

**PRESS CONFERENCE:**

**Brigadier General Ed Cardon, Deputy Commander for Support, Multi-National  
Division – Central**

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**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Brigadier General Ed Cardon**

**REPORTERS:**

**Ahmed Jassem from Al-Arabiya Newspaper**

**REPORTERS 1-11**

**\*REP1 = REPORTER 1**

**\*INT = INTERPRETER**

**BRIG GEN  
CARDON:**

Well good morning. As-Salāmu `Alaykum. It's good to be here today to talk to you a little bit about what's been going on in Multi-National Division Center. First, I want to say that we're in a definite period of progress. Our mission when we came here was to block accelerants, to protect the population, and to prevent sectarian violence. And when you look at the reduction of attacks over the last several months, we attribute that to a couple of reasons. First is the surge of which two of our brigades and our headquarters were part of that. The second is the growing capacity of the Iraqi security forces and there are security forces in our area that conduct operations entirely on their own. The rejection of al-Qaeda and other extremist elements and the awakening movements. If I could talk a little bit about blocking accelerants. First, attacks in our area are down by two-thirds. One reason for that is we're living amongst the population and when you live amongst the population you tend to get better intelligence, you get better information, and it creates a sense of security. In protecting the population, to protect it you have to live among it and that's where the role of concerned citizens comes in. When we move into an area Iraqi citizens normally come up and ask a couple of questions. The first is, "Are you going to stay? And if you stay, how can we help?" And that has caused the growth of a lot of local security—correction, local citizens forming

together into groups to help with the security in their local areas. And finally, to prevent sectarian violence. It's gotten much better. I'm not saying it's perfect but it's much better. We think that might be better because of the joint security elements where we work with Iraqi security forces. But more importantly, we have concerned citizens groups that are mixed groups, Sunni and Shi'a. And we've reached the point where we don't really talk so much about Sunni and Shi'a. We talk a lot more about Iraqi. And there are several Iraqi security force leaders and leaders within those areas that consider themselves as Iraqi; where they go into areas that they couldn't have gone before. And that's a very, very positive development. I just wanted to throw those few questions out—or observations out and then take your questions. Yes, sir.

**REP1:** As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Ahmed Jassem from Al-Arabiya Newspaper. Operation Fardh al-Qanoon that the QOI is working out, do you think that Operation Fardh al-Qanoon is working on eliminating the terrorists and the militias? And what is your stance from the Iraqi people who stood by your side to fight terrorism? And what is your stance from the awakening groups and the awakening troops that are fighting with you?

**BRIG GEN  
CARDON:**

Well I think the—I think it is working. I think that there's been a lot of progress made. Let me talk a little bit about the awakening movement. I took the governor of Karbala—we went up and met with the governor of al Anbar at Riohill[ph]. A few weeks later, the sheikhs in al Anbar and the sheikhs from Karbala met in al Anbar and more recently I took the governor of Karbala and the sheikhs of Karbala to al Anbar to meet with the governor of Anbar and the sheikhs of al Anbar. I don't think that would have happened a year ago. But it was a great thing to see as they put forth their statements on unity and that they are Iraqis and not Sunni-Shi'a and they have to work together. We also see that a lot in the north Babil area where there was for awhile a lot of fighting between Sunni and Shi'a elements. Now you don't see that near in the degree that we saw that once before. I think there's a couple of reasons for that. One is for al-Qaeda, we and Iraqi security forces have done a good job capturing and killing al-Qaeda. But we could never do that without the Iraqi people that have stepped forward to do that. We have better information now that allows us to have more precise targeting. I also think Muqtada al-Sadr's statement on the 27th of August was also very helpful with the Shi'a elements and that—we think in our area that has been very positive. Everything's not 100%; there are still attacks out there as you saw recently here in Baghdad where an element tried to make themselves look like

another terrorist element but it's all moving in the right direction. What makes this so important—this time so important—this definite period of progress, is that when the violence is down we can do a lot more working with governance and economic development and economic reconstruction. And that's really going to be the focus of our efforts over the next several months without taking our eye off the security advances that we've made.

**REP2:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Question from al-Haif Fihal[ph] TV. Are you with arming the awakening troops and do you think that this question should be addressed to the Iraqi forces because they are the ones responsible for arming the youth and the tribes?

**BRIG GEN  
CARDON:** First on—I'll say a few things about concerned citizens. First, we do not give weapons or ammunition to concerned citizen groups. We do train them but we train them how to operate a checkpoint. That's it. We don't train them to conduct operations. We thought that it was a great initiative by the Government of Iraq to allow the Iraqi security forces to work with concerned citizens and we have encouraged that in—for example, in Mahmudiyah and Medaiyon[ph] Kadas, you see that—where the security forces are working with the concerned citizen groups. We don't allow

concerned citizen groups to form where we are not operating. In other words, you will not see concerned citizen groups where we are not because there's no need for that. Eventually—this is a temporary thing. Concerned citizens are a temporary thing. First, they help secure the area. And now it's a transition of some percentage of them into the Iraqi security forces which we're working hard with the Government of Iraq on. A percentage of them will be taken care of on the pension law that the Council of Representatives is working on now. And then the rest have to get some sort of adult education, vocational training, the ability to open a business, those sort of initiatives to allow them to grow in their community. But right now those Iraqi—those concerned citizens working with Iraqi security forces and our forces have been one of the primary reasons that we've had so much stability reach the area.

Yes, sir.

**REP3:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Question from Radio Sowah[ph]. General, after the death of the chief of the awakening troop, the Satar[ph], his brother took over his post. How would you evaluate the situation? Is there a dissolving of this awakening troops or do you think his brother will follow his footsteps?

**BRIG GEN  
CARDON:**

Well I met his brother when I was in al Anbar with the Karbala governor and the Karbala sheikhs and it appears to me at the time, listening to him speak, that he's going to continue on with his brother's momentum. The awakening in al Anbar has been fascinating. It does not mean though that there still will not be attacks or some criminal behavior in al Anbar. But now it's at a level that, as time goes on, we think will be manageable by the Iraqi security forces. That's really the—all the areas where these awakening movements happen or concerned citizens, the idea is for us to help transition this all over to Iraqi security forces. We are not creating new armed groups or new groups that can turn into militias. We are watching them very carefully. We operate with them in terms of checking on them, making sure they're doing what they're doing, making sure they're not operating outside of their areas, and we're working very hard with the Government of Iraq to try and get them either as legitimate security forces, going into the Army or the police or into the business sector or into the government sector. That's our initiative. We know that it cannot stand the way it is but it's been—no one can deny that they've been remarkably successful in leading to the stability that we have today. The real question is what to do next. Yes, sir.

**REP4:**

Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:**

Question from Alkula[ph] Iraq Newspaper. In some of the places the awakening troops are wearing the uniform of the National Guard—Iraqi National Guard and this confuses between the governmental forces and those awakening troops. Do you have an idea or any intention to give them a special uniform?

**BRIG GEN  
CARDON:**

No, we do not have an idea to give them a special uniform. We've asked the Iraqi security forces to help in this matter. For most of our concerned citizen groups in our area they wear a reflective vest of some type so that they can be identified and that's extremely important because this also helps us identify if there's an illegal checkpoint. And we know that there's certainly the potential for someone to try and replicate what we're doing, but the advantage to living out in the population, the advantage to living out in the population is that the Iraqi soldiers, our soldiers, and concerned citizens all get to know each other so they know who's supposed to be there and who is not supposed to be there and then we can act accordingly. But right now there is no intent for us, for the coalition, to provide uniforms for concerned citizens. However, I know in some cases that the Iraqi security forces are thinking about providing uniforms to better delineate them from just a group of people standing on a checkpoint. Yes, sir.

**REP5:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** I just wanted to ask who is financing and arming the awakening troops? Is it the Iraqi troops or the American troops? Who's supporting them? Thank you.

**BRIG GEN  
CARDON:**

Okay. As I stated earlier, we do not arm or provide ammunition to any of these groups in our area. For payment, that is done with monies from coalition forces at this time. However, the Government of Iraq has just come to us saying that they would like to take over this role and they will start working with these citizen groups and paying them for what they're doing. That's still very much in the beginning stages but a very positive development in our side. The numbers that we're talking about roughly is we have about 28,000 concerned citizens—not all of which are paid; some are just volunteers. We roughly have about—right now about 20,000 that are paid. And how much pay do they make? They make about a little less than half of what an Iraqi security policeman and Iraqi Army soldier makes. Yes, sir.

**REP6:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Question from Ararya[ph] TV. The private security companies and what they've done in Sursaquer[ph] and Karada made the Iraqi Government to reconsider the work of these security companies in

Iraq. Do you approve the Iraqi Government's [unintelligible] of eliminating or ending the work of the private security companies in Iraq?

**BRIG GEN  
CARDON:**

We are—first, I know the Government of Iraq and the State Department and MNF-I are working through these issues. It's really inappropriate for me to comment on this except I'll say one thing is that they should be following the rules in all cases by which we move to prevent the loss of life. And it's really not appropriate for me to comment on the talks ongoing between the Government of Iraq, the Embassy, and coalition forces. Many of you know that with—that there's a proliferation of private security companies. And some are very good and some are not so good. And I'm glad to see that this issue is finally being looked at. Yes, sir.

**REP7:**

Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:**

Yesterday there were some armed troops fighting you—in the past I mean. And soon they came and stood by your side to fight the terrorists. Are you sure of those who are fighting with you against terrorism?

**BRIG GEN  
CARDON:**

Well there's a saying that says you cannot reconcile with your friends. The measure that we use is we do not negotiate with people

that have blood on their hands. Now we do not have an absolute guarantee of this. You deal with the information that you're given. But I will say that, for the most part, every concerned citizen we have gets enrolled into a biometrics database. And we have had cases as they get enrolled, we see that they have been sought after since 2003, 2004, 2005, or 2006 and we picked them up. In some cases the concerned citizens, when they find out who we're looking for, they have told us the location—us and the Iraqi security forces—the location of at least four in our area. The other significant thing that they've done is the number of caches and munitions that they've turned in; 252 caches and 104 IEDs that they've turned in to us. And so those are all positive developments. We are not naïve though to think that some of these people at least passively supported the insurgency. That doesn't mean they were part of it, but they weren't against it. They maybe, perhaps were just staying out of the way. But that—in certain areas and I'd be happy to take you out there to look at this because it is quite amazing. Areas where—for example, if you go down into Jurf as Sakhr where it's almost guaranteed contact. If you go down there today you can walk up and down the streets of Jurf as Sakhr with no problems. Now all the military-age males in Jurf as Sakhr, when I say that they were not all—there's no guarantee to say that they were not part of some of the groups that were operating out there.

But right now they're working with us, with Iraqi security forces, and with the Government of Iraq. That's a very positive development. Yes, sir.

**REP8:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Where's the important—I mean where do they actually concentrate the awakening troops in Baghdad generally?

**BRIG GEN CARDON:** I can't speak for all of Baghdad but I can speak for our area. We have them in the Mahmudiyah Kada, we have them in the Medine[ph] Kada, we have them in north Babil. That's the predominant locations of the concerned citizens in our area.

**REP9:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Do you have any statistics for the total volunteers of the concerned local citizens in Baghdad?

**BRIG GEN CARDON:** Not for Baghdad, not for Baghdad. But I know that those numbers exist and we could probably get that for you or you could ask MND-Baghdad. But we do track the numbers very closely. For example, I can tell you that we have 13,195 in the Mahmudiyah Kada. We have 4,100 in the Medaiyon[ph] Kada—correction, sorry. In the Medaiyon[ph] Kada we have 1,097, and in north Babil we

have 4,109. And that number constantly changes as we reassess the security. Yes, sir.

**REP10:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Are there any—you spoke about awakening troops and the positive aim and do we have any awakening troops that work on destabilizing the places in Baghdad or occupy some places in Baghdad like faked occupying troops? And do you have any procedures against those faked occupying troops?

**BRIG GEN  
CARDON:** Well we do not put—we do not work with concerned citizen efforts where we don't have our own forces. But let me use the town of Horjat[ph] which just recently—I'll tell you how—what normally happens. We conduct an operation with Iraqi security forces and we form a patrol base. Then you have the Iraqi citizens ask you, “Are you going to stay? And if you stay how can we help?” And if they say how can we help we form a concerned citizens group. Almost inevitably they will be—this concerned citizen group will be attacked within—certainly within 30 days. They will take—they will be attacked; which we will normally defeat with Iraqi security forces and with coalition forces although there may be some loss of life like in Horjat[ph]. But then what happens is now the population is pretty upset and the concerned citizen population tends to start to

grow dramatically as people feel like they now have to stand up against this criminality. And that's the way it tends to work. There have been cases of concerned citizen groups that have operated outside of our area. They were arrested by the Iraqi security forces. So I think that's a positive side. They violated the terms of their contract. So in general, we have them under the tightest control that we can get them under. Now does that mean of thousands of people that there might not be a few of them doing things they shouldn't do? It's possible but I'll tell you that we are watching that very closely and we'll detain them if they do. Yes, sir.

**REP11:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** As you know, the awakening troops used to work with al-Qaeda in the past. And some of them were behind inflicting harm to the citizens, some of them. So do you have any intention to present them to the court in the future in case they—in case you have—there were some evidence against them or any kind of proof?

**BRIG GEN  
CARDON:** Well the short answer to that is if there's evidence against you, you get presented to the court. But it's not a fair statement to say that all concerned citizens worked with al-Qaeda. Over one-third of our concerned citizens are in Shi'a or mixed Sunni-Shi'a concerned citizen groups and this is something I think that's important. There

are Shi'a groups that are just as threatened as Sunni groups have been and have worked with different groups. But the bottom line is we enforce the laws of Iraq. And if we have any evidence or statements or physical evidence that says that this person was part of al-Qaeda then they should be detained and go through the Iraqi court system which we're spending a lot of effort to enhance the performance of. Okay. Thank you very much for your time today and I hope to see you all again.