

INTERVIEW:

Rear Admiral Patrick Driscoll: Multi-National Force – Iraq Spokesperson

Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly: Civilian spokesman for Operation Fardh al-Qanoon

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PARTICIPANTS:

Rear Admiral Patrick Driscoll

Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly

Various members of the press

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: As-Salāmu `Alaykum, and thank you for coming this afternoon.

I'm joined by my good friend, Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly. He's the civilian spokesman for Operation Fardh al-Qanoon, and we're going to start with a brief statement from him, and then we'll take your questions.

DR. TAHSEEN: Thank you, Admiral. I'm really very happy to be here with you today.

And so we will talk about another aspect -- and the civilian aspect that is, that it has to do with the -- it has to do with the effort of the government in providing the basic services to the hot zones. And the government of Iraq has set the priorities that such places need some good care and getting out the basic services and providing the basic services, and also the getting out the projects for the infrastructure so that we can provide the best services to the inhabitants of those places.

The government allocated \$150,000,000 to Sadr City only. In addition to giving priority to -- or -- and carrying out the basic services in Sadr City, Shulah neighborhood -- neighbor -- district, and also Khadamiya District within a budget of the regionals for this year.

And as Prime Minister Maliki announced and said, that this year will be a year of reconstruction. And it cannot be done without having a good security environment. Our armed forces, and we

of course, we are very proud of its performance and any place in Iraq managed to create a security balance that could contribute in the same time and achieving the development plan and the reconstruction for this year.

This money will be allocated to reconstruct the infrastructure in Sadr City and is inhabited by, or is actually heavily populated, and they represent one third of the population in Baghdad. And at the same time, it's not only for reconstruction -- reconstructing the infrastructure, but also to vitalize the communities there and also to open much doors for other projects, and also to provide or create job opportunities to people there, and also -- Most of the people in those areas also suffer from a shortage in the services, and this is due to the combat operations and the security situation there. So that's why we have to present an exceptional help to those places. Amanat Baghdad, from its side, managed to do a good job through providing the water project in Sadr City which could cover approximately -- or most of the places and/or neighborhoods in Sadr City, and also it allocated -- Amanat Baghdad allocated some of the engineering effort to -- to the municipalities that exist in eastern Baghdad so that they could provide the basic services in those places.

Prime Minister Maliki gave instructions to the supporting committees for Operation Fardh al-Qanoon and also to the

ministers that are responsible for providing those basic services like the water, electricity, oil and health, et cetera. And he gave instructions to them so that they set priorities to those places and providing the basic services. And there's a big campaign to restore the electricity in Sadr City and also to give them with generators. And as you know, despite the difficulty of reaching those places, the -- the engineers and the electricians want and go there to fix the electricity. The Ministry of Commerce, or trade, was able to provide the food ration to the people that could cover all the people in Sadr City. And also -- In addition to that, the other food rations that presented as ate (sic). And the Ministry of Health also was able to support the clinics and the hospitals through to providing them with enough medicine, vaccines, blood and other surgical operations so that the hospitals and the clinics could carry out the surgeries and multiple -- or through multiple operations in Sadr City. And also so that we could carry out these operations inside Sadr City and because they can't go to other hospitals outside Sadr City.

And we hope that those steps could be -- or could enhance the peace and the hope inside our community. And we are serious in -- in moving forward in a way that will best provide the good services in this stage and this situation.

But now we will take the questions. And if Admiral Driscoll allows me, we take the questions now.

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: Please.

(Speaking in Arabic)

REPORTER:

NINA Agency, Dr. Tahseen, regarding the basic services and also the medical services in Sadr City, and what you've said goes contrary to what we have seen and we witness through our calls with the history of -- with the hospital in Sadr City. They always say that they suffer from a shortage in the services and medicine, and they suffer from -- there's an overload in receiving the patients and the wounded, especially during the combat operations that is going on right now. And because daily they receive between 100 and 150 wounded. So how would you respond about this?

DR. TAHSEEN:

Well, we talk about the services, and you could go ask Dr. Ali Bustani, he's the manager of the health in Rusafa district. And with coordination with him, now, there's more than -- or there's a -- more than one campaign to -- to enter and to bring the medicine to these hospitals, and this hospital in particular. And those hospitals we know that there's a -- and due to the operation -- and combat operations, you know, we know that it needs support. And that's why we started this campaign to support those hospitals and support them with medicine and also

with staff, outside medical staff, outside surgical/medical staff, outside Sadr City.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER:

EIN Agency. You have talked about, and you said \$150,000,000 were allocated to reconstruct the infrastructure and also to be disbursed on the economical -- on the economics situation.

My question is about the mechanism that will be adopted in disbursing this money and how will the basic services will be restored, because the Sadr City now is being bombed, and there are ongoing clashes now.

DR. TAHSEEN:

We're not saying that we're going to disburse them today; at least, those are allocations for this city which suffers from a bad situation. But after everything is established and stabilized, there will be a method, a mechanism to work on these projects.

This money, this exceptional money, has been allocated due to the -- because the government is keen, and knows that this city or this area needs reconstruction and basic services and also providing good services to its economy.

Yes, there will be projects. But of course, due to the security situation, there won't be -- there will not be any projects for the time being.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER:

Baghdad Institute for Media. Question to Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly:
We are from Sadr City, and we witness and we have seen -- we've heard the things that you've talked about, and those things don't exist in reality because the situation is very bad. And your idea -- your words are just ideal, because I wish -- it's a request that -- that you visit one place in Sadr City and you can see that for yourself.

DR. TAHSEEN:

Well, when we talk about this, you can't provide services if the people don't need it. I didn't talk about Karradah or Mansour district. I talked about Sadr City and the need for those services. And because people need those services, there will not -- there wouldn't have been any operations. And this is why we set priority to the Sadr City. We know that the economic situation has to do with the security situation. And this is a reality. And Sadr City -- and in al-Amin District, which is a part of eastern Baghdad. Of course, that's why we need to raise the economic development there.

(Speaking in Arabic; discussion in Arabic.)

REPORTER:

Question to Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly. And we have seen a serious problem in Sadr City and Shulah, and we didn't know, do the people in Sadr City, from women and children, are outlaws? We would like to know who are the outlaws and why this cordon or

siege is, and why this bombing by the American helicopters against the -- the city.

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: Thank you for that question. The operations in Sadr City, the purpose of the operations, as we just discussed, was to facilitate the delivery of the -- the reconstruction, the supplies of the basic essentials of life that they need in Sadr City. That's the purpose of the whole Baghdad security plan. The Baghdad security plan is to come in and create security in Baghdad, and as the neighborhoods become safe, then we can bring in other services. In Sadr City in particular now, in the southern part of Sadr City, they're establishing that -- an area of security. And once that security's achieved, they'll be able to bring in secure -- additional services. They've already brought in what we would respond to as emergency support; i.e., water, food, some emergency medical supplies. But as Dr. Tahseen said, to get to the larger reconstruction projects, all of the things, you know, fixing and building hospitals, electrical power, water, things like that, that's going to take time. But you've got to have security first before you can get the people in, in order to do those things; otherwise, if you don't get the security first, there will be -- construction workers will come in, they'll be subject to intimidation and extortion. Their supplies will be stolen. They'll be -- They'll be threatened, and they won't be able to get the job done. So you

have to have security first, and then hopefully, very quickly, with the help of the money the Prime Minister has provided, we'll be able to shift into the rebuilding and the infrastructure.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER: Question from Hurra TV. Question to Admiral Driscoll: We would like -- Could you give us the recent update -- an update for the recent operations in Sadr City and who have been -- who has been detained and -- and -- and who has been detained recently. And could you also comment about the statement made by Muqtada al-Sadr yesterday?

I have two questions to Admiral Driscoll, and one question to Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly. The level of services, we all know and we hope that there will be excellent services in Baghdad; however, we also hope that those basic services go to the level that we aspire -- or the people aspire.

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: I'll begin. First of all, the purpose of the operations in Sadr City are as I described. They are to establish security in the area so we can bring in the reconstruction and the -- and the services that the city -- that the Iraqi people, the Iraqi citizens of Baghdad -- and Sadr City included in that -- deserve, in order so -- in order for them to move -- to move on in their life. They need to have security so they can have economic development so they can

have opportunities for jobs, for the -- to have proper health care. But first you have to have the security.

In terms of Muqtada al-Sadr, I just want to say that his pledge that he made last year for the freeze has been a contributor -- a significant contributor -- to the decrease in violence that we've seen since 2007. When the surge hit its peak in 2007, we've seen a decline in the violence. And one of the contributing factors to that is the fact that Muqtada al-Sadr pledged that his -- his followers would freeze. This has had a positive effect in improving security and supporting the reconciliation process.

Muqtada al-Sadr could play a very important role in improving the security and the quality of life of all Iraqis. This is true of anyone, whether they have two followers or two million followers, that they can play a role in the political process. And that's what we're looking for here. We're looking for moving from shooting at each other to shouting at each other. We're move -- you know, moving from violence into the political process. And Muqtada al-Sadr could play a very key role in that.

REPORTER:

Actually, my first question to you: I mean, how is the security situation new in Sadr City? I mean the operation between the Iraqi forces and the U.S. forces there. Is there any casualties? Is there any -- did you captured (sic) a lot of, you know --

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: I understand.

REPORTER: Yeah. That's what I mean. And first my question, not about the services. Thank you.

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: Okay. The operation is ongoing, as you know. And it's an Iraqi-led operation. Iraqi security forces are in the lead. The police and the army are in the lead; they're being supported by coalition forces. And what they're doing is they're going into the neighborhoods there in southern Sadr City. They are establishing security in local neighborhoods in order to enforce the rule of law and ensure that individuals in those areas can -- can live their life peacefully and allow the conditions for bringing in the relief we've talked about immediately, and then from there begin the reconstruction process. It takes a little bit more time.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

DR. TAHSEEN: As for the last question, the government -- And I don't want to say "serious," but -- and through the huge allocations of money, all this could show the importance of this subject of the government. This is one.

Two: The carrying out the projects in Baghdad in particular because it's a -- it's a big city, and as you know, the infrastructure in Baghdad needs rehabilitation. Of course, all those things need time, and a long time. And we need to keep in mind that our people who corrupt and want to sabotage the -- providing the

services -- like the contractor who could say that he could provide those services, but eventually he could leave Haifa Street unfinished.

So this is one of the things that indicate that we need better equipment in dealing with -- and mechanics in dealing with the contractors.

The problem with the big foreign companies, they can't come to the country due to the security situation. The companies that we have now have a limited ability, and this is what we have for the time being.

In general, the -- and with those allocations in general -- and -- and we are being transparent because we need to eliminate corruption. There is also -- And there could be also obstacles in providing the projects; for instance, yesterday -- or last year -- the budget of Amanat Baghdad were fifteen hundred or half a million. But now it's much more than that. Now, this budget needs some real mechanism to be -- and getting those mechanisms -- and if you have the same contractors to carry out such mechanism, this will create a problem in the society.

But the thing is -- The question is what's the best thing to do? Bringing the foreign companies that -- that actually could help. But you can't do that without establishing security. And this is the major point. We do have the money, but the carrying out the

project has to do with the security situation and the security environment. It's not just a reason, but it's -- it's the reality.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER:

Admiral Driscoll, a follow-up question: Are you determined to continue the operations in Sadr City despite the warning announced -- issued -- or issued by Muqtada al-Sadr because he said the operation should be stopped?

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL:

Once again, I think the security operations there are for the purpose of establishing security so we can bring in the services we just talked about. And that's what the Iraqi people deserve there in Sadr City. They deserve the same security that we're trying to establish and we have developed in other parts of Baghdad and in other parts of Iraq. Once that's done, we hope to bring in, with the support of the Prime Minister with the money that he's allocated, and then with the help of capacity and capability-building, to provide the services to help build the schools, to help provide the health clinics in order to get people back to a normal life; I mean, people want to do a couple things: They want to have a job and work, they want to be able to educate their children, and they want to live in peace. And that's what this process is designed -- designed to achieve.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER:

Question to Admiral Driscoll: But the nature of the -- the nature of the operations now in Amin neighborhood, there are some clashes and heavy clashes with the Iraqi and American forces, and also there were some clashes yesterday and it led to the death or casualty -- there were actually 130 casualties. And we know that the American forces and coalition forces have some really high-technology and surveillance and intelligence in targeting the armed men. So why this casualties is taking place, especially among the civilians and children? Yesterday in Sadr City a third of the casualties were women and children. And there was a school in one of the areas was damaged also. And the students also were harmed. And still the -- and the people still sent their children to school.

So we would like to know, is there a specification for those locations that you target without having any casualties among the civilians?

And the second question to Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly regarding the services: The school that has been damaged, of course no one could provide services to the school. So I'm not talking about Karradah or (inaudible) District. We're talking about the hot zones. And another example: We made a story in Saidya neighborhood, and now Saidya witnesses a calm situation and everything is good. And they always praise the services

provided by Amanat Baghdad. But they also complain about the medical services and the health services. And the health ser- -- And they only have one clinic, and they demand further services, health services in Saidya.

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: I'll start with the security portion of it. First of all, as we saw in the Jamila market, that a lot of this collateral damage, if you will, is not caused by coalition forces, but it's caused by inaccurate fire or random fire by criminal groups, by those that are violating the law by taking up arms and using these weapons.

In terms of coalition procedures, we have -- as you know, we have very precise rules of engagement. And we go to extreme measures to protect innocent Iraqi civilians that are not involved in the process. It's a difficult thing in an urban environment. But I can tell you from personnel experience, the mindset of U.S. forces, of coalition forces when they go into a combat zone. And I've been in that situation where friends of mine didn't pull the trigger because there was a thought in their mind. And we've lost -- we've lost coalition people because of that. But that's -- that's the degree that we hold ourselves to. Obviously, if there's any civilians that are injured or hurt, our condolences go out to them and we investigate those -- those incidents always, and we report those -- those results back to you. But you also have to remember when you have a criminal group, you have someone

with an illegal weapon, and they're standing in front of a school, they are in the -- in the environment surrounding themselves by civilians. They are putting those civilians at risk.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

DR. TAHSEEN:

I'd like to comment one few thing (sic). It's a -- because I'm from the Amin District. When you asked me why the heavy casualties. Why don't you ask the person who shoot those weapons. And we know that those places are heavily populated, and those criminals go hide inside those houses. So he will -- So how would you fix this? So I'm asking you this.

(Speaking in Arabic with unidentified person; not being translated, briefly.) Well, he's hiding among the civilians so...I sometimes ask the military people as well, if he's launching a rocket then hiding himself among the civilians. What is our part to do? So what is -- How can we deal this? So those civilians, why don't they ask him why does he come and hide himself among the civilians.

So let me just answer the question about Saidya. A few days ago I was in Saidya and sometimes I go tours there (sic) and I make some tours. And I was in Saidya, of course, I've seen some schools and, yes, there will be -- the director of the Kargh (phonetic) also made some calls to me and told me that the schools need some supplies -- and special supplies.

As for the health services and the clinics, you know we have three health services and clinics in Saidya, and we've allocated some medical staff and they're going to those clinics, and the medicine is being provided to those places. And they want a hospital, and this is what you -- I know what -- this is what you want. It's not -- The thing is, you can't provide a hospital for each neighborhood, and this is a -- a huge project. And so we told them that there is a framework in Alam neighborhood and it's -- it's a health center. And it will be a hospital and -- in the future that will provide services to those places. And I was in Saidya a few days ago as I've mentioned.

REPORTER:

My question is for Admiral Driscoll. Sammy from NHK, Japanese Public TV. Japanese Self-Defense Air Force has been working on logistical support for multinational forces; however, one of the Japanese high courts has recently decided that it is unconstitutional because its activity almost beyond the restriction of constitution.

I have two questions: First, how do you evaluate Japanese Air Force contribution to multinational forces? Do you have any comment on that court decision?

Second, can you say that the area where Japanese government says that the Baghdad airport where the Japanese Air Force is working is non-combat. Do you agree with that or not?

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: Ohaiyo gozaimasu. First of all, I can't really comment about the constitutional issue for Japan; I'm not familiar with the law. So I'll have to skip on that one.

In terms of the Japanese support to the Iraqi Air Force, it's been significant. The -- As you know, the Iraqi airport (sic) has grown in capability quite a bit here in the last year. We've seen them go from 30 flights a month to about 300 flight hours a month. And that's a great, great increase. And in large part that's responsible -- for those that are supporting and helping build the Iraqi Air Force. Evidence of that is during the recent operations in Basra where you saw the Iraqi Air Force doing a very good job of supporting and supplying Iraqi forces that were on the ground there. And so I'd say that the effort has been very positive to this point.

In terms of the safety out in Baghdad, we also fly civilian airliners out of there and have done so safely and securely. So I'd say the security there is good.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER: Question to Admiral Driscoll about the walls and the T-walls that separate the Sadr City. We need some details about this wall, the length and the altitude of this wall that separates northern and southern Sadr City.

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: These are temporary security barriers that are being put in place to provide security. And it goes back to -- The objective there is, number one, to get security for those residents of Sadr City in order to bring in the services behind it. I had an interview with a reporter a little -- about a week ago, two weeks ago, and the reporter said to me, complaining about the security barriers that were up in her neighborhood. And we talked about it, and I said, Well, I know it's an inconvenience; you have to drive around them, and it took longer to get to work and so on and so forth. But then I asked, How is security in your neighborhood? And she said it was very good. And I said, Well, would you like that to change? And she said, No. And so the security barriers are temporary, but they have a purpose. The purpose is to control flow in order to provide security for those people that live in that environment and also provide security for the Iraqi security forces as they do their job of providing local security.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER: Question to Admiral Driscoll: A few days ago I have asked one of the activists in human rights and I've told him about the raid -- operations conducted by the American forces. And also I have told him that the American forces confiscate certain special machines like computers, mobiles, and cell phones. And he told me that such things are against -- violate the human rights. And

we know that the American forces basically came to establish the state of democracy and also -- so such things go in contrast with the American forces, what they call for. So why do they do those things? And also there's a rumor -- an Iraq -- and even the journalists recently -- a computer --

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: Yes, I'm familiar with that, yeah.

REPORTER: -- was also confiscated from a correspondent of Radio Sawa. So how would you respond about this?

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: Well, I would characterize it this way: When -- When certain items are confiscated in a -- in a security operation, they're -- they're used to enhance security for the Iraqi people. The human rights that we should be talking about are the human rights for every Iraqi citizen here under the Iraqi law. Those -- Those -- The information that's used from those kind of devices is used to develop intelligence against those that are conducting terrorist activities and strapping suicide vests on and making suicide car bombs and killing, you know, dozens of Iraq -- innocent Iraqis at a time. And so if there is an incident where we can get the exact information, we can attempt to get those devices back to the individuals.

But the human rights we're concerned about are the human rights of the Iraqi people here. And any way we can develop that intelligence is the way we're going to go.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER: Question to Admiral Driscoll: What is the percentage of the -- or the achievements of the operations in Sadr City? Did it achieve its goals? Could you give a percentage for that?

And the second question, also to Admiral Driscoll: There is a military siege against Sadr City to eliminate the weapons, but as we know, there is a large amount of weapons in the streets in Sadr City. So how would you respond to this?

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: Well, I can't really give you a percentage yet of -- of completion. It really is a continuation of the Baghdad security plan. And so as we go from neighborhood to neighborhood, Sadr City is another district, if you will, inside Baghdad that we are enforcing the rule of law and establishing security so we can complete the Baghdad security plan. Really, that's the answer to your question.

REPORTER: Thank you.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER: Dr. Tahseen, I have two questions. And one to Admiral Driscoll. It's well known that the Iraqi budget, and there's a bad performance and a bad disbursement for the projects in -- in this -- regarding the basic services. And this bad disbursement goes to the bad companies because there's no monitoring and transparency. And also the border pipelines that are being

destroyed by the outlaws in Diyala Province and those caused a huge problem to 17 -- 15 villages in Diyala. And until now, those villages have no clean water. And even the government until now didn't do anything. And what's the point behind reconstructing Sadr City and there's a -- there are militias -- What's the point behind giving 150 million that, on the other hand, there is no real security? Make some badges so that people could go in and out.

DR. TAHSEEN: Is this a question or an opinion?

REPORTER: Both. So there's no point behind the money...

DR. TAHSEEN: There is no security. There are 3 million people in Sadr City. If there are 100 or even 10,000 among those 3 million, those 10,000 try to create a bad security situation. We have -- We should -- We should not forget the rest; those are our people, and we're here to provide services to them. Those 150 million will be provided to better the situation, the economic situation there. So those who carry out weapon (sic) now try to hinder the process and the progress in the country. So this doesn't mean that we should punish the rest of the people in that place as well. I -- Always I meet with laborers and -- do you know that there are laborers in those places who can't go to work? And those people need security and also need services, because without a good economic situation, those -- those things couldn't have

happened. We can't punish the whole -- the entire community in Sadr City because there are some of them, like ten -- 100 and like -- or 1,000 of them. We have to provide services to everyone. And this is what the government wants.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER:

Question to Admiral Driscoll: When will the operations end, not only in Sadr City -- Yes, he did answer that. (Speaking in Arabic; previous journalist also joins in) and he said it's a continuous operation so that we can really establish a good situation. Be optimistic.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

MS. JOHANSEN:

Elissa Johansen-Rubin with the New York Times. You mentioned that you're working hard in the southern part of Sadr City to make it possible to bring in supplies and projects and all that. But a significant part of Sadr City is that northern half, which is also very populous. What do you see ahead -- When do you think it'll be possible to help begin to improve the living conditions there? And do you think there will have to be some military operations to secure that area as well?

And then my second question, for either of you, is in Basra, Muqtada al-Sadr's forces have basically stood down, and the Iraqi army is in control. Why do you think that step was taken there, but in Sadr City there is still fighting?

DR. TAHSEEN:

Let me answer the first question. Of course, in any kind of conflict or crisis, there is a -- an equation between security, which -- and also development. One of the reasons behind the security or the bad security situation is the economic situation or level for those people. The government has to activate its program and its developing program to serve its citizens in a way that sets priority to those who deserve those developing projects in the first place. Those people suffered for many long years from marginalization; they suffered from -- even the basic services were not provided for those people. Now those people have a chance, that they have an elected government, and this government should also have some duties and commitments. And this is the chance that we give through the priorities that we give -- or for those citizens.

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL:

And in terms of Basra, I talked to Major General Barney, who is the commander of -- the MND commander down in the southeast, yesterday, and he reported that, as you mentioned, operations are going very well, that the Iraqi security forces are executing a plan that was constructed by the Iraqis and led by the Iraqis. And that's -- that's the kind of operation we're looking for as the Iraqi army and the Iraqi security forces build capacity and capability. In terms of the objective there, the objective there was to go down and enforce the rule of law. There were people

that were being intimidated down there; there were people that were being extorted down there. There was oil being stolen, and the Prime Minister decided that it was time to take, you know, a kind of a bold move and go down there and fix the situation.

As you mentioned, things are much better now. I talked to Major General Abdul Kareem who is a Ministry of Interior Operations officer recently, and he says that the conditions on the ground there have improved dramatically, that they are restoring law and order, that people are back out, and that -- and that they're collecting weapons and are -- they're taking many caches in and off the street. So the operation there is -- is making very, very positive progress, and the Iraqi security forces are learning every day, they're learning and getting better, and being more effective in this kind of operation.

DR. TAHSEEN:

I just want to say that we also very proud by the performance of Iraqi security forces. They did and they are doing the best thing for Basra and for Baghdad and for all of Iraq. We are proud of them.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER:

Question from Radio Sawa. Question to Admiral Driscoll: Everyone in Sadr City talks about snipers, American snipers from the U.S. Army. And I've been to the city and I've seen in the hospital children, three, four years old, and even seven, and

they were targeted by snipers, and American snipers. Are those children part of the conflict?

The second question to Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly: You've mentioned that Sadr City or one third of it -- Sadr City represents one third of the population in Baghdad. So we have one third of unemployment exists in Sadr City. So are you thinking of eliminating the unemployment in general, because we know that unemployment is an important factor in this conflict.

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: First, I don't think anyone in this room believes that coalition forces would ever target children. In a combat environment like we talked about, the question over here, it's in an urban environment. And when -- when the criminals, when those that are carrying weapons and shouldn't be, when those are -- when they have mortar launchings and shooting rockets and doing those kind of things -- and they do it close to schools, they do it close to families -- they are acting extremely irresponsibly and they're putting them at risk. And as I said earlier as well, coalition forces go by very strict rules of engagement and often make decisions not to engage if there's even the possibility of civilians being hurt.

What I would -- What I would ask you to think about is in a fire fight, you know, the Americans aren't the only ones -- the coalition forces aren't the only ones that are -- that have weapons

there and are shooting. And so any time an innocent civilian is injured, is killed, our hearts go out to him and we -- we condemn that kind of violence. But the -- all -- the parties that are involved in the conflict have to take responsibility.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

DR. TAHSEEN:

You said that there's an unemployment, and there some employment actually, and people who work in Sadr City, most of the services and the basic services in Baghdad and the people who provide those services are actually those who work and/or live in Sadr City. It's the job of any government to take into consideration to know how much people live under the poverty line. And the government should set a priority in its programs to raise the living standards of those people to an acceptable level. And this is the job of the government -- whether it's in Sadr City, in Mansour, Karradah, Mosul, or even Basra. This is the job of the government. We have to, of course, that -- because any Iraqi has to live a good life and also to enjoy the riches of this country in a good way. But the problem is -- is the -- is the security situation that we are witnessing right now inside our neighborhoods, and this increases and influences the development of programs that could carry -- could -- could be carried out in those places.

And last question?

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER: Question to Dr. Tahseen Sheikhly and also to Admiral Driscoll: Iran and the Qutus force and its agents and what Iran is being doing (sic) ever since the war and until now, so what are the security procedures, the actual security procedures -- not those that are being also said by the American forces against all what Iran is doing?

DR. TAHSEEN: It's for you.

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: Okay. (Laughter.) The special groups that we see that are receiving training, they're receiving weapons, and they're receiving the money to -- to finance their operations are really -- number one, causing interference in the internal affairs here in Iraq. And they're also targeting -- indiscriminately sometimes -- innocent civilians. And so we've seen here in Baghdad, many of the rockets that come from Iraq (sic) kill innocent civilians here in Baghdad in the international zone, and so what we do in order to prevent that is we -- we target those rockets, and we also go after the -- the members of the special groups and we can find them.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER: Question to Admiral Driscoll: Through this press conference, the -- the community of the journalists demand the withdrawing the American forces from Sadr City and removing the wall.

(Speaking in Arabic.)

REPORTER: I have question to Admiral Driscoll: We have spoked (sic) about armed militias in Sadr City and also other militias. But we didn't talk about in this press conference about al Qaeda. Where is al Qaeda now in Baghdad and in the surrounding areas? There are some reports, international reports, saying that there are some activities to al Qaeda and al Qaeda is making use of the situation now. We didn't talk anything about al Qaeda, and we only talked about the eastern part of Baghdad.

REAR ADM. DRISCOLL: That's a very good question. As we found out last week, al Qaeda is still a very lethal enemy here in Iraq with a series of large car bombs. What it also tells us is that the Iraqi people have nothing to gain from al Qaeda. Their Taliban-like philosophy is one that the Iraqi people by and large have rejected. And al Qaeda no longer controls large areas of -- of terrain here in Iraq. They don't control major cities. And thanks to the great work of the Iraqi security forces and the coalition forces, they're off balance and in retreat. However, as we found out this week, they can still, through their spectacular attacks, still kill large numbers of innocent Iraqis. And so they maintain -- they continue to be a primary focus of -- of the military here in Iraq.

DR. TAHSEEN: Thank you very much and hope to see you in the future.

[END]