

PRESS CONFERENCE:

Rear Admiral Gregory Smith, Director of Communications, Deputy Spokesman, Multi-National Force – Iraq

Maj. Gen. Mohammed al-Askari, Spokesman, Iraqi Ministry of Defense

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PARTICIPANTS:

**Rear Admiral Greg Smith
Major General Mohammed Al-Askari**

REPORTERS:

**Courtney Kealy from Fox News
Clarissa Ward from ABC News
Arwa Damon from CNN
Ahmed Jassem from Arabiya Newspaper
Michael Howard from The Guardian**

REPORTERS 1-17

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI:

Asks question in Arabic.

INT:

...the safe havens of those groups. And also targeting the commanding operations of al-Qaeda. And also capturing the senior al-Qaeda leaders. And the Iraqi security forces and the MNF also managed to dismantle this organization and scatter it all over the country. And its operations, as you know, include the kidnapping of the children and demanding ransoms for them. And this is one of the methods they use to finance their operations. We will show you a video of releasing or freeing a child, an 11 year-old child. And his father is a simple man who works as a mechanic. He was kidnapped and the criminals wanted \$100,000. In case they didn't, he will be beheaded—the child that is. And we would like to stress the importance of the Iraqi citizens through the tips that he provides through being skeptic about one of the locations. And so they informed the security services. And you will see all this and the feelings of this family after their child was released. Because the child was really smart and he had a good memory of...he gave the number of his...the cell phone of his parents to the security forces and they contacted his parents. In this operation we managed to capture five of the kidnapers of the child in Kirkuk. And this operation came after receiving tips from the citizens. This is an important thing. After making investigations...investigating those

five kidnapers, they led us to another network in Kirkuk and we captured another three kidnapers. These methods of kidnapping the children and demanding ransoms so that they could fix their financial situation in al-Qaeda. And you will see now a movie. And after that Admiral Smith will also talk about a very important thing regarding the new mechanism of al-Qaeda which al-Qaeda shows off about this new mechanism. Do you know what that is? It's the use of children from 8 to 14. Al-Qaeda is bragging about recruiting those children and making them bombs to kill the Iraqis. Let me just go straight to the video and you will see it for yourself. And then Admiral Smith will talk about it.

[85 seconds of audio silence]

RDML SMITH: One of the most significant factors in the 60 percent decrease in terrorist attacks since last June has been the widespread rejection of al-Qaeda in Iraq by Iraqis who have suffered from their indiscriminate violence, their murder, intimidation, extortion, and kidnapping. As we just witnessed in the dramatic rescue video General Askari showed, the car bombs and suicide bombers that destroy Iraq's bridges, electrical systems, and most tragically, kills and injures scores of innocent victims. None of this can be explained in a rational way; it is a morally broke ideology that

Iraqis have rejected and are fighting against to reclaim their homeland. The fight has given rise to tens of thousands of local citizens volunteering to defend their neighborhoods, the dramatic increase in the number of tips as the general mentioned, and average citizens who come forward daily to Iraqi and coalition forces identifying problems in their neighborhood, and the commitment by the Government of Iraq that grew with security forces in 2007 by some 125,000 new personnel. The events in recent weeks further remind us of the morally-depraved nature of Iraq's enemy. We have seen two 15 year-old boys used as suicide bombers. Al-Qaeda also appears to be increasing the use of women as suicide bombers. Prior to 2007, five women had carried out suicide attacks. There have been ten women since that time with four already in 2008. The two women who most likely unwittingly carried explosives into the markets last Friday were, in fact, teenagers. Even more sad than that, they were both mentally handicapped and were used by al-Qaeda to murder innocent men, women, and children out celebrating their holy day. In further proof of the depths that al-Qaeda will go to achieve its objectives in Iraq, I want to share with you some photos of material recently obtained off an objective showing how these terrorists exploit children. On December 4th, near Khan Bani Saad, coalition forces conducted a targeted operation to go after several al-Qaeda operatives. In the

course of that operation, three al-Qaeda-Iraq extremists were detained and two others were killed when they showed hostile intent. At that objective, coalition forces found several items including five videos of al-Qaeda-Iraq training and indoctrinating a group of young boys. This is not the first time we've observed such material, but the volume and content was the most significant and disturbing we've found to date. The video shows 20 or so boys, most believed to be under the age of 11, being trained in how to carry out kidnapping and assassinations. The boys were supplied with weapons ranging from pistols, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenade launchers. The video also shows the boys making statements promoting slaughter and declaring their allegiance to al-Qaeda. We believe the purpose of these videos was to produce training films to be promulgated throughout Iraq encouraging other youth and presumably their parents to begin the necessary training and indoctrination toward becoming al-Qaeda terrorists proficient at carrying out violence against fellow Iraqis. I would like to now show you a short video that was compiled from the material found at the Khan Bani Saad operation. Please show the video.

[20 seconds of audio silence]

RDML SMITH: There should be some audio for this.

[8 seconds of audio silence]

RDML SMITH: I apologize. What you will hear in the video when you get copies, you'll see the boys were giving out orders to the gentlemen there that's being, obviously, kidnapped. They are being told by a male instructor off the camera here how to interdict a car [and] how to take the passengers out of the car. You can see they are all heavily armed; one boy in the back has a grenade in his hand. You see all the adults in the background there watching. These are the boys. Just young children; many of them below age 11. I apologize that the audio is not available but we'll make sure we get it for you. Here they are seen coming out of presumably a building that they have been occupying nearby in a neighborhood to assault another building. Again, deploying from a vehicle into a neighborhood for an assault. You'll see one of the male instructors here; the large man there—on the left there. And here the same male instructor is giving direction in how to assault a building. He is telling the boy to stay behind the wall until the other boy on the other side gets his position and directs an assault at that point. Teaching the boys how to climb over a wall so they can open the gate. You'll see the gate being opened by the first boy here in a second and letting the rest of the boys into a courtyard for an attack on a house. Teaching them

how to assault the doorway to come in [with] guns blazing and yelling and screaming and terrorizing, in this case, a family that's sleeping in the front room. And here they are in a group singing and chanting their allegiance to al-Qaeda. In addition to these training videos, we have also found at other locations videos of al-Qaeda using children for propaganda purposes. Al-Qaeda often refers to the children as the new generation in the mujahedeen. We've also seen evidence of al-Qaeda entering schools, disseminating propaganda and, no doubt, terrorizing the children and their teachers. We also know that as many as 5,000 Internet web sites associated with al-Qaeda or friendly to al-Qaeda's jihad, often target young people and children with their radical ideology. On December 8th, coalition forces were conducting operations against al-Qaeda-Iraq near Muqdadiyah and found a written proposal to do a movie script showing terrorists training children. The script was to include children interrogating and executing victims, planting improvised explosive devices, and conducting sniper attacks. As you can see, al-Qaeda in Iraq wants to poison the next generation of Iraqis and hopes to continue the cycle of violence they have brought upon Iraq. Despite the 60 percent drop in violence I mentioned at the start of my remarks, we still assess that al-Qaeda remains the most significant threat to Iraq. Consequently, Iraqi and coalition security forces will continue to focus its operations on targeting the

leadership of al-Qaeda and pursuing their networks wherever they are operating. During the month of January, Iraqi and coalition forces killed or captured a total of 35 senior al-Qaeda in Iraq terrorists. These 35 included four emirs who headed...who directed al-Qaeda-Iraq's operations in key geographic locations, three cell leaders, six who had vehicle bomb or roadside bomb network leaders. Six who led media and propaganda cells. Three foreign terrorist facilitators and 14 financial weapons and communications facilitators. On this slide it shows ten of the most significant of the 35 killed or captured al-Qaeda-Iraq for the month of January. Yasin Sabah was the security emir covering most of Northern Iraq. He was a recruiter, foreign fighter, and weapons facilitator. He was captured in Mosul on December 13th. Barhan Hammad 'Awad Hammad was a foreign terrorist facilitator in the Bayji area. He was picked up during an operation [on] December 11th near Tikrit. Salman Hammadi Salman ran financing in the Arab Jabour area. He was captured on December 22nd near Baghdad. I won't read the remaining seven at this time but, of course, you can follow through and indicate...see that these individuals range from bomb network makers, foreign terrorist facilitator...network leaders, as well as key communication nodes and carried out other activities inside Iran-Iraq. Before we take your questions, I wanted to note the stark contrast between those who are building a strong, secure, and

peaceful society and those who seek to create a culture of violence, hate, and despair. As I said last week, Iraq's democratic and elected government is building schools, training engineers, police officers, and doctors, and offers the children of Iraq hope for a peaceful and prosperous future. Al-Qaeda-Iraq, on the other hand, sends 15 year-old boys and mentally handicapped women on suicide missions, builds car bombs, and is trying to teach children how to kill. The Iraqi people have made their choice clear. And the men and women of Multi-National Force-Iraq partnered with the Iraqi coalition security forces...Iraqi security forces to rid this nation of extremism and terrorism. With that, we'd be happy to take your questions. Yes, ma'am.

REP1:

Hi. Good afternoon. Courtney Kealy; Fox News. Obviously I don't think the press corps needs a lesson on [the] moral depravity of al-Qaeda, but there are still lingering questions over the last bombing. And when you talk about a contrast between obvious terrorists using children, I think our concern really still is the credibility of the Iraqi government. When these two women were obviously either unwittingly used or consciously chose to blow themselves up, I know that eyewitnesses and people that actually saw—unfortunately to be macabre—the head of the body, the head of this woman, there was no visual proof that she was mentally

handicapped. And the Iraqi government came out immediately with evidence that they said that they were mentally handicapped. And covering unfortunate suicide bombings for years, I've never even seen someone as expert as the Israeli government have such forensic proof so quickly. If we're talking about credibility, I'd like to know what evidence you have that they were used and what you are doing to stop such catastrophic bombings that just recently happened even though security has increased and the level of violence has gone down. I think that's more of our main concern rather than...we all are very familiar with how horrendous al-Qaeda is.

RDML SMITH: I assume that question is for General Askari? General Askari is who the question is for?

REP1: I'd like both of you to answer; the American forensic evidence as well as the Iraqi forensic evidence because otherwise it starts looking like it becomes a propaganda war of two sides as opposed to what is happening on the ground to increase security. And I know a lot of people have risen against al-Qaeda, but it's a very upsetting question that I don't think you really have the proof unless you can tell us otherwise.

RDML SMITH: General.

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI: Speaks in Arabic.

INT: Well simply, after this suicide bomber was...took place in Baghdad al-Jadida and [unintelligible] Al-Ghazl market, we have some pictures we can show to the media the suicide bombers. We only have the heads of the suicide bombers and through these pictures and as you said, as there are some eyewitnesses said that...I talked about this. But also other eyewitnesses recognized those pictures and those areas include some security forces there. And after the operation was conducted, we gather so many information and investigation is still on. That's why through the pictures of the suicide bombers...so through the picture of the suicide bombers, we managed to reach the information and we make this statement.

RDML SMITH: And again, I guess you are asking whether or not we have definitive proof. The investigation being done by the Government of Iraq is, as the general just pointed out to you, their best judgment of the two individuals that were involved in those suicide bombings at the market were two women that were known in the area as having been effectively Downs Syndrome and were, in fact, the two women—two young women, in fact—that we believe unwittingly

were used by al-Qaeda to enter those marketplaces and were blown up.

REP1: Just a follow up question though. Is...there is no proof. And when you say definitively that they are used unwittingly, it starts to...you...there are holes in your argument. It's not a moral argument that al-Qaeda is bad. But if you are trying to put forth to credibility of the Iraqi government, I think it is important to have proper evidence before you go forth with saying things are facts when they are not necessarily facts.

RDML SMITH: Well again, I would state that what we know to date and what we've learned from the investigation that was done by the Iraqis is that these two young girls were two girls suffering from Downs Syndrome. They were used by al-Qaeda to enter those two markets and blow themselves up. If the evidence suggests otherwise in the future, we'll certainly provide that as an update. But at the present time, there's nothing to suggest otherwise.

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI: Speaks in Arabic.

INT: And every investigation will be presented to the media. And this is not something new; the use of the mentally-handicapped person

occurred one to two years ago. And it happened during the elections and also it happened in one of the funerals when sent a mentally disabled or handicapped people because nobody can control those minds and their emotions. That's why they use those people. And we have evidence...the Iraqi government has evidence. And the Multi-National Forces have evidence for those...for this mechanism.

RDML SMITH: Yes, sir.

REP2: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Al-Meda[ph] Newspaper to General al-Askari. Do you expect that there will be an optic in the kidnapping operations of the...against the children after you show us this movie...showed us this movie? Do you expect that there will be an optic in the kidnapping against the children?

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI: Speaks in Arabic.

INT: Of course we are taking the worst and we always take the worst conditions and we always calculate for everything. And...because the family...this will lead the family to monitor the children. And the teachers at school will also monitor that the students because

you cannot control the emotions and the thinking of those young children. Because when we were children, we were like obsessed with the movie stars and stuff like that. That's why when we agreed with the Multi-National Forces about showing this movie; this is to send a message to the Iraqi families to monitor the behavior of their children. To the schools in Iraq also should be careful in taking care and monitoring the use of the children. Also, the kidnapping of children was not only to recruit them; we have some confirmed information is that they will be used to finance the al-Qaeda through demanding ransoms. That's why these are messages sent to the people and everybody should be working together so that we will not allow those criminals from those terrorist networks to make use of those children. We should be guiding them into schools...inside the schools to love the country.

RDML SMITH: Please. Yes, sir.

REP3: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question from Radio Sawa. First question to Admiral Smith. There are some reports, some intelligence reports...American intelligence reports say that the al-Qaeda operations decreased in Iraq in a really big way and it's heading to other places and towards the Arab world. As an American forces, do you have any indication for that?

And also a question to General Al-Askari regarding the two young girls that conducted the suicide attack in Al-Ghazl market and also in Baghdad...new Baghdad, had they been kidnapped? Have you identified the families of those two young girls?

RDML SMITH: To begin with, the report you are referring to was...I saw some news reports this morning that the director of national intelligence indicated that their belief is that al-Qaeda, the broader al-Qaeda network, is moving some of its forces in areas other than Iraq. I think we've told you before that the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq has been reduced by as much as 50 percent through a number of means and efforts by both the Iraqis and by partners in the region. Whether al-Qaeda is, in fact, moving its resources elsewhere is not something that I would be able to address from here. I can only tell you what we observe inside of Iraq. And we've made it pretty clear that we think the degradation of the foreign fighter networks has been significant. The support of countries in the region to reduce the flow of foreign fighters has been significant. And those are two positive developments. As to whether al-Qaeda is moving its forces elsewhere in the world, I'd defer you to the national intelligence director for that kind of observation.

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI: Speaks in Arabic.

INT: As for the questions about the families. I think the commanding operation, also Operation Fardh al-Qanoon is conducting its work and we also reached some information and evidence. And through this investigation we conducted several operations. And we talked about...talked with the officials in Operation Fardh al-Qanoon that the investigation is still on and I think they reached to the families of those two young girls and women and the information is confirmed.

RDML SMITH: Yes, sir.

REP4: My question to the general from [unintelligible]. Concerning the children that you are talking about, what do you think? Are they Iraqi children or foreigners? Because I've seen a report on TV saying that some of the children have been trained actually in Afghanistan. They were Afghanian. And if so, how could they get in Iraq actually? Is there a problem with the police border people there? So what do you think?

RDML SMITH: I asked that question specifically and our assessment is that the children you see in that video are, in fact, Iraqi children trained here in Iraq. Again, not trained...from this video, I shouldn't leave the

perception that they were going out tomorrow to conduct the operations you saw they were being trained on. We believe the video and the purpose of the video was to use as a product that they could use as propaganda to send out to other areas in Iraq to convince, again, young boys to join the jihad, to be part of a growth of their indoctrination to when they do become of an age where their fathers are allowing them to participate in terrorist activities as families of al-Qaeda do, then they would be allowed to go off and do that. So again, the purpose was of the video, we think, was to really just spread more of a broader message across Iraq of indoctrinating young youth in the training and the philosophy of al-Qaeda was the objective.

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI:

Speaks in Arabic.

INT:

We will also provide to you some video with the boys with audio. The picture that you've seen and there should have been some audio but there is a mistake. But we will also give you the full tape with an audio. And you can hear that there are Iraqis with an Iraqi accent talking.

RDML SMITH:

Yes, sir.

REP5: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question. Haidl Essari[ph] from Egyptian TV to General Al-Askari. Where are those children now? Where are they now? And have they been entered into a special rehabilitation program? And the second question to Admiral Smith, there is a department in the Bucca camp or prison, and has children about those age and they have or they never undergo any rehabilitation program. And no one is helping them. And their future will be much worse than the future of those if they go outside the prison. Do you have any programs to rehab those children?

MAJ GEN AL- Speaks in Arabic.

ASKARI:

INT: Regarding the first question, this movie was found in December during operations conducted by the Iraqi forces and the Multi-National Forces at one of the operations...places of al-Qaeda. And as Admiral Smith said, this is just a propaganda message. Of course, as you know, the security situation in Diyala last year was really unstable and a huge operation started in Diyala. So the focus was on those areas like Khan Bani Saad and Baquba. And through...because it was a big safe haven for al-Qaeda. So now we destroyed those safe havens and we captured all the documents. And there is a good study at the Ministry of Interior and Defense and also from the Multi-National Forces. These pictures are just a

sample. And there are also other pictures that could give you information about the terrorists and about how we will resolve all this. All these safe havens have been destroyed and eliminated by us and the MNF. And so those children and their families and then we hope that through the media that, and as we said at the beginning, we hope that the education and the media should focus on this and we should start a campaign together to protect our children.

RDML SMITH: As far as the children that are and youth that are in detention, in fact, there is a very, very strong program of education and training that occurs at Bucca. Not only for the youth that are there, but also for the adults. Programs of instruction and basic education. They are all going to school. They are getting an opportunity to have religious education. They are learning some skills. And so, yes; there is a very strong program that will allow for the transition of those who made a mistake in the past [and] who no longer are a threat to this...to Iraq to be allowed to go back home. And that's been a transition as thousands of Iraqis that were in detention last year in coalition detention facilities are now back home having gone through that same process. Yes, sir. Third row. Yes, ma'am.

REP6: Hi. Clarissa Wood; ABC News. I just wondered if you could give

us a little bit more background on the video: Where exactly it was found? When exactly it was found? Who shot the video? How we know that this is al-Qaeda video? Just some more details on that.

RDML SMITH: Sure. Again, December 4th, Khan Bani Saad was the area. It's northeast of Baghdad. The actual operation was targeting a known senior al-Qaeda operative at the time. The objective was to take that individual. Three were detained [and] two were killed during that operation. Found amongst those individuals where they were...where we were at...where the operation occurred, was this material and other material. Around five videotapes full of raw footage that you saw portions of this. So the affiliation was tied to the fact that this belonged to the individuals that, again, we knew were al-Qaeda. They were on that objective. And the footage that we believe—whether they themselves shot it—we do not know what timeframe they shot it so I can't give you an answer there. But again, we assess it to be Iraqi children here in Iraq having been filmed at some point in the recent past. Raw footage that we assessed would have been used to produce a more finished product, like a propaganda film, that could have been sent out then and used in other mediums. We'll go on this side real quick.

REP7: Arwa Damon; CNN. Just to follow up on Clarissa's questions too.

Do you have any sort of idea as to the numbers of children that al-Qaeda has already recruited, is trying to recruit? What happened to the children that we do see in that video? And also, what can you actually do as the U.S. military or as the Iraqi government to try to prevent al-Qaeda's access to these children? What parts of the country do you believe these training camps are centralized in? And just a bit more background in general on the use of children in these operations.

RDML SMITH: Unfortunately, I couldn't tell you even a range of numbers in terms of how many children have been affected by al-Qaeda. Clearly there are families that...in which the adult males are part of al-Qaeda and you would assume that those children that are growing up in that household environment; an environment that would, unfortunately, perhaps produce the next generation of al-Qaeda in Iraq. The real way to slow this down, to stop the cycle of violence, is to remove the impetus which is the adult males that are participating in this violence. To end...to stop them from becoming the role models—a bad role model—for their children. In the case of these young boys, again, since we do not have custody of the children, we don't know precisely where they are at, there's little we can do directly for these individuals. But the great hope is that families who have an opportunity to say no to al-Qaeda and make a change, reconcile

their differences with their neighbors if that's necessary, and bring their families back into a more normal, balanced lifestyle, that's the hope we would like for this to occur. And I think the education of all Iraqis on the dangers of allowing even what might seem like child's play, although albeit with literally real weapons in real scenarios, is a real dangerous thing to do. So it's our responsibility I think to make certain that Iraqis are aware of this kind of activity. And that's the purpose of providing this footage to you as the media to get it out there. Sir.

REP8: [unintelligible] from Kyoto News, Japanese news agency. Do you have any clear evidence indicating that a link is still exist between al-Qaeda organization in Iraq and al-Qaeda of bin Laden in terms of finance, human resources, or chain of command?

RDML SMITH: We have a great deal of evidence through interrogation and other means that we've learned over the years now in Iraq operating against al-Qaeda in Iraq. The linkages back to the senior leadership of al-Qaeda are there. And the linkages are several. Their links are not necessarily directly in making decisions about what attacks to carry out on any given day here in Iraq, but the overall support of financing, of foreign fighters, obviously the connection from a media propaganda is all directly tied back to the senior leadership of

al-Qaeda. Remember that the al-Qaeda in Iraq is led by foreigners who are spreading essentially the Taliban-like ideology of al-Qaeda inside Iraq, forming allegiance with other extremist groups here in Iraq, and then collectively addressing what they believe to be their purpose which is to create a caliphate here inside of Iraq at any expense, at any cost. And so there are direct connections back to senior leadership of al-Qaeda. And we know that to be the fact and the case. And of much concern to us, of course, is the...addressing what happens here in Iraq. There are other parts of our national defense that are concerned with other elements of al-Qaeda worldwide. And we'll go here and then back to you.

REP9: Do you have any statistics on how many...sort of breaking it down, how many children have been kidnapped by AQI elements or elements connected to them? How many have been used, how many children or teenagers have been used in bombings? And overall, how much—you've described this as a propaganda tool—do you think this is more systematic than that? You mentioned two cases of teenagers being used. Do you...can you tell us which two cases those were and as well? So just sort of to break down the pieces.

RDML SMITH: It would obviously take a great deal more analysis to answer your question specifically on numbers and the number of children

involved in kidnapping. All that, I guess, would be available if we took the time to go through all the records of every kidnapping. That, of course, would be really something the Government of Iraq would have to do largely to answer your question. But I think more precise to your question, are we concerned that al-Qaeda is using children in the capacity of actually conducting operations? We know that two boys recently. One out west where, you'll recall, he went into the home of a sheik in Anbar Province with a box of candy and it blew up killing several. And then you'll recall up north, the young boy that set down what we believe to be a portable heater in front of a school injuring and killing several. Whether those two boys knew precisely what they were doing? Somebody knew obviously. But what they wanted the intent to be which was to kill and maim and they used those two boys to do it. So it's not clear what the two boys' objectives were and how they participated—wittingly or unwittingly. But the use of children in general is a disturbing trend. And these are just two specific examples in recent time. But I don't have necessarily a picture that would paint the landscape over the last three or four years and show trends. There certainly are many cases. If you look at the...again, the youth that have been involved in operations, that have been caught up in operations as spotters—they are often used in that way and those means—and used, unfortunately, even with carrying

weapons and being caught up in violence. Those individuals are in detention both by Iraqi and by the coalition for their activity. So we know there's been a pattern of behavior associated with young children. And it's a concern that we believe that Iraq's future is being poisoned by such use of children. And it's an important thing for us to highlight. And certainly something that the Iraqi people themselves need to do as much as they can to prevent that from occurring. Back here.

REP10: Ahmed Jassem. Speaks in Arabic.

INT: Question from Al-Arabiya Newspaper. The financing of al-Qaeda is being through stealing the oil products. And we know that Iran is controlling 15 oil fields; recently we know that. So what is the stance of the American government from this? And also the Iraqi government through this because the Iraqi government summoned the Iranian ambassador and also gave him some statements to stop such plundering of the oil. And also question to Major General Al-Askari, it's been a year since Operation Fardh al-Qanoon started and we know well that al-Qaeda and the armed groups still, every day, renewing their tactics and their operations. So what we want from you to...is that we want you to stop them and change your tactics as well. When we pass through the streets, we could see that cars are backed off and checkpoints. And you know very well that

this could attract suicide bombers as we have seen on the video tape.

RDML SMITH: The first part of your question—it had a couple of parts to it—but I’ll try to address it. In terms of al-Qaeda and their financing efforts in the hydrocarbon areas, in other words, stealing oil directly out of pipelines, called oil bunkering where you essentially plug a hole...punch a hole through a pipe, run a siphon off it into trucks, and sell it on the black market. That’s clearly been a means by which al-Qaeda has used to finance its operations as well as opening up legitimate gas stations and skimming funds off that as well as just through the extortion of the hydrocarbon industry be it truckers or be it gas stations as well. The second point, I certainly wouldn’t be able to address from here as the MNF-I spokesman regarding Iran’s alleged horizontal drilling into oil fields in the south. And I’ll leave Major General Askari to address that issue.

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI: Speaks in Arabic.

INT: Well, before answering this question, this is what the Iraqi government and this is a security conference. We talk about certain subjects like the policy of the government. That’s why this is left for the Iraqi government. And any political thing, it’s up to it. As

for your question, the changing the tactics of al-Qaeda, the intelligence information and the pursuing the criminals, all this is a really big and huge thing. There are people that are working day and night in all the Iraqi ministries. And it's the best thing that you cannot fight because you don't fight the regular army because you are dealing with the terrorist groups that are being trained in a good way and they are using the locals as human shields and also using the ground so that they will hide. Let me just answer your question is that we always change our tactics and methods is that you use their same methods. You cannot set a military plan just like you were fighting a regular army because those are just spectacular attacks done by a group of criminals. Let me just remind you of one thing...let me just remind all of you that these operations in...of al-Qaeda in 2006-2007 and compare that with the operations conducted now ever since Operation Fardh Al-Qanoon started. So you just make...go back and make the comparison yourself. Of course we have techniques, we have methods, [and] we have coordination with the Multi-National Forces. And we manage to eliminate some operations before even they happen. But we can talk about the media...about all the operations. But the thing of...the matter of removing a checkpoint or putting it, you all every time demand us to set a checkpoint. Yes; there could be some mistakes in the checkpoints but we can overcome them. Sometimes there is a

traffic jam. We're studying all those. But you should remember that we should give some time or you should give us some time to train our Army. We are receiving and training and fighting terrorism and we have been...we are training our soldiers and fighting the terrorism. That's why we need more training of our soldiers on how to search and how to conduct or man the checkpoints.

RDML SMITH: We've got three questions here. We'll take the second row and we'll come back to the front.

REP11: Shukran. Asks question in Arabic.

INT: I'm a host of a program at the Hurriya channel. Major General Askari, could you or could the minister of defense coordinate with the minister of education to educate the children because some of the children are students and they could be inside the school. So could there be any coordination between the two ministries so that the teachers could have some educational courses, security educational courses, to teach the teachers there to control the students and understand them. Because the teachers could contact and interact with the children. Because the teacher could be able to do that. And the second question to Admiral Smith. During the direct phone calls during the program, an Iraqi woman called and while the Vice President al-Hashimi, she was...she witnessed her

son while...she witnessed her son in a prison while al-Hashimi was making a tour inside the prison. And when she went and checked the name of her son, she couldn't find it in that particular prison. So when she goes to that prison she doesn't find her name...her son's name. And this is not the first time when you don't find your...someone's name inside a prison where he is supposed to be there.

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI:

Speaks in Arabic.

INT:

Regarding your first question, after receiving the information—that was a month ago—we study carefully and how to set a program, an educational program to protect the children in order to prevent the terrorist groups from using...from making use of the Iraqi children. We are also ready to coordinate with the minister of education and also the minister of human rights and all the ministries and the media on...even the international communities in order to protect the Iraqis and the Iraqi children from this phenomenon.

RDML SMITH:

I guess to answer your question, if you are referring to an Iraqi detention facility, I can't speak to that. But in coalition detention facilities, of course, all individuals are documented. Their names are taken and clearly there is a control for that. I can't speak

specifically to that particular mother and the situation you address. But we certainly do not go about any process that would involve not documenting an individual's name properly and accounting for his whereabouts inside our detention facilities. We are expected all the time...there is a clear and transparent process there. So I can't speak to the specific of that but I assure you we try to be as clear in our documentation of the individuals that are in our care and custody. Front row, please.

REP11: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Could you give us the details and double-check it? We don't have any presence by the way but we can help you if you want.

RDML SMITH: Sir.

REP12: Michael Howard from The Guardian. Could you give us some numbers of children in detention to your knowledge? Age ranges; how many are in Iraqi detention? How many [are] in U.S. detention?

RDML SMITH: Let me follow up on that. I can absolutely do that. I just don't have the number on the top of my head right now that are in coalition force detention. But we'll follow up on that. We'll make sure that

answer gets posted today on our web site.

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI:

Speaks in Arabic.

INT:

If you'll allow me, Admiral. Some of you has a different idea. Those videos have been captured inside al-Qaeda training camps. Those have been trained previously and they have been...that's why they're making some evaluation. Some of the pictures that you have seen, most of them were, like, masked and through this we can reach to those children. But these operations like when Diyala was controlled by the terrorist groups and most of the places there were training camps. And this was one of the training camps that was used to train the children. Now only it could be just for propaganda but also for conducting operations. In al-Qaeda, this was captured...the video was for a training camp for al-Qaeda. This is just part of the document that was found by the Iraqi and the Multi-National Forces.

RDML SMITH:

Yes, sir. Second row.

REP13:

Asks question in Arabic.

INT:

Question from the Japanese News Agency. I would like to ask were you able through the documents that you found, were you able to

know the children? Are they the sons of former fighters in al-Qaeda or they come from poor families so that we can, like, know the purpose why those people are joining al-Qaeda. Are they just being impressed by the movies or it's a corrupt ideology?

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI:

Well, let me say that when the government has power and when government starts to clear areas, such phenomena could disappear. How could we protect the children? How could we do everything? This could be done through achieving operations. Also through achieving the gains from those operations. Such trainings, such phenomenon used to happen when there was a void for the security services in those places. That's why this made them able to terrorize the people. And the children used to impress...they were so impressed when they used to see the al-Qaeda. If we go now to Diyala, you can see the opposite. The Iraqi child now has new method of thinking. Of course, that is due to the presence of the Iraqi government and the presence of the Iraqi security forces. So when a child sees the Iraqi soldier and the Multi-National Forces are protecting him, he will not be impressed by such videos.

RDML SMITH: Ma'am.

REP14: Jamana[ph] from CNN. I've got a question, Admiral Smith,

regarding the video that we saw. We were wondering if you got any information if these children were there willingly or any indication that they were kidnapped. And a question for Major General Askari.
[continues in Arabic]

INT: We'd like to ask what is the stance of the Iraqi government. And what [are] the Iraqi security forces are doing in the streets? Because we see suicide bombers and we see all those happening. So what's the government is doing about this?

RDML SMITH: It would only be our assessment; that was we watched the videos and watched the interaction with adults in the neighborhood. It appears that it truly is a tribal...areas of families in which the adults are participants in the training or are obviously part of the al-Qaeda operations there and it's their children is the presumption. But it's just an assessment. We don't precisely know because we don't have custody of those children. And we have not been able to prosecute by asking questions of the individuals, either adults or children, that are involved in that video.

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI: Speaks in Arabic.

INT: Regarding your question, I would like to just tell you that there are

some decisive procedures but we can't talk about everything because the enemy could make use of this information that we have. But these operations, they always have some counter procedures. We always make meetings for the practice cells to protect, to evaluate, and anticipate what they would do in the future. And as a media...and you will find in the future that there are some procedures in the future.

RDML SMITH: All the way in the back, please. Yes, sir.

REP15: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Question to Major General Askari. Do you think the government will start a huge campaign regarding the...against the homeless people and the disabled?

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI: Well, we can't just react. Tomorrow they could start a new operation, a new method against laborers. This is not a good way to fight it. The fighting terrorism is based on intelligence. And it's a fight that you should have the initiative. That's why when we say that we...our operations are based on intelligence to pursue such operations. And also to invest the cooperation that is being...the increased cooperation between us and the citizens. This could also answer the question of one of the reporters who said that many of

the people who supported and gave us those tips and they gave us the idea or the identification of...they identified those two suicide female bombers. That's why we are trying to... However, this is just an operation that was conducted and we should work on how to prevent such operations in the future. And as you know that the work or our fight depends on intelligence and we seek intelligence so that we can eliminate all the operations not only such suicide bombers like...or...because there are so many other operations by al-Qaeda. That's why this is what we are focusing on.

RDML SMITH: Perhaps a couple more questions. Yes, sir. In the back.

REP16: Was there any indication in the video or the documents whether they were actually being trained to become suicide bombers? From what I saw at least, it looks like they were being trained for warfare or kidnappings and so on. But was there any actual indication...?

RDML SMITH: Could you go back...could you put back the one photo that's got the one boy in the right with the vest on? We'll show you...and not in the training footage, but in the other propaganda films we've seen, we have seen young boys with suicide vests. The boy on the right; that's a suicide vest he's wearing. But again, not in the training video that was taken at Khan Bani Saad. This was footage,

propaganda footage taken off other objectives in the past. So precisely to answer your question, yes; we've seen evidence of it but not in the training that was done earlier. Question, please. Yes, sir.

REP17: Just to be precise, the use of children, the use of the mentally disabled, you're not saying that is a new phenomenon, that's a new trend? It's just you're noticing a few more incidents in the last couple of months? Is that accurate? And also, second question to Mr. Askari. With regard to the investigation, Fardh Al-Qanoon, with the woman suicide bombers from Saturday, you are saying that you know that they have made contact with the families and all that information is confirmed? Or do you just think that is what occurred?

RDML SMITH: Let me answer your first question. You are right. We are not saying that there is a new phenomena occurring in Iraq. We know that for some time women have been involved as suicide bombers. The statistics, as I pointed out earlier, suggest though in the recent, since November especially, there has been I believe seven or eight attacks by women wearing suicide vests. When you compare that to the total number since 2003, it's a large percentage of that has occurred in the last three or four months. Whether or not it's a trend or not,

it's too early to tell. The same with the young youth. There have been youth involved in violence here in Iraq for some time. The fact that literally within a week there was two boys, both happened to be 15 years-old, it certainly catches your attention. But again, not a trend that we could statistically document.

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI:

Speaks in Arabic.

INT:

As your question, the commanding operation of Fardh Al-Qanoon is working and it has some information about this. And when all the investigation...when the investigation is complete, we will announce everything about this. We cannot hide everything. When all the investigation is complete, it will be announced and we have information—and confirmed information—that and it will be announced once the investigation is complete. I'd just like to say finally, if the admiral allows me, this use of children has a main thing. It's just a propaganda for the desperate status of al-Qaeda which is the use of the disabled or the children. And this, I think, is a factor that al-Qaeda is dying in Iraq. Or else why would he go to those or use such mechanisms or methods? And some could justify...those who support al-Qaeda because they say that the children could not be noticed by the security forces or they couldn't be searched. That's why they could conduct such suicide

operations. And this is what happened. Like in the al-Ghazl market, there is kind of like weak point in searching the women. And this is something normal in Muslim countries. And this gave us a lesson of how to search the women. That's why they think, al-Qaeda think that they could achieve and have an initiative through the use of children and women because there are...nobody could suspect children or a woman that could be a suicide bomber. And I think the admiral has detailed information. Because the children used to cargo[?]. . .used to transport the weapons and explosive from one place into another.

RDML SMITH: Well, thank you very much for your patience. We got a little start late today and we got a full hour in. But I appreciate it. Any questions afterwards. We're going to have the videos for those that can draw from the Defense Visual Information Distribution System, DVIDS; it's on the system now. We also, for those that cannot get there, we have copies on DVD in the back that you can take with you. Shukran. Thank you.