

PRESS CONFERENCE:

**Major General Kevin J. Bergner, Multi-National Force - Iraq Spokesman
Mr. Phil Reeker, Consular to the Ambassador, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad**

DATE:

December 4, 2007

TRANSCRIBED BY:

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**Maj. Gen. Kevin Bergner
Mr. Phil Reeker**

REPORTERS:

Ann Simmons from The Los Angeles Times

REPORTERS 1-10

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

...example of the tough fight that's underway every day in Iraq is illustrated by one recent action against a terrorist named Abu Maysara. On November 17th, northeast of Samarra, coalition forces killed a senior al-Qaeda in Iraq terrorist named Abu Maysara along with five other al-Qaeda in Iraq terrorists. Abu Maysara, also known as Abu Basha'ir, served as a senior adviser to Abu Ayyub al Masri, the Egyptian-born leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Originally from Syria, Abu Maysara was responsible for providing extremist guidance and justifications on terrorist matters to Abu Ayyub al-Masri. He also provided logistical support to al-Qaeda operations and was a key leader in the al-Qaeda in Iraq media network. Abu Maysara's terrorist activities in Iraq began at least three years ago. He fought against Iraqi and coalition forces in Fallujah in 2004 while serving as a senior advisor to then al-Qaeda in Iraq's leader, Musab al-Zarqawi. He also ran an illegal court in Fallujah responsible for the brutal murders of countless innocent Iraqis. He was captured by coalition forces in November of 2004 using aliases and fake identification cards. In March of this year, along with a group of foreign terrorists, he escaped from the Iraqi detention facility in Fadush[ph]. Abu Maysara was killed during an intelligence-driven raid as I said, northeast of Samarra. During that operation, coalition forces were targeting al-Qaeda in Iraq media

networks; specifically a building which was being used to produce al-Qaeda propaganda. In the weapons systems video of the operation that you'll see running behind me, you'll see two coalition soldiers approach the targeted building on the upper right of the screen. As the ground force nears the building, they received heavy gunfire from inside. The ground forces then called four of the terrorists inside the building to stop firing and to come out. When they failed to surrender their arms, an air weapons team was called in to help neutralize the threat. And you'll then see an air-launched weapon which is delivered against the structure. As the ground forces entered this destroyed building, they discovered three of the terrorists were wearing suicide vests and one of the vests had detonated during the operation. Abu Maysara was positively identified through DNA evidence after the operation. This terrorist was one of 40 senior al-Qaeda in Iraq leaders that were captured or killed by coalition and Iraqi security forces in November. Of the 40, 9 were killed and 31 were captured. Four were senior-level Emirs. Nine were Emirs or cell leaders involved in improvised-explosive devices. Eight were foreign terrorist facilitators. Six were involved in media and propaganda cells. And the remaining 13 were facilitators of logistics, communications, and finances. Of that group of al-Qaeda terrorists, ten of them, who were the senior most of that group captured or killed, are shown on this slide. Ibrahim

Abd Ibrahim Husayn was captured in Tikrit and was a foreign terrorist facilitator who has links to networks outside Iraq who are bringing foreign terrorists into the country. Dhakir Sabah Ghafil ‘Inad, captured in Balad was a foreign terrorist facilitator in Salah ad Din Province. He was also involved in financing and movements of the foreign terrorists and the network in Iraq. Diyah Alawan Ahmed Khamus, captured in Baghdad, was a leader of the foreign terrorist facilitator network as well that operated in the Baghdad belts. Imad Falih Hasan ‘Ali, captured in Baghdad, coordinated with networks outside Iraq—again with foreign terrorists. And ‘Ala’ Muhammad ‘Abbas Husayn, captured in Mosul, was a vehicle-borne IED cell leader who also worked with vehicle-borne IED explosives in the Baghdad network. Abu Harith, who was killed in Kirkuk, was the Emir of Kirkuk. And Talal Abdul Aziz, known as Abu Tiba[ph], was killed in Samarra and was the Emir of Samarra. We have previously announced the deaths of both of these Emirs and they had both also replaced AQI leaders that our forces operated against in August. ‘Aqil Khaz’al ‘Abd Jasim, captured in Baghdad, was a VBIED cell leader who tried to reconstitute Baghdad’s network of VBIEDs. And Thamir Muhammad ‘Alaywi Muslih, captured in Baghdad, was the overall Emir of the VBIED cells that operated in Baghdad and was behind some of the infrastructure bombings and attacks against civilians and security

forces. Following up on successful operations in the north with Operation Iron Hammer that captured or killed hundreds of terrorists and found and cleared several large ammunition caches, the Multi-National Division in the north has recently launched a new operation known as Operation Iron Reaper. Operations involve four U.S. brigade combat teams and three Iraqi Army divisions. And the purpose of the operation is to continue the pursuit of al-Qaeda and advance the efforts that have already been accomplished in the northern provinces. Within the first three days of the operation, often working on tips from the local citizens, Iraqi security and coalition forces discovered and destroyed several weapons caches. Previous operations in northern Iraq began the process of improving security in the north and building confidence. The increasing confidence has now paved the way for some 6,000 concerned local citizens volunteering to improve security in their towns and improve the security overall throughout northern Iraq. As security improves, Iraqi citizens continue to step forward to work with Iraqi and coalition forces to reduce the violence in Iraq. Last Thursday, for example, in Kirkuk, Iraqi and coalition security forces discovered a large weapons cache hidden under a cement slab in a Kirkuk home. A tip from an Iraqi citizen led to the cache which consisted of more than 600 mortars, 70 rockets, and two 120-millimeter mortar tubes. In the Mansour District of Baghdad, some

1,100 security volunteers have now been screened and vetted for training as Iraqi police. While waiting for their training to begin, these individuals are working in conjunction with security forces in the area to help secure their neighborhoods by manning checkpoints, helping in searching vehicles, and protecting the streets. These courageous citizens are a further signal of the collective resolve in Iraqi communities at the local level today working together with citizens, security forces, tribal, and government leaders to reduce violence and help further isolate extremists. The positive trends that we've seen in Baghdad and throughout Iraq are also, in part, attributable to al-Sayed Muqtada al-Sadr's call to halt attacks and his followers that are upholding his pledge of honor to cease attacks. We continue to exercise restraint for those who are honoring his pledge. And coalition and Iraqi forces will continue to fulfill their mission to the Iraqi people and protect them from the criminals who violate this pledge of honor. Amidst the improving statistical trends, growing courage, and the confidence of the local citizens and their security forces, this remains a tough fight and it's one that requires a sustained effort by both coalition and Iraqi forces; sustained over time and sustained through their courage and the patience to see it through. And now I'll turn to my friend, Phil Reeker. Phil.

MR. REEKER: Thank you, General. Thank you very much. And ladies and gentlemen, as-salāmu `Alaykum. Thank you for being here. We...many of us saw each other just two days ago when we were joined by the Deputy Secretary of State, John Negroponte, who finished his almost week-long visit in Iraq with a press conference here before you. You know that the Deputy Secretary was in Iraq for almost a week and visited nine locations in eight provinces throughout the country and, of course, had the opportunity to meet with Iraqi local and provincial officials as well as members of the security forces, members of our Provincial Reconstruction Teams and, of course, the Iraqi national leadership here in Baghdad. You will recall that the deputy secretary noted for all of you his encouragement by the advancements that he's seen on this visit to Iraq, the advancements this country's made toward security, many of the things that General Bergner has noted and outlined, and also on economic revitalization. And so before we take your questions, I did just want to highlight what we believe are two important milestones for Iraq and the Iraqi people in the area of economic revitalization. I think it's worth offering our congratulations to the Government of Iraq for reaching its 2007 budget target; that is a target of \$30.2 billion U.S. in revenue by the beginning of December. As you know, the Government of Iraq had budgeted for 2007 predicated upon total revenues of \$30.2 billion of which oil

revenue was to account for \$28 billion. And oil revenues alone have reached U.S. \$30.2 billion by the first of December so that's an entire month before the end of the fiscal year at the end of 2007. There are obviously many reasons for this success. Many individuals deserve praise in their part in terms of ensuring the solidity of the Government of Iraq's financial ledgers. But it's worth noting that the incremental and steady increase in Iraq's oil production, enhanced security, dedicated to export routes, efforts by the Ministry of Oil to diversify export channels, the reopening of the northern export pipeline through Turkey, all of those are important elements that have allowed the Government of Iraq to meet this important milestone early this year and continue working for the benefit of the people of Iraq. And, of course, we, on behalf of the people of the United States, remain pledged to do our part to continue our programs to assist the Government of Iraq ensuring the ability to execute these budgets, the wise use of resources and revenues. So once again, we note that important milestone. I'd also like to highlight—and I believe I even have a slide this time with a nice picture—to congratulate on behalf of the U.S. Embassy and Multi-National Forces-Iraq, congratulate our Iraqi partners for the successful opening this past week of the Mosul Airport with the inauguration of a flight of Hajj pilgrims. It was really a tremendous amount of tireless work by many, many Iraqis and supportive

American partners who were able to help Mosul Airport process its first commercial passenger operation since 1993. And an Iraqi Airways 737 jet aircraft, flight 019, landed on December 2nd at 5:30 in the afternoon and then 152 Hajj pilgrims were processed and boarded. And at 10:30 that evening, Iraqi Airways flight 20 departed Mosul bound for Baghdad where those pilgrims were able to transfer to a flight onto Saudi Arabia. And a second flight departed on December 3rd. And these flights, of course, will continue throughout December and January. This is, I think, a success that is a very fine example of multiple organizations working together here in Iraq on behalf of the Iraqi people including the Ninawa Provincial Government, the Ministry of Transportation, the Hajj Committee, our Provincial Reconstruction Team, the Multi-National Forces Division-North, the Embassy, and the Iraq Civil Aviation Authority. Just note that the airport in Mosul is owned by the Ministry of Transportation and the 30,000 square foot, refurbished terminal at Mosul Airport now has a passport control area, customs inspection halls, substantial meet-and-greet areas, arrival and departure halls. And they have turned that airport facility...the terminal over the Iraq Civil Aviation Authority. The U.S. Government spent some \$3.2 million on refurbishing that facility as well as investing over \$10.3 million in the air traffic control tower and navigational aids. So this was a moment to cheer.

I think it's a significant step for the revitalization of the economy, not just in Mosul but throughout northern Iraq. So with that highlight, I think we'd both be happy to take your questions. Thank you.

REP1: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: To Mr. Reeker from the [unintelligible] Press. As a counselor to the Ambassador, how do you view the Iraqi policy? Do you think that there are no kind of disputes or disagreements among the Iraqi politicians that recently emerge inside the COR? And a question to General Bergner concerning al-Qaeda. Based on what you've said about the capturing and killing, do you think that al-Qaeda now has new plans of launching new kind of attacks against civilians?

MR. REEKER: Well, on your first question, I think it goes without saying that in any democracy there are going to be incidents that arise from time to time that cause tensions within parliaments. That goes for the Iraqi Council of Representatives as it does within our own U.S. Congress—and really, in any democracy around the world. This is a vital function of democracy—the give-and-take, the debate that is necessary to take place to make governance happen, to work on behalf of the people. What we have said so often is that it's time now for the Government of Iraq, that is the executive branch as well

as the Council of Representatives, to work together to find mechanisms and accommodations where they can resolve questions necessary to move ahead, to take advantage of the positive developments we've seen in security here in Iraq, to work on the political sector as well as the economy; to move forward on behalf of the people of Iraq. That's what leaders are elected to do. That's what their people expect them to do. And so the debates, differences, all kinds of challenges are part of any democracy or part of any system of governance. That, in fact, can be positive but we need to capture and harness that energy and use it to move forward on the important political processes that will help the Iraqi people move ahead toward the long-term stability, security, and prosperity which they so much deserve and so much yearn for.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

And to follow up on your second question, there is no question that al-Qaeda in Iraq remains a dangerous and a vicious threat to the Iraqi people, to the security forces, and the coalition forces. The progress that has been made in the last few months has seen an affect that's really been achieved by reducing the safe havens, the operating bases that al-Qaeda had sought to operate from. And so we continue to focus on keeping up the momentum that has been achieved by our forces, Iraqi forces, and the Iraqi people in changing the dynamic. But this will require a sustained fight and it

will...as I described today, they are a continuing threat and they are one that we continue to have to fight very hard against. The increasing courage of the Iraqi people at the local level to work with their security forces and with the coalition forces is making a significant difference in reducing the places that al-Qaeda can work from, reducing their freedom of movement, and providing both Iraqi and coalition forces a much better opportunity to help protect the citizens of Iraq. Al-Qaeda continues to try to seek spectacular attacks which were so damaging and continue to be so damaging in inciting sectarian tensions. And so we still have a tough fight ahead of us even amidst the progress that we discussed today. Shukran.

REP2: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question from a Japanese newspaper. I have two questions for...to General Bergner. Do you have any statistics, any recent statistics, that show the reduction of the violence ever since Operation Fardh al-Qanoon started? The second question; there was period up there that things were calm but the suicide bombers returned again this month. So why has another increase in the suicide bombers particularly in Diyala Province?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Well, let me start with your second question. As I mentioned

earlier, this will require a sustained and determined commitment on the part of Iraqi and coalition forces and if you think back to just a few months ago and the circumstance that the Iraqi people in Diyala were exposed to and al-Qaeda's intention to turn Baqubah into the capital of a caliphate, the illegal courts that the Iraqi or that the al-Qaeda in Iraq terrorists were running, the way that they had hijacked the public distribution system and medical supplies for the Iraqi people, it shows you the lengths that these terrorists will go to to subvert the people of Iraq. And so the level of effort that is required in Diyala Province is one that we understand. It's one that the Iraqi people, their security forces, and the coalition forces are taking great efforts to operate against. And the operation that I described earlier is part of that and a continued effort by Multi-National Division-North—these four brigade combat teams and three Iraqi Army divisions—to continue to put the pressure on the al-Qaeda forces there. The al-Qaeda terrorists and their operating bases there are continuing to be the target of our operations but this will continue to be a tough fight as I said. There have been some statistical improvements. If you look across Iraq, attacks are at a level not seen since January of 2006. There's been a decrease of some 60% in attacks since the surge in operations began in June of 2007. And so if you look in just about every category—whether it be the reduction in the number of attacks, fewer civilian

casualties—you see some encouraging trends. But those have to be understood in the context that Iraq remains a violent place. It's not as violent now as it was a year ago but it is still a violent place and it is still a place that is beset by many challenges and many problems. So we're...on one hand we're encouraged by the statistics that show the collective result, really, of the Iraqi people, their security forces, and the coalition's efforts, but we continue to know that this is going to be a difficult fight. It's one that isn't going to be like turning on a light switch where you go from dark to light. And it won't be one where there is steady, uninterrupted progress; there will be setbacks and there will be difficult times as you mentioned, for example, in Diyala, where we will see a period of attacks as the terrorists try to reassert themselves. And so it is one that, as I said, requires a sustained and concerted effort over time even amidst the encouraging statistics that show the collective result of really, really courageous work by security forces and the Iraqi people. Shukran.

REP3: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question from an Iran newspaper. Is there any kind...any program to join...or the awakening groups to the Iraqi Army and police and if there is any kind of program, do you have a timetable? When will it start and how? And does this have to do with the political disputes

that are now ongoing on the...that come on the political side and groups?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

First of all, let me say that from the inception of this effort—which is a reflection of the courage of the Iraqi people at the local level to step forward and turn against the extremists in their communities to work with their security forces and work with the coalition forces—this has always been about helping the people of Iraq come together and counter the extremists that are in their communities. The way that it has taken shape is first and foremost by a decision on the part of Iraqi citizens to start fighting al-Qaeda and other extremists, to start working with their security forces and the coalition force. Through that process, there is a screening and a vetting process that takes place. And there is an effort right away to help link them to the legitimate security forces of Iraq so that they are well-coordinated and supervised and there is teamwork. Some of those individuals will seek to join the Iraqi security forces and as you saw from, I think, my friend Abdul-Kareem's announcement yesterday from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Interior is now beginning to take over the contracts for many of those local citizens and formally integrate the pay and support for those forces under the umbrella of the Ministry of Interior for the Government of Iraq. An important step. And that is also going to lead to some number of

those forces being formally trained in the police academies of the Ministry and then taking their place as trained and fully-equipped policemen much as we've seen already in the community of Abu Ghraib. So that process is underway. The Government of Iraq has taken important steps now to begin broader screening and vetting that will allow those individuals to come under the...to join, actually, the ranks of the Iraqi security forces and continue to work under the current situation in the communities that they're now protecting. So both of those arrangements are now increasingly a result of Iraqi leadership.

UNIDENTIFIED: Off-microphone comment.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** Yeah.

REP4: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: How much time do you think it will take to join those...to put them and the security people to the Iraqi security forces? And we know that they take salaries from the American forces right now.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:** Well, actually the question of their salaries is the point that I'm getting at. That's a commitment that the Ministry of Interior has now announced that they will take responsibility for. I think the

number was around 12,000 in the city of Baghdad. And it is also happening and will continue to help Iraq...those local volunteers pursue involvement in the legitimate security forces of Iraq in other communities as well. The question of timing is a difficult one. It's one where it has to be done in such a fashion that it doesn't create an unhelpful impact on the security in these communities. It has to be done at a pace that the police academies can absorb and train these individuals. And it has to be done at a pace that the Ministry's personnel and finance and administrative systems can support. So those are really the pacing items, if you will, that will determine exactly how quickly it proceeds. But I think the important point here is to come back to the fact that there is a commitment there to absorb and involve these courageous citizens now into the legitimate security arrangements under the Ministry of Interior. Shukran.

REP5:

Ann Simmons from The LA Times. There was also mention yesterday that a lot of those volunteers would actually end up in some sort of civilian positions. What kinds of positions are being discussed? And secondly, there was some report of an audio statement posted on a website today by Abdul al-Baghdadi[ph] calling for a renewed bombing campaign. I was wondering if you could comment at all on the authenticity of the statement and your

reaction to it.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

To your first question, there are some number of those concerned local citizens who will want to seek civilian employment once a level of security and stability can be achieved in their communities. And so there need to be employment opportunities, formal job training programs, vocational...technical kinds of programs that are available to them and are designed to help them make that transition from contributing as part of a security force to contributing to the civilian economy of their country. There are a couple of programs underway that USAID is already involved in in terms of vocational and technical training. And we are working with the Government of Iraq. The Government of Iraq has established a committee that is looking at the cross-ministerial effort that will be necessary between the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Industry and Minerals, and all of that in a way that helps create the employment opportunities, the job-training opportunities for those individuals so that's the way it is proceeding. And the purpose, again, is to help those individuals that aren't going to pursue a specific position in the security forces have alternatives that provide...that help them provide for the needs of the families and contribute to the economy of their communities. Yes, ma'am. Go ahead.

REP5: Are these programs specifically aimed at the volunteers? Or are they general employment programs that will also...take...?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: I think if you looked at them right now in their broadest sense they're more general programs. But there is an effort underway to help target some of those and to help fill the needs in places where there may not be a specific program that would also address the civilian employment for those volunteers. And your second part of your question was about an audio tape purportedly to be from this fictitious character called Umar al-Baghdadi[ph] which I have not heard specifically so I can't really give you an assessment other than to just point out that the whole notion behind this character is to try to put an Iraqi face on the al-Qaeda organization. And it's something that we've talked about in our press conferences in the past and talked a little bit about how that was really an effort by something that is largely a virtual organization in terms of the name and the actual organization of it. To put a voice and an identity on that so that still is what we believe to be the case on this tape. Yes, sir.

REP6: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: [unintelligible] Question to General Bergner. First question is about

the awakening troops and groups. Do they receive instructions from the American troops or from the Iraqi security forces? And the second question is regarding the machines that detect the explosives. How many of those machines are actually now working in Baghdad?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Okay. To your first question, the relationship between Iraqi security volunteers and the Iraqi security forces and coalition forces is one of teamwork. And in some communities where there are both Iraqi forces and coalition forces, they work very closely with both. In fact, I've seen pictures in Amiriyah and some other places just recently with the Iraqi Army forces doing joint patrols with the security volunteers in their community. I was in the town of Garguliyah[ph] a few days ago and I sat down with the...talked with the concerned local citizens there, Iraqi security volunteers, if you will, and a special police brigade commander from the Iraqi security forces and listened to him and how he was working directly with the concerned local citizens there and how the company and battalion commander from coalition forces were also part of that teaming effort. And so it is a result...it is a collaboration where all three are involved. And it is one where the best arrangement is when the Iraqi forces and the security volunteers are working very closely together. Shukran. Okay. I'm sorry. Was there another part?

REP6: Speaks in Arabic.

INT: Regarding the machines that detect the explosives of the car bombs.
How many of those are working actually in Baghdad?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Yeah. That's not a number that I have right here with me. But I will get you the background on the kinds of technology that are being applied to help Iraqi forces and coalition forces provide the technical means to locate explosives and how that's progressing. So we'll follow up with you after this on the details. Shukran. All right. One more question. Yes, ma'am. Actually...so that's two more questions because I was pointing at her. So go ahead.

REP7: Sorry. You'd mentioned earlier the halt on the Mahdi Army. What are your plans and expectations for if and when that freeze is lifted?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Well, the first is I think we have to understand that the opportunity that this is creating for all the people of Iraq to have an improved security environment, the opportunity that it's giving coalition forces to focus more intensely on al-Qaeda in Iraq, and the opportunity that it's giving the people of Iraq and their government to improve the conditions for reconciliation to take place is very significant. And it is clearly helping in all three of those capacities.

And so we hope that the leadership will continue to find the courage and the commitment to fulfill the obligations, the pledge of honor that has been made. And as I mentioned in my remarks, the indications are they are. And we acknowledge that and we encourage that. And we join the Government of Iraq in welcoming that. And so we're working hard and I think the Government of Iraq is working hard to sustain that commitment and encourage the continued commitment in the future. Yes, ma'am.

REP8: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: I have two question from....Today the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that the Presidency Council is on the last stage of preparing the last station for the presence of the American forces for Iraq to present to the Security Council. What is your comment? And the second question, there is some distrust between the American leaders...commanders and the Iraqi commanders so how do you think you could solve this whole trust issue between the Iraqi and the American commanders?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Do you want to talk to the first one? I'll answer the second one while you...

MR. REEKER: While I finish something...

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

In terms of the relationship between Iraqi security force leaders and that of the coalition forces, I think I'd just say very clearly it's actually quite good. And I would say that at every level whether it be from the Chief of Defense and General Becker and General Petraeus, whether it be at General Abud and General Odierno's level, or whether it be at the division, brigade, and battalion level, it is actually quite good. We have great respect for the Iraqi forces. For the courage and their selfless sacrifice that they're making and I speak from personal experience as well. General Abdul Amir, for example, the 6th Division Commander. He used to be a brigade commander when I was in Mosul in my last assignment here. I have enormous respect for him and I could say the same about General Khorshid, who's the 3rd Iraqi Army Division Commander in Mosul. I'd say the same about General Othman, who I know as well, who's now the 8th Iraqi Army Division Commander. So I think actually the strength of that professional relationship between soldiers, especially soldiers on the battlefield, is actually very strong and we have great respect for the Iraqi leadership. Shukran.

MR. REEKER:

In regards to your first question, I think what you're referring to, of course, is the work on the renewal of the United Nations Security Council resolution that provides the mandate for Multi-National

Forces to be here supporting the people of Iraq and the Government of Iraq. As you know, recently our leaders, both President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki and the leaders of Iraq, signed a Declaration of Principles. That was, of course, the first step in a process. It was a statement of intent, a shared statement that establishes the common principles by which we will frame our future relationship which will help us move closer to normalized, bilateral relations between our two countries looking forward in the political and diplomatic front, the economic front, as well as the security relationship. This is something Iraq's leadership has asked for, an enduring relationship with the United States. And, of course, as the President and many other U.S. leaders including just this week Deputy Secretary Negroponte have also said, we seek an enduring relationship with a democratic Iraq which we believe has a very positive future. And so as we work to build that relationship in a sustainable way we are working with our Iraqi partners on the second step which will be a final UN mandate as you mentioned. The renewal of this Multi-National Force—Iraq chapter 7 UN mandate for a final year, followed then by a third step which will be the negotiation of the detailed arrangements to codify our bilateral relationship. So this is, I think, a very positive process. I think it's positive for Iraq to see utilizing the gains that we have talked about in terms of security, to move forward, to make 2008 a year in

which, as the Prime Minister has said, they can concentrate domestically on issues like services while maintaining the progress on security but also work with international partners like the United States to develop a bilateral relationship for our long-term work together. As we have said, Iraq is increasingly able to stand on its own, but will not have to stand alone. And that's the process that we are dedicated to working with our Iraqi partners on. Shukran.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

That's the nice part about having my political partner here with me.

MR. REEKER:

What can you add?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Yes, sir. Very last question. Yes, ma'am. Okay.

REP9:

Asks question in Arabic.

INT:

I have many questions and I don't think we have time for all these. But a few months ago there was a resolution of mixing or joining the militias with the Ministries of Defense and Interior and we suffered from the militias a lot. Regarding fusing those militias, so how did the Iraqi Government took this decision? And we know that the militias inside the security forces are the ones who commit acts of terrorism. Secondly, there is a statement by the Ministry of Finance to Prime Minister Maliki of joining members of Hezbollah,

around 100 names of persons—over 215 persons—and join them to the Iraqi security forces. And the third question is what's the point of bringing the militias inside the security forces? And we are going through this horrible security situation and we're still...there are still displaced families. And I think that the security improvement is due to what the tribal groups are doing in the awakenings and not the Iraqi security forces.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, I guess I would start answering your question by saying that there is clearly a collective resolve in local communities that is enabling the improvements in security. And it is, indeed, a result of tribal leaders and their commitments. It is, indeed, a result of government leaders working more closely with their security forces. It is also a result of local citizens who are willing to now help protect their communities and work with their security forces, the legitimate Government of Iraq, and frequently in the...with the commitment of their tribal leaders. And when the leaders of the tribes are now encouraging their sons to join the Iraqi security forces and to work with the government and with the legitimate security forces of Iraq, that's something that is important to recognize for the courage of those individuals who do that at great risk. And it's also important to note that it is done after a screening and vetting of the individuals so that it does not lead to a problem

inside the security forces as they accept new sons of Iraq to serve their country. So your point is a good one and it is one where there are risks involved. And those risks have to be consciously understood by the security leaders of Iraq. And there have to be steps taken, like screening and vetting, like commitments that are signed and fulfilled, that will help ensure that they actually provide a helpful result in improving the security in Iraq. And so I think your point and your concerns are good and I think that they are being understood, honestly, not only by the coalition but also by the Iraqi leadership as well. Shukran. She has a follow up. Yes, ma'am.

REP9: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: You mentioned that...about Muqtada al-Sadr...about freezing the activities of [unintelligible]. We know that...there's only [unintelligible] but there's also...as Iraqis we know that there are other militias that come from outside Iraq and they...and now they're infiltrated into the Iraqi Government. And there's some senior figures inside the Parliament and there are some...certain names that I can't mention about, you know, give you some names because we're afraid to be threatened. There's a full statement and we can give you that statement so that you can take a look at the names. And until now the government is not doing anything about this; there's no use. So how can we make sure that we will ensure

our safety if the Iraqi Government is not doing anything?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

I'm sorry. Just tell me the last part of the question again. Protect our safety and I didn't hear the last part.

INT:

If the Iraqi Government is not doing its job.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, you raise concerns that reflect those of a citizen of Iraq who is interested in the success of her government and interested in the fulfillment of the democratic process in Iraq. And to me, I take that, your question and your concerns, as something that's encouraging because it shows a citizen's view that wants very much for her government to succeed. My own interactions with Iraqi leaders also tells me the same thing. That the issues that the government of Iraq, your government, is working on today are arguably some of the most difficult foundational issues that any country must come to grips with. They are complex. They are issues that in many other countries have taken years to reconcile and determine the way ahead. And you do it and your government is doing it under extremely difficult circumstances. But they are working on it and they are making progress. And so your concerns and your voice in that is something that I take as an encouragement because, clearly, you're helping your government understand the concerns you have

and what you want them to be aware of. So thank you very much.
Shukran. Yes, sir. Last question unless you had something.

REP10: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question to Mr. Reeker. Concerning the economical[?] situation, yesterday the Minister of Finance, the Iraqi Minister of Finance or Commerce actually, he said that the food ration should be cancelled...the food ration...the distribution of the food ration to the Iraqi people should be cancelled. How would you comment about this?

MR. REEKER: I think primarily first I would say these are decisions that have to be made by Iraqis, by the Iraqi Government in terms of how you implement economic policies; how you make the changes to your economy that may be necessary to move the Iraqi economy forward. We've documented some of the positive aspects in the Iraqi economy. The work on a budget which is vital to implementing this. It's an important part of governance to be able to legislate and pass a budget and then execute that budget, to distribute funds to the provinces and to the people for whom that budget is intended. But how that is done is going to be something that is for Iraqis to decide, for Iraqi leaders with the input of their citizens. And that is what democracy is essentially about. On the

part of the United States and the international community, we have tried and continue to offer many different programs and support in terms of utilizing lessons learned all around the world. Bringing in expertise and experts who can advise in this matter. Our Deputy Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Kimmitt, was here in Baghdad yesterday and today meeting with Iraqi financial officials to discuss a wide variety of issues like debt relief, working with the international financial institutions. Our Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs will also be visiting and working along with our Embassy team and many other experts with Iraqi counterparts to help and advise in terms of how to formulate policies. But ultimately, again I come back to my first point, that these are decisions that must be made through Iraqi processes and by the Iraqi people and implemented by the Government of Iraq. Shukran. Thank you.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Thank you all very much and thank you again for your patience and understanding this afternoon. Shukran jaziilan and ma'salaam.