

**PRESS CONFERENCE:**

**RDML Gregory Smith, Director, Multi-National Force – Iraq Communications Division**

**DATE: November 7, 2007**

**TRANSCRIBED BY: SOS INTERNATIONAL, LTD.**

**PARTICIPANTS: RDML Greg Smith**

**REPORTERS:**

**[Name Unknown] from the Iranian News Agency**

**Amit Paley from The Washington Post**

**[Name Unknown] from American Forces Press Service**

**[Name Unknown] from the Turkish News Agency**

**REPORTERS 1-12**

**\*REP1 = REPORTER 1**

**\*INT = INTERPRETER**

**SMITH:**

Good afternoon. As-Salāmu `Alaykum. How are you? This afternoon I'm going to focus on coalition and Iraqi security forces' operations against Al Qaeda in Iraq. I'll highlight some of the key successes and discuss its impact on reducing AQI's effectiveness to carry out its subversive agenda here in Iraq. This first slide depicts 35 Al Qaeda leaders killed or captured in October. Some of the key captures include six AQI emirs, including the emir of Diyala, the emir of the Five Farms in...south of Baghdad, Huwaysha south of Mosul, Dualwiya east of Samarra, and Baji. Additionally, an emir responsible for teaching extremist, Taliban-like doctrine was also captured. Three cell leaders were killed and three were captured. Two of these captured were responsible for the personal security detail for Ayyub al-Masri, the foreign leader of AQI. 14 of the captured were foreign terrorist facilitators. Attacking these networks is critical to reducing the violence in Iraq. Recent analysis of documents captured from Uthana, a foreign terrorist facilitator killed in September, confirms that approximately 90% of the suicide bombers and bombings are perpetuated by foreign terrorists, not by Iraqis. The captured documents also confirmed that about half of all foreign terrorists who enter Iraq conduct suicide attacks. In addition, six logistics and weapons facilitators and three truck and car bomb leaders were captured. AQI has strived to reconstitute their weakened

car bomb networks and Iraqi and coalition forces are focused on neutralizing this lethal AQI element. This slide shows an additional eight AQI leaders that were captured in October. Four of these worked in the Mosul media or propaganda cell and two were administrators who worked on false documents and AQI finances. The two remaining were involved in AQI senior communications and courier activities. In addition to these 43 AQI leaders, AQI and coalition forces captured two senior leaders of the terrorist group called Tays Mohammed. The group's emir from Mosul as well as a key finance and weapons facilitator were captured on 15 October by Iraqi and coalition forces. Tays Mohammed is affiliated with Ba'athist and previous regime elements and have had a sporadic relationship with AQI. The targeting of AQI leadership and their networks has contributed to the downward trend in violence we are seeing across Iraq. We know, however, that AQI will continue to conduct high-profile attacks and progress will be uneven. AQI is attempting to replace lost leadership and we are continuing to keep pressure on them and their networks. The surge of operations centered in Baghdad and the surrounding belts and up in the Diyala river valley has driven much of Al Qaeda into the rural areas and has caused them to flee northward. Iraqi and coalition forces are targeting AQI as it attempts to reestablish operating areas and safe havens. On Monday, three Brigade combat teams from Multi-National Division –

North and three Iraqi Army Divisions, launched operation “Iron Hammer,” a large scale offensive stretching across four northern provinces. The operation is designed to exploit previous successes against Al Qaeda and set the conditions necessary for continued reconciliation of these key provinces. Iraqi security forces continue to grow stronger; not only in size, but also in effectiveness. Last Saturday, an Iraqi special weapons and tactics team advised by coalition forces, captured an entire extremist cell near Kabassay west of Ramadi. This terrorist cell operated along the highway linking Ramadi and Rupa, conducting road-side bomb and sniper attacks as well as intimidating local security forces and citizens. The precision operation captured all four primary targets in this cell and four other suspects. Concerned local citizens are also having an impact in helping Iraq and coalition forces keep Al Qaeda from neighborhoods cleared during the surge of operations that started in June. There are over 67,000 citizen volunteers working in tandem with security forces. In October, Multi-National Division – North reported finding and clearing 72 weapons caches. Of these, 40 were found by concerned local citizens and we are seeing similar results this month in November. Last Saturday, concerned local citizens in Hora Rajab delivered four 57-millimeter projectiles to coalition forces. And later, the village children...children from the village, led Soldiers to another cache. These weapons are no longer in the hands of Al Qaeda

and will not kill innocent civilians or be used to attack security forces. This past week, 200 concerned local citizens from Al Jarra, south of Baghdad, worked with Iraqi National Police and coalition Soldiers to clear an area between their town and the Tigris River. While doing so, they repulsed an Al Qaeda attack and found multiple improvised explosive devices that the coalition Explosive Ordnance Team later disarmed. While the security situation has improved, we are also focused on working with Iraqis to improve basic services and economic opportunity. On 30 October, coalition forces working with the Qadr neighborhood advisory council, distributed micro-grants to 29 small business owners in Jamaya, located in western Baghdad. Those businesses had been affected by AQI violence. The recipients received between \$2,000 and \$2,500 in grants to help renovate businesses, buy inventory and office supplies, hire workers, and pay for other business-related expenses. Coalition forces have invested over \$2.6 million in micro-grants to Iraqi businesses so far this year. In closing, I want to reiterate that although the numbers of victims and violent incidences and casualties are turning down, difficult days still lie ahead. Al Qaeda in Iraq is still capable of causing damage and fomenting terror. They will continue to attempt to destabilize Iraq by intimidating, kidnapping, and murdering innocent Iraqi civilians. Despite their suffering, Iraqi citizens have made the strongest statement against Al Qaeda. They have rejected Al Qaeda and the

Taliban-like vision they have for Iraq and have stood up regularly against them. An AQI torture cell, recently neutralized in the Hamran Mountains by Iraqi security forces, is a reminder to all of us of the methods these terrorists employ to accomplish their goals. The combination of Al Qaeda's barbaric behavior of torture, execution, and car bombings as well as their extreme, Taliban-like doctrine, have persuaded Iraqi citizens to join the fight and defeat these terrorists. And we salute them all. With that, I'll be happy to take your questions. Sir.

**REP1:** I'll be the brave first. Is it your sense that the dynamic between Al Qaeda and the Sunnis is done? I mean, clearly, the level of violence has dropped because you don't have the Sunni insurgency fueling a lot of the violence at the behest of Al Qaeda and they've been co-opted to a large degree. Is that dynamic done and you're now looking for other threats to the security situation here?

**SMITH:** I think you only have to listen to the voices of the Sunnis themselves; they've spoken out. And it goes to this Taliban-like ideology that was being spread by Al Qaeda. Clearly there were...the torture, the kidnapping, the murder, the rape—all that has had devastating impacts on the Sunni population. But I really believe when they began to look at the future, what it meant in the long term, what this

new ideology was going to mean for them and their families, they were repulsed by that. And I think that is what has made the difference. And whether or not there's been an absolutely clean break completely among all Sunni populations; clearly there's still some pockets inside Iraq that Al Qaeda still has some support. They're still receiving some, obviously, local support for bed down as they move about the country. They're being fed, being watered, if you will, by local Sunni citizens perhaps. And so we still have to work our way through this. But I think as neighborhoods like Diyala and elsewhere have witnessed that kind of torture and that kind of ideology, they have stood up and denied those sanctuaries to the Al Qaeda.

**REP1:** Perspective...is that done...I mean, I understand that in places where it's worked, it's worked but is there any chance of things sliding back toward the balance that we've seen before? From a military perspective, is that piece of the war, for the most part, done?

**SMITH:** It's hard to imagine in places like Al Anbar it slipping back to where the violence could regenerate to levels that we saw just a few months ago. But we're also not in a position yet to say it's irreversible in parts of Iraq where Al Qaeda still has a significant presence. There's a lot of work yet to do. Those operations kicked off with Iron Hammer are suggestive of our efforts of putting that amount of force

north of Baghdad to deal with the remaining elements of Al Qaeda. And we will continue to pursue them where they are and where they go inside Iraq. So we've got work to do, but I think as far as in certain parts of Iraq, clearly the presence of the citizens and the way in which the...they have turned against Al Qaeda is very encouraging and not likely to change. Yes, sir. Please. Michael?

**REP2:** Admiral, you had turned back October Multi-National Forces and ISF rounded up or killed 43 AQI in total?

**SMITH:** That's right.

**REP2:** To what degree, if any, do you track the same kinds of operations or impacts that the concerned citizens, the tribes, the former Sunni insurgents have? I mean, do you have any kind of a measure or metric for that?

**SMITH:** Well, keep in mind that the only other real activity...there is no other real activity that's associated with going after Al Qaeda in a military-like way and obviously we're working very closely with Iraqi security forces. So, I think, collectively we know about what Al Qaeda has been in terms of individuals have been removed, either killed or captured, that's pretty clear. And we represent that

transparently to you all month to month. In terms of other impact, I think it's less so on the military component of it. It's more towards, again, working together. And we're seeing a growth in the partnerships out there between concerned local citizen groups and the Iraqi security forces to deal with that very issue. But I don't...unless your question is suggesting that they themselves have a...are doing military-like activities...

**REP2:** Yeah. They have their own independent campaigns, like say in Zualbah or Radwaniyah where there's, you know, clashes between the tribal forces and, you know, returning or regenerating Al Qaeda forces. I mean, are you tracking that? Cause that's going on as we all know.

**SMITH:** We certainly do in the sense that working...those areas of concerned local citizens are working very closely with Iraqi security forces and working with our Brigade commanders to identify those very engagements that they're having. And again, they're there to protect their neighborhoods and who best knows who belongs in a neighborhood than the local citizens and they're going to deal with it in the way they see measured to do at the time. But yes; we absolutely are aware and do understand the impact that they're having.

**REP2:** So how would you just summarize the nature of their impact on the Al Qaeda network? I mean they're the guys who know where they slept. They're the guys who know where they hid their caches; they're the guys. So in terms of unilaterally or ISF or MNF, overall, how would you describe it? As significant? As pivotal? As...how would you...

**SMITH:** I would say it's very significant and the key sense is this; Al Qaeda now knows it does not have free sanctuary. It now knows it does not have the freedom of movement in Iraq. It now knows that the Iraqi people do not trust them, will not honor their supposed commitment to them because they know it was dishonorable. And because of that, I think, they're on the run and they realize there's less space to maneuver inside Iraq for them to operate in because the Iraqi people are just not going to put up with it. [Unintelligible], please.

**REP3:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Iranian News Agency. In a previous statement by you, you mentioned that the American forces intend to release nine Iranians. Could you please give us some details regarding this? Those detainees, are they armed men or diplomats or visitors? What are they exactly, those nine Iranians?

**SMITH:** First of all, thank you. Yesterday I mentioned that the coalition will be releasing in the coming days nine Iranians that had been detained in varying lengths of detention. And I mentioned that two of those were of the “Irbil 5” that were detained last January. All nine, which are from a group of 20 Iranians currently in detention, have been assessed to no longer be a security threat to Iraq and have no continuing value in terms of maintaining them as detainees. They were all detained for various different reasons and I won’t...there’s not a universal reason why they were detained except for one universal thing and that, of course, is their activities at the time of their detention suggested that there were obviously involved in a criminal activity, illegal activity, or were attacking or directly supporting the attack on coalition, Iraqi, or innocent civilians. All nine have now been judged to, again, not pose a current threat as individuals to the Iraqis’ security and pose no continuing value as individuals in terms of intelligence. So their release is still pending. We’ll have information for you on who they are precisely and when their release occurs at that time, but give us a few more days and we’ll work our way through this. And we’ll be completely open and transparent with you at that time. Please, sir.

**REP4:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** A few minutes ago you mentioned that you gave \$2,000 to the civilians in Dora to provide services there from the terrorists or to provide services there? Is that on the economical level or just to conduct operations?

**SMITH:** The...well, no. This is...the micro-grant program is meant to and designed for the reestablishment of small businesses in areas affected by this war. In this particular instance we were highlighting those that have been affected by Al Qaeda operations. And in this case, they got between \$2,000 and \$2,500 to help rebuild small businesses; to help, pay, buy, and refurbish materials to support the inversion of their storefronts, to buy equipment and to buy supplies. So it's an economic development program designed for small businesses.  
Michael.

**REP5:** Admiral, given that intelligence has indicated from day one that the "Irbil 5" were members of the Quds Force and you're now saying two of these nine being released from the "Irbil 5." You're releasing two of the members of the Quds Force.

**SMITH:** That's correct. The two individuals of "Irbil 5" remain identified as Quds Force associates but their individual threat to this country's security has been deemed to be insignificant as well as their

continuing intelligence value is insignificant as individuals. Quds Force, as you know, has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States; that has not changed. The difference is these individuals do not, themselves, pose a threat to the security of Iraq.

**REP5:** Sir, that's what I was just trying to fathom. So membership in a...if your organization is listed on the FTO as a terrorist organization, your membership alone in that does not deem you to be worthy of detention...sir?

**SMITH:** Well, again, each individual's case will be evaluated. As you know, with all of our detainees, every six months a board of Iraqi and coalition force personnel sit down and view the individual case files...the purpose they were detained originally, what we have learned since their detention about the individual, certainly their...what they've done positively and negatively while in detention. All those factors are considered as we review every single detainee's case. And these individuals, like every other detainee, received that same review and, in these instances, now nine of these individuals are being released as we have released over 300 Iraqis here recently in Suramoni. And if you've seen our notice today, we intend to release a large number of Iraqi citizens tomorrow.

**REP5:** Sir, and these two members of the Quds when they go home, obviously they're currently serving Quds Force members, it's just that now you believe, for now, their current threat has abated. But would you be of the expectation that they then cease and desist once they go home and continue to serve?

**SMITH:** We should remind ourselves that the Iranian government has said it will do all it can to cease any activity that's maligned here in Iraq. So again, we look forward to those kinds of positive steps. This is an opportunity, again, to demonstrate that individuals who have shown in good faith, no longer become a threat, the reason for their detention no longer exists and they could return back to society. Just like Iraqi citizens; when they're returned, they sign a pledge to not interfere and participate in maligned activities. And so we trust them to carry through and if they don't, they'll be held accountable for that. And I suspect in the same way, they will, as well as the government that they come from in the case of Iran, will be held accountable for their future activities. Yes, sir.

**REP6:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** We've learned that the people who joined the "Awakening" are taking salaries from the American troops. Is that true? And how amount...what is the amount of money that's being given to those

people?

**SMITH:** That's correct. The concerned local citizens which now number, as I mentioned here, just over 67,000, almost nearly 70,000 now, many of those individuals as they've gone through the process of being vetted, biometric data being taken, assurances that they have not had a criminal past, have interest in participating in the transition in the long term in the Iraqi security forces. Many of those individuals are being paid a stipend of around 300 U.S. dollars a month to participate as neighborhood watch members-concerned local citizens. Not all 70,000 are actually being paid to date; it varies from location to location. Some of the programs are less mature than others; they haven't gone through all the process. Each individual case, again, goes through a process. But, in general, the intent is that once an individual has gone through that process, is participating, has agreed to all the stipulations associated with that activity, then they're paid a stipend of \$300 a month. Please.

**REP7:** Could you talk a little bit about the other eleven Iranians who will not be released; what's their status? Is it under review? And can you talk about any legal proceedings, if any, currently against those eleven?

**SMITH:** Again, we don't treat groups of individuals or individuals as groups.

We treat them as individuals in terms of their case files and so we've got eleven individual Iranians whose individual files we review on a periodic basis, approximately every six months. You can infer from the fact that they're not being released that they individually have been assessed to still pose a threat or still have a value from an intelligence point of view to their detention. All of the eleven remaining once the nine are released will remain in detention and continue to go through that periodic update until such time as this independent, joint panel makes a recommendation to leadership to do otherwise. Michael?

**UNKNOWN:** Speaks off microphone.

**REP8:** Just, for example, what would be the legal status right now of someone like Ali Mossad Tuktuk? He's still being held in U.S. custody in Iraq. His ongoing threat level would be constantly reviewed by this panel; would that be correct? How would you describe his status...legal status?

**SMITH:** I'll just describe every detainee's status as being the same. Their status is one that they're being held in detention as a security threat to Iraq. That's a U.N. authority that's granted to detain individuals under that charter. It's done so...in a way which follows a direct

evaluation of the individual and every six months, again, by an independent and joint panel. That panel looks at a broad range of inputs. Most precisely, the derivation of why they're in detention in the first place and from that point there's been, obviously, other intelligence that's been gleaned off of other detainees and their own statements and so forth, other facts that have come into play. If, in fact, there are criminal activities as you've seen in other cases, then as those are developed and then turned over to the Iraqi criminal court system, those individuals move from a detention status into those court systems and then are following through that process and the outcomes there are, again, varied through the criminal system in Iraq. But, in general, all detainees receive that same level of scrutiny and oversight in terms of their case files on a periodic basis. Yes, sir.

**REP9:** Hi. Amit Paley from the Post. I wanted to find out was the release of these prisoners/detainees contingent upon any promises from Iran to continue its pledge to block the transfer of EFPs? And you mentioned at the news conference yesterday, you made a point of emphasizing that you believe the caches found to not [unintelligible] the pledge. Are those two linked and are there discussions ongoing to link those two issues; the detainees and the transfer of weapons from Iran?

**SMITH:** No, there's no link to the decision to release the detainees with any

other factor that's ongoing. As you know, we're not in direct negotiations on these kind of matters. As you can imagine we would not be with Iran. Iran has participated in some tri-level talks in the past. We look forward to those future discussions. But those are independent of the decision made yesterday to release the nine individuals that are currently in detention. Yes, sir.

**REP10:** [Unintelligible} from AFP. Is Mahmoud Farhadi among these eleven held and what is his status? How do you rate him?

**SMITH:** He is among the 20 that are held. Yes, sir. And I've not indicated who the nine are that are being released. But we'll have that information for you at the time they're released. His current status is, as I mentioned, every other detainee. His...he, obviously we know a great deal more about him today than we did when we first took him into detention and his file is being built and developed. And on a periodic basis, his case will be reviewed just like every other individual. At the present time, he's a security risk to Iraq and will be held in detention. Yes, sir.

**REP 11:** You talked a lot about Al Qaeda but I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what level of control you think Sadr has of his...the militias and what you make of the current status of the so-

called truce or peace agreement that he made.

**SMITH:**

Well, the level of control is a challenging one to try to answer from up here because I think, depending on where you sit, there's a different level of that occurring in terms of inside Iraq. Clearly Muqtada al-Sadr has had a great impact on his followers. He's asked for a ceasefire and many, many of them, we believe, have listened to it and pledged to commit to his ceasefire. But as we've seen also, there are many who have chosen not to and dishonored that pledge, ceasefire. Those individuals are being treated just like any other criminal activity here in Iraq would be treated and are being dealt with. I believe though that Sadr, his own statements and his own pledges and those of other leaders here in Iraq, have been very, very helpful and they're very encouraging. And we applaud that activity. We think it's the right way to move forward. It remains to be seen how sustained it can be. But we're optimistic that the pledges of Sadr, and others like Sadr who can have impact here in society and can work through Imams and other means of influencing individuals to understand this new Iraq future does not have to be intertwined with violence and that there are political and more peaceful ways to move this country forward and it's a very positive sign. Question, please. Sir.

**REP12:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Turkish News Agency. Concerning the Iranians; will they be delivered to the Iranian Embassy and when will that happen?

**SMITH:** Again, we haven't said what date they'll be released and turned back over to the...in this case, I think the intention would be that the government of Iraq would participate in that hand over and, again, we'll have more information for you in the coming days. Any other questions? Well I thank you for this afternoon. I appreciate your attendance and we'll see you next week.