

PRESS CONFERENCE:

**Mr. Robert Gates, United States Secretary of Defense
Mr. Abd al-Qadir, Iraq Minister of Defense**

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PARTICIPANTS:

**Mr. Robert Gates
Mr. Abd al-Qadir**

REPORTERS:

**Dmitri Sevastapulo from The Financial Times
Lolita Baldor from The Associated Press**

REPORTERS 1-4

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

MOD ABD AL-QADIR:

In the name of God, most merciful, most compassionate, peace be upon you. For the sixth time our...we have this great, dear guest, Mr. Gates, the Secretary of Defense of the United States of America, in support of our just battle against terrorism, the terrorism that has been centralized in Iraq. Mr. Gates arrives at circumstances that are totally different from the circumstances that were there during his previous visits because we have achieved progress in the security operations and the security process up to...so that the security situation is now similar to that of 2004. There are still some points of terrorism or some enclaves of terrorism and we still have a lot of work to do. And we are still taking the worst circumstances into account. What took place between me and Mr. Gates was about what is our in regard to the future and what we must plan for in a practical and accurate way with regards to the arming and equipping and the ways of preparing for receiving the security dossier from the Multi-National Force and, specifically, the American Army. And we must be aware that the meeting that a new Army and a growing Army like the Iraqi Army receiving this dossier and replaces an Army that is so advanced like the American Army. We talked about what we must prepare in terms of requirements within a very accurate plan...scheme and preparing for the requirements of that. I would

like to welcome His Excellency, the Secretary of Defense of the United States, a second time. And I'll give him the chance to...for His Excellency to speak.

**SEC of DEF
GATES:**

Thank you very much. I'd like to thank Minister Abd al-Qadir for joining me and for our talks this evening. I would also like to thank Prime Minister Maliki for hosting me this afternoon. The Prime Minister and I had a productive discussion on a range of issues affecting the future of Iraq. As you know there have been recent months of dramatic change in the security situation across the nation; a decline in violence to levels not seen since the Samarra Mosque bombing nearly two years ago. As a result, there has been a substantial increase in the number of refugees returning home. International investment in Iraq is on the rise. And more than 70,000 Iraqis have taken it upon themselves to defend their neighborhoods. In many parts of the nation, these positive developments have led to a growing sense of normalcy and hope. Earlier today, I made my first visit to Mosul, a city that has seen its share of trouble over the last few years. As operations have pushed al-Qaeda out of the south and the west, there's been a resulting increase in terrorist activities in Mosul and surrounding areas as al-Qaeda tries to establish a new foothold; and yet we have seen the Iraqi troops stand and fight. I was heartened to learn that earlier this

week, the first commercial flight since 1993 departed Mosul: 152 passengers bound for Mecca for the Hajj. One of the main reasons for my visit to Iraq today, was to find out how we can best work together, not only to sustain the momentum of recent months but to build upon it. I know that the Iraqi people are more than up to this challenge. The Maliki government recently took a critical step by signing with us a Declaration of Principles which sets the stage for future U.S.-Iraqi cooperation. The government also has just passed important pension reform. However, much remains to be done. Iraqis who have chosen to fight against al-Qaeda need to be integrated into Iraq's security forces or provided other job opportunities. More than ever I believe that the goal of a secure, stable, and democratic Iraq is within reach. We need to be patient but we also need to be absolutely resolved in our desire to see the nascent signs of hope across Iraq expand and flourish so that all Iraqis can enjoy peace and prosperity. Thank you.

REP1:

Dmitri Sevastapulo, The Financial Times. Mr. Secretary, there are currently 25,000 detainees in U.S. custody in Iraq. Are you concerned that the Iraqi Government will not be in a position to assume custody for these detainees when the Unster[ph] Resolution is replaced with the Bilateral Security Agreement in 2009? And Mr. Minister, when you were negotiating this security agreement you

talked about requirements. What are your requirements from the United States?

UNKNOWN: Speaks in Arabic.

UNKNOWN: Yes.

REP1: The second question was when you were negotiating the security agreement with the United States, what are your requirements from the United States?

**SEC of DEF
GATES:** Do you want me to go? With respect...

UNKNOWN: Speaks in Arabic.

**SEC of DEF
GATES:** Back to the detainees, we are already working on these issues with the Iraqi Government. I'm pleased to say that—and I think that the overall number of detainees actually now has declined somewhat from the numbers you've described—and contrary to our expectations earlier this year, the numbers have not grown as we thought they would and instead, as I've just said, are declining. So I have confidence that we'll be able to work this out with the Iraqis.

MOD ABD AL-QADIR:

Speaks in Arabic.

INT:

With regard to the requirements with the Iraqi Army from the United States of America, this work is continuous on that aspect especially from the beginning of 2006. In addition to the training and the equipping, the building of systems for the Iraqi Armed Forces, especially building the capabilities for the system of fire support with these systems...or ground systems such as the mortars or helicopters at the same time, building the administrative structure. In addition, building the system of command and control. In all these matters there are requirements that have been prepared accurately and carefully and it is specified by years...for each year. We have completed the requirements for 2006 and we are working very extraordinarily to accomplish the requirements of 2007. And we have presented our requirements for the year 2008. We are working vigorously through FMS and through Minsticki[ph] we have within the coalition forces.

REP2:

Masouf[ph] from The Arabic. American officials and Iraqi officials are confirming the improvement in the security situation at percentages that go beyond 50%. My question: In regard to this security improvement, will it be met with withdrawals of American forces? And will we witness sudden withdrawal of American forces

from Iraq? Mr. Abd, I would like to ask about the issue about the tensions between us and Turkey, especially that there is penetrations that took place during the few days. Will this matter be resolved diplomatically or there are any security preparations or using the help of coalition forces in Iraq?

**SEC of DEF
GATES:**

First of all, with respect to the withdrawal of American troops, as General Petraeus announced early in September, the first units not to be replaced actually withdrew, returned home in September. The larger units will begin their withdrawal from Iraq this month. The first brigade combat team will be withdrawn. And assuming conditions remain as they are or continue to improve, an additional four brigade combat teams will withdraw from Iraq by around the end of July. In February-March, General Petraeus will make further recommendations to the president on his evaluation of the security situation and what the prospects for further draw-downs are in the second half of the year.

**MOD ABD AL-
QADIR:**

With regard to the Iraqi-Turkish matter, it is known that the Turkish problem is the presence of the PKK on the Iraqi territories and within the territories of the Kurdistan Province. We held various meetings with the Turkish leaders especially the politicians and parts of the military and we provided many solutions to deal with

this problem in a very practical way. We participated in this respect...we shared this with the Multi-National Force. Until the Turkish forces are working within its territories and the territorial areas only, there is no intervention on a grand scale and matters are limited to some bombing missions, very limited bombing missions. There are some bombing from air as well as from the ground bombing. But with regard to the Iraqi Armed Forces, it is known, of course, the security situation that is prevailing in Iraq but this does not mean that if something happened that can affect our people in the Kurdistan region that we will not stand, of course, without doing anything. We have plans; we have what we can provide to our people in time. And we will coordinate with...vigorously and accurately with the Multi-National Force and with the Government of the Kurdistan region.

REP3:

Mr. Secretary, Lolita Baldor with The Associated Press. As you mentioned a few moments ago there has been, obviously, security gains here in the Baghdad area. However, al-Qaeda has, it appears, shifted to the north. When you met with commanders this morning we understand that commanders have suggested that they could use more combat power in the north. Is this something that you spoke to them about? Do you think this is something that is needed up there now that the gains have been made down here? And is this, indeed,

the next step?

**SEC of DEF
GATES:**

They did indicate to me that they are having a continuing challenge up there. At the same time, they are seeing a much less sophisticated threat than they did months ago or a longer time ago. And where in the past they perhaps were encountering opposition of anywhere from a dozen to two dozen opponents, now it's a handful of people or single fighters. So the nature of the threat has changed even though the challenge remains. What I heard them say was that they were looking forward; that they did need some additional force they felt, particularly west of the river. And they are looking forward to the return to Mosul of a couple of battalions of Iraqi forces that will be rotating out of the Baghdad area as I understand it. And those are the forces that they were talking about to me at least.

REP3:

Will you put more U.S. forces in that area? Will you...

**SEC of DEF
GATES:**

Well, I...first of all, how the forces are allocated within Iraq is up to General Petraeus, not up to me. But that request was not made to me.

UNIDENTIFIED: Next question.

REP4: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Iraqi Channel. My question is to His Excellency, the U.S. Secretary of Defense. After the disappearance of terrorism, the beautiful Baghdad began to emerge. But the Iraqi citizens are angry because of the American heavy equipment that takes the Iraqi...that is touring the Iraqi streets. In addition, some of these troops are taking some governmental buildings as headquarters for, especially in the area of Shapp[ph] and was able to separate some streets in the northern areas. What are the measures that will be taken to remove these from the streets of Baghdad which is crowded in the first place? My question to the Iraqi Minister of Defense: Your Excellency, there are governments that will deliver security from the Multi-National Forces and I assume that you have discussed the transfer of the file with them that you take into account the Iraqi environment because the...most of it is still under the Iraq...American control. So thank you.

**SEC of DEF
GATES:**

First of all, I can understand the nature of the concern with regard to increasingly heavy traffic here in Baghdad. I saw something here today that I have not seen in the previous five visits that I've made; I saw a traffic jam. And I think that the kinds of issues of the use of equipment, the use of buildings, and so on, these are the kinds of

things that can be worked out between the Iraqi Government and MNF-I. Frankly, I think that it bespeaks the progress that we've made that these are the kinds of issues that we're talking about rather than how many people are being killed on the streets of Baghdad every day.

MOD ABD AL-QADIR:

With regard to receiving the security dossier and the issue of the forces, the ground forces cannot work without cover and our fights against terrorism is very special fights in the cities and it always requires the support of helicopters. And there is a complete plan with the Multi-National Force that...to have capabilities by the end of 2009 that can secure fully the support operations by the Iraqi helicopters. The limits of our needs until 2010 of helicopters has been completed. And the process is continuing. We are receiving airplanes that are multipurpose airplanes armed with missiles and air-to-ground as well as automatic weapons and it is sufficient to deal with the situation now. We are working for 2008 to move to the fighting helicopters, helicopter fighters. And we will not leave the Iraqi soldier fighting terrorism without cover. And within this period, our friends from the Multi-National Force are with us and we will replace them not on the ground only but at the air as well. And through a present planning and very accurate planning that have money allocated for it already.

