence that we can base it on. Yes, sir.

REP3: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Hora TV. Admiral REAR ADM, my question is...after the Blackwater incident and the consequences behind this and all the fuss, the media fuss, the officials in the American administration they gave the supervision of...they gave the American army...they said the American army should supervise the work of these security companies, particularly the Blackwater. So how would you deal with the issue of setting a new mechanism for the work of the security companies in Iraq?

REAR ADM: There are a number, as you know from the media reports, a number of investigations and a joint commission that have been created to address this issue of security contractors here in Iraq. And I think it would be premature right now to come to any conclusions or describe what the way ahead is until all of these different investigations and the joint commissions have gone through their

processes and have gone through the studies and looked very carefully at all of these different factors. Quite frankly, the presence of a number of these people here in Iraq is essential to a lot of our operations. That's just the fact of life. The reason the contracts and protective services are here in their capacity is to prevent us from having to have soldiers or marines standing guard at a lot of different facilities or that sort of thing. So there's a legitimate reason for these contractors to do their work. But how the way ahead will be determined, I think we should wait for these investigations and the joint commissions to issue their study. Yes, sir.

REP4: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question from al-Hurriyah TV. Are you sure of the abilities of the Iraqi forces right now, and to what extent do you think your Iraqi forces are ready to take over the security issue now?

REAR ADM: I think I'll defer to my brother here from al-Anbar to talk about that. He's probably got the best insights of anybody right now.

BRIG-GEN: Um, the development of the Iraqi army has been one that's a difficult development just because we're building an army at the same time this army's at war in its own country. So that makes it extremely difficult. But I will tell you that at least in al-Anbar – and I'll only talk about al-Anbar – we have been fortunate that the young men have enlisted in the army and have taken the training very, very seriously. And in every place that we see they are performing very well. One of the things that I will tell you that characterizes their service probably best is that they're brave and that they're very competent at what they're doing. Now, there's always a second part to the answer. Are they ready to step out on their own right now and

take over this completely? My answer to that would be no. There are some challenges as we have rebuilt the army from the ground up, as the army has rebuilt itself. There's some challenges. And in many cases while we have very many willing and able young jundis at the lower levels, developing leadership just takes time. You don't just go out in the street and find an officer, or a mid-level officer, or a senior-level officer. They have to be developed. They have to grow. And it takes additional training to get them to the standard that they need to be.

Additionally one of the challenges is the challenge of being able to support itself logistically. That takes time to develop as well. And as you know much of the Iraqi army right now supports itself through contractor support, through life support contracts. And they're moving very quickly, discussions ongoing now at what kind of support they're going to be able to provide themselves over time. So while I would characterize their performance as very professional and very brave. I would also characterize the nature of the army as young and as one that is maturing and one that is developing. And I think that is the role that coalition forces have to play as we continue to help with their training, continue to mentor, continue to advise them. But more and more in al-Anbar the lead and operations is being planned and executed by the Iraqis themselves with us just providing some advice and some mentorship as they go along with these operations. Does that answer your question, sir?

REAR ADM: I have one small part to add to that. And that is in looking at the Iraqi security force overall, I would echo the comments that General Gurganus just gave. We have focused...if you look at what the Iraqi security force needs right now, in terms of being able to stand on its own, logistics is just one part of it. They do not

have the capability right now to sustain themselves logistically. So that's one part that still needs to be worked on. And that's going to take some time. Of course there's another part of this. And that's loyalty. And that's another issue the government of Iraq understands and has taken head on, and we've seen a lot of examples. We've given in the past of commanders in the Iraqi security force having been fired or relieved and thousands of people who had been sent away based on their loyalty or lack of performance. And then finally I think that the key part that Mark just mentioned here is leadership, and both at the non-commissioned officer level and also at the senior officer level. The leadership is the key. And that's what we're encouraged by what we see. But there's still a long way to go in terms of the ability for the Iraqi security forces now to bring up and grown from within the competent leaders and the people, the men and women of integrity and strong leadership skills that will be able to take that forward. But I also think it's really important to emphasize what kind of unifying institution that the Iraqi security force and Iraqi army represents. Because that means that a young man can come from one part of Iraq and serve in an institutions that represents the entire nation. It's a national institution, and we think that's an incredibly important piece of the nationhood and sense of identity of being part of a greater effort.

Thank you. Yes, sir.

MARQUEZ: How are you, sir? Miguel Marquez with ABC News. Good to see you as well.

On the rules of engagement for the U.S. military, with the Blackwater incident, with al-Dora just recently, with their court cases now...the whole just of things seems to be that the Americans are targeting Iraqis indiscriminately, Iraqi civilians. There is a sense among the Iraqis that the Americans are not as friends, they're

here as an occupying force, and increasingly a less positive force here. Has there been any review, any discussion, any change, anything with regard to the rules of engagement for U.S. forces in Iraq, given sort of the environment which you're now operating in here? Things do seem somewhat more sensitive for the U.S. military operating in Iraq because of the high profile civilian cases we've had recently. A couple other things...I keep seeing references to Iranian-made shoulder-fired missiles being found in Iraq, in addition to EFPs and everything else. I'm wondering if you had any further information on that. Are these heat-seeking? I saw something about infrared missiles. I'm just unclear just to what exactly it is we're talking about. And also in General for you as well...General Petraeus told the L.A. Times yesterday about an AQI offensive going on right now. I mean things are very quiet here, seemingly in Baghdad at least. Are you seeing an increase in AQI activity in Anbar? A lot has been made of the model out there. Do you have numbers, recent numbers, General, that you can share with us about where things are now? And if things continue along that track you said that they would be pulling out soon. When? How soon could we see a substantially reduced or almost non-existent U.S. presence out in Anbar? Thanks, sir.

REAR ADM: To begin with, the rules of engagement are designed to give the young troops the tools that they need to be able to employ force at the right place at the right time in the appropriate circumstance. This is a very difficult battle space and a challenging environment. I would expect that the overall review...to back up. The military operates under rules of engagement which are military-specific, which means that the chain-of-command and the way that force is employed is through a military application force. So there's a watershed marking between the way that

the contractors and the way the military applies force there. I think that what we will see in this review and in this joint commission will be a recommended way ahead and presumably changes that will take place that would effect I expect more on the contractor side than military rules of engagement. But we are very careful and we are very explicit of how we target and how we choose to employ lethal force. Because we understand the nature of making mistakes, and so we're very careful of how we train our troops. And I would contend it's the most professional group of young warriors that the nation's ever fielded. It doesn't mean that you don't review and don't assess. But in the same breath...and I'd also give you the chance to give your comments if you see fit there Mark about the rules of engagement. But I don't see that there's been any specific instance from a military point of view that would warrant that kind of review or change in rules of engagement. And obviously we don't share exactly what those are so that the enemy can't exploit the way that we operate. The second part of your question in regards to the surface-to-air missiles that we found. They're Misagh 1s, which is an Iranian-specific surface-to-air, it's a heat-seeking man portable, heat-seeking/IR man-portable surface-to-air missile that we found. I can't share that with you right now, but we found some. And then finally...let's see...I'll talk about from our perspective in terms of the idea of an al-Qaida surge, if you will. If you look at Ramadan this time a year ago, for example, historically violence levels, certainly in comparison with last year, last year's Ramadan violence levels went significantly up. We are substantially below last year's level. And as a matter of fact, in comparison to this time, we're about 38% lower in terms of Ramadan violence levels than we were at the same point last year. But we always assessed

and we always expected that al-Qaida would attempt to raise levels of violence, to have more attacks, and to conduct, their own for want of a better term, surge. I think that anticipating that, understanding it, and planning for it, we actually planned for a counter surge, if you will. We have seen an uptick in the number of attacks recently in the last few days, but it has not been either at the level of intensity or severity or the numbers that we'd seen before. Which is not to say we don't think that al-Qaida is defanged. We think that they're still dangerous. But we also think that we have been doing the kinds of operations that have kept al-Qaida off balance, that have kept them on their back foot, that have spoiled a lot of their attacks. We've talked before about the number of car bombs, the total numbers of attacks are going down. We keep taking down cell leaders and networks. It's detective work, but it's also taking to the next step and the next so that we continue to press them very hard and keep them off balance. We feel that by having taken a large number of these...for example this guy Tunisi, he was a foreign fighter/facilitator and we know that foreign fighters that are coming across the border are a higher percentage of suicide bombers. So by reducing that and reducing the flow and ultimately reduce the number of attacks, it's a multifaceted approach. And I'll give Mark the Anbar piece of this.

BRIG-GEN: Okay, well, I'll go back to the top of your questions with ROE. While I will not talk about specifics of ROE, let me help you with this at least from our position. The ROE is clear. It's unambiguous, and it supports the mission. We have the best ROE right now we have ever had, in terms of clarity, in terms of what's allowed, what's not allowed. And so I think in our case we're extremely happy with the ROE we have because it is so clear, and it allows us to do the things that

need to be done. And to answer one part of your question...there has been no change because there's no need for a change. It allows us to do things that need to be done within the bounds that we should be. I cannot address part two of your question, but let me talk a little about AQI activity in al-Anbar. That one I can. Three weeks ago we had a total of seventy-six (76) incidents in the whole al-Anbar province. We had seen a spike in that all the way up to ninety (90) incidents. And the reason I can smile about that is because that's not a real big surge. And it has maintained at ninety (90) incidents for both weeks of Ramadan that we have completed so far. One year ago during the same week we had four hundred and fifteen (415) incidents. So the 38% reduction across Iraq, as you can tell from those numbers, we enjoyed quite a bit sharper. With that said, I echo what Admiral REAR ADM said. We think that al-Qaida is still a very dangerous enemy, and we think that they're intentions are to continue to try to get back into the population centers in al-Anbar, which right now they do not enjoy freedom of movement in any of the population centers in al-Anbar. But one of the things that always concerns me is their constant desire to pull off the one spectacular attack. Is that within the realm of their possibilities? Absolutely it is. I mean you can't defend against everything, but to date we think we've been very fortunate in terms of the number of incidents. To answer one other of your questions...I think you misunderstood my answer that I gave earlier when I talked about the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit had left. That's the only unit that's leaving right now. We will continue to downsize the forces at the times, as much as you have heard. To date though, that's the one unit that was part of the surge. It came in for a specific period of time, for a specific mission. And it's completed that mission and has

now returned to its regular duties with the Marine Core and with Central Command. So that represented about 2200 of our total strength in al-Anbar. Yes, ma'am.

ZAVIS: Alexandra Zavis from the L.A. Times. General, what has been the effect of the assassination of Sheikh Abu Sattar Abu Risha on his movement on your AO?

REAR ADM: The question is about the assassination of Sheik Sattar. Tragic event. We think we lost a true hero and a true martyr just because of the stance he took against al-Qaida and many of the things that he did in the fight against al-Qaida. But we think his organization...we know his organization has elected his brother Ahmed to replace him. Ahmed will receive the same support in the fight against al-Qaida as his brother did. And our support for them will remain unwavering and unchanged. And we think they're contribution to security and stability in al-Anbar, which has been tremendous in the past, which has been a key factor, is not going to change at all. We see evidence that while his death is tragic, that the organization and the associations that he has is continuing. And I think actually we may even see them get stronger as this kind of renews their resolve in the fight against al-Qaida.

ZAVIS: Initially when this happened, there were threats to sort of take the law into their own hands and to revenge attacks and so on. Has there been any sign of that since then?

REAR ADM: No there hasn't. And as a matter of fact, probably one of the best news here is that now the Ministry of Interior is leading the investigation in the death of Sheik Sattar. And what I can tell you about that, what I do know, is that the MOI currently has ten suspects in their custody. Not in our custody, in their custody

that are being held here in Baghdad, in Rusafa. That the lead in the investigation of his death is with the government of Iraq. Yes, sir.

REP5: Asking question in Arabic.

INT: Question to Admiral REAR ADM. Last Friday you detained four senior employees at the Baghdad International Airport, and there was a joint operation at the military academy in Rustamiyah. Could you give us the latest information about the investigations concerning these two incidents? You also detained an Iranian delegation in Iran and this caused an economical problem. How would you comment about this?

REAR ADM: The first two operations that you referred to are actually jointly conducted with the Iraqi security force with the full awareness and cooperation, and in fact initiation, of the Iraqi security force. My understanding is that there were three people detained at Baghdad International, not four. These individuals had been involved in criminal activity to include kidnapping. And the appropriate...I think it's a good way to describe the circumstance where the commitment of the government of Iraq to the rule of law is being demonstrated when you see people who are in positions of responsibility being held accountable. And in fact, if you see that they're carrying on criminal activity that they'll be detained and held accountable. And I expect that they'll be held accountable for their actions within the Iraqi judicial system. In the case of the military college, that was also a Ministry of Defense initiated process. There had been two commandants. One had been murdered and then another commandant over there had been kidnapped and then subsequently was released. And so those activities were conducted in order again to take specific action to apply the rule of law and to ensure that people

who are part of institutions that people should be able to trust are held accountable for their actions and will be removed and again be addressed through the Iraqi judicial system. And then the final part was the question regarding the Iranian. The Iranian Quds force officer that was detained was clearly an Iranian Quds force officer. He was involved in the facilitation of smuggling of weapons and munitions into Iraq from Iran. He also was responsible for training of extremist elements here in Iraq to conduct activities and operations that would undermine the government of Iraq and also to target the coalition and Iraqi security forces. Where we're coming from...and you mentioned there was economic hardship applied with the Iranians closing the border. The claims that this man was anything other – that he was a businessman instead of a member of the Quds force – I'd find it hard to believe that they would close the border for a businessman. But that said, we are not looking to attempt to do anything other than support the government of Iraq. And as I said before, the government of Iran, the leadership has publicly stated to the Prime Minister here in Iraq that they are committed to supporting a stable and secure relationship between the two. Our perspective on this really is two-fold. One is under the U.N. National Security Resolution that authorizes the operation of the Multinational Force. Part of our charter is to deal with security threats and risks to the legitimate government of Iraq. And anytime you have activity, of weapons smuggling, and people who are being trained to attack Iraqi security forces and coalition forces and Iraqi people, by the way, innocent people that are suffering from these weapons, we are compelled by our professional obligation to take action on that. And then a second part of that is of course our own consideration of force protection. And when we see activity that is

going on that is ultimately costing American soldiers their lives, we're going to take action and take appropriate steps and do everything that we can to prevent that from happening. That said we're not looking to try to over hype this or inflame the situation. We're playing it exactly straight. We're focused on our responsibilities here as part of the, under the authority of the U.N. Security Council resolution that created the Multinational Force, and also interested in protecting our troops from a force protection point of view. Actually behind you. Everybody gets one before anybody gets two, you know.

GALI: Thank you. Andrew Gali from OFP. The toll so far for September for U.S. military deaths is the lowest in fourteen (14) months I think. And for the last four months the figure has been going down each month. To what extent do you think this reflects that the surge is beginning to work? Or do you think there are other factors playing into this?

REAR ADM: I would assess that it's a combination of a number of factors. But the surge unquestionably is what's been the catalyst that's created the opportunity to have more forces operating in more places at the same time and to deny al-Qaida and the extremists safe haven and to take away sanctuaries. So I would assess the reduction of casualties...first of all, the casualty figures are still too high, so we're not in any way resting on any laurels. The violence levels in Iraq are too high. The trends are certainly in the right direction. And all of the statistical means that we use to measure what's going here are encouraging and in the right trend. But the violence levels are still too high, and we don't...there's no sense we've accomplished what we want to accomplish here. We still have a lot of hard work to do. But I would attribute the reduction that you see to a number of factors and

the surge being the catalyst. I think it would be responsible for all of those other factors coming together. Do you have any thoughts on that?

BRIG-GEN: I concur completely. Our situation in al-Anbar's a little bit unique in the fact that with the full-blown partnership with the tribal leaders and with the increased capacity of the Iraqi army and Iraqi police out there. We kind of enjoy a little different picture here. But we think that the surge forces absolutely were the catalyst for this because it just allowed us to be in some places that we had not been able to be with the permanent presence. And that's exactly what it takes to reduce the levels of incidence of violence.

REAR ADM: We'll keep going just for a minute. There's at least two hands up that we'll finish. Sir?

MARQUEZ: Wow. I never get a follow up. This is fantastic.

REAR ADM: Okay. Forget it. No.

MARQUEZ: Exactly. Following up...you said it's a difficult battle space talking about the situation given all the high profile civilian deaths that have occurred fairly recently in Iraq. Maybe you both can talk about that a little bit. How much more difficult is it? And is playing it straight by the rules and by announcing, in front of the Iraqi press especially, that there is no change in the rules of engagement here and they're just find. I think Iraqis might have a hard time believing that. I mean most Iraqis...an ABC News poll showed that they really don't see the American military presence here as necessarily positive. And if I can take another crack at the missile thing...Have enough missiles of those, the heat-seeking missiles, been found to constitute and escalation in the level of aggression by the Iranians here? Is there some context you can put it in?

REAR ADM: I'll take the first crack at this, the way the coalition forces are viewed. You know

I think one of the best things that's happened from the surge has been the fact that those additional troops are...first of all, the change in our strategy of going from operating off of large forward operating bases and kind of commuting to the war...now instead we're in the neighborhoods, we're living in the neighborhoods, we're operating in the neighborhoods. I'm convinced that the greatest tool and the greatest strength of this overall is the fact that the Iraqi people are now having an opportunity to interact with American troops on a day-to-day basis. And wherever American troops are interacting on face-to-face, day-to-day basis with the Iraqi people, that's a good thing. You look all over the world, and you see where American troops have interacted with people in other lands, in Germany, Japan, Korea. You look over history, and ultimately the more interaction you have between American troops and the local people is going to be a good thing ultimately, I'm convinced of that. I'll let you take your crack at that. In regards to the Misog-1, there had been enough of them found that we have talked about it now. And anytime you have a sophisticated surface-to-air...in other words we've brought this out. We've said that we've found these things; we've seen them deployed. That's significant in its own right. I think you can appreciate the fact that now that we've found enough of these things to talk about them is of note in its own right. Yeah. You'll pull this out one little strand at a time.

BRI-GEN: You've said more than I would have.

REAR ADM: Yeah all right.

BRI-GEN: Let me talk a little bit about the ROE, and I don't mean to be flippant about this at all. But honestly I don't feel qualified to comment on ROE from the Iraqi

perspective. Seriously. I look at it from our side, from an American commander with what my troops need. Again as I told you, I think it's clear. I think it's unambiguous. And I think it provides the proper level of protection for the Iraqi people as well. Okay. Given that any time that you're at war it's a dangerous place. And understand that bad things happen anytime you're at war. Some are regrettable. But I've got to tell you I think again that if you went down a road here a little bit about what the Iraqi people think. Then I tell you what I would recommend you do when you come to al-Anbar. Why don't you go see the tribal sheikhs and ask them if they're tired of the American troops being in al-Anbar. Let them answer the question for you. That's the Iraqi side of the answer that you need, and I can't provide it for you.

REAR ADM: Okay. One question there. Last one.

ZAVIS: Thank you. If the concern is the Iranian support that's particularly going to rogue elements of Jaish al-Mahdi, why is it that the individuals that have been, or at least the individuals that we know of that have been detained, have been detained in the Kurdish regions of Iraq in [unintelligible] Hakim's compound, not in Sadr City or others.

REAR ADM: I think you'd have to ask the Quds force that question. I can't answer it for you. I would like to thank you for coming out this afternoon. This is my last press conference after almost a year here. Some of my most memorable afternoons have been spent with you and I appreciate your patience. It's been an honor for me to serve in the Multinational Force and to be a member of this Multinational Force and to serve with brothers like Mark BRI-GEN. I have a whole new appreciation and respect for journalists, especially the difficult challenges of reporting in a war

zone. I know that and understand that courage is just not a military virtue, and it takes a lot of courage, especially on the part of the Iraqi media to do your jobs.

And I publicly salute you for that. And then finally, the last thing I would say is to the Iraqi people. I respect and honor you and your country. And I wish you all the best. There will always be one part of me that will be cheering from afar. But it's been an honor to serve with you all. Thanks for joining me today.

BRI-GEN: Thank you and good luck in your future.

REAR ADM: Thanks, Mark.

END OF INTERVIEW