

PRESS CONFERENCE:

Major General Kevin J. Bergner, Spokesman, Multi-National Force – Iraq

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PARTICIPANTS:

Major General Kevin Bergner

REPORTERS:

**Leon Nasri from Al-Arabiya TV
Ahmad Kareem from AFP
Alpere[ph] Teqalif[ph] from IHA**

REPORTERS 1-16

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Good afternoon. As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Operation Phantom Phoenix continues to pursue the extremists and disrupt their networks even as coalition and Iraqi forces further expand population security in Iraq. Major General Mark Hertling, the Commander of the Multi-National Division – North, and Lieutenant General Odierno, the Commander of the Multi-National Corps in Iraq, have both provided recent updates and detailed operational insights into the effects their operations are achieving. There have also been a couple of other operations in recent days which I'd like to update you on this afternoon and then I'll be glad to take your questions. On Thursday, in Al-Ali, a village in the Northern Diyala River Valley, coalition forces detained 10 al-Qaeda in Iraq terrorists during an intelligence-driven raid. Among the group was a cell leader, two, who had been involved in planting roadside bombs, and seven other terrorists. On Sunday, near Baquba, coalition forces liberated two Iraqi citizens who had been brutalized in an al-Qaeda torture house. As the soldiers approached the building, they heard individuals crying out from behind a locked door. Inside were two men, chained to the ceiling. It turned out that they were hard-working electricians who maintained the power lines that are so vital to the electrical infrastructure and so vital to the distribution of electricity to the Iraqi people. The soldiers also found braided wire

cords, cables, and a strapped hook...a strap hooked to the ceiling used to hold the prisoners while they were being beaten. The men said they were kidnapped by al-Qaeda gunmen while driving to visit family in Baquba on January 9. They were then bound and blindfolded and taken to the torture house. Several al-Qaeda terrorists interrogated these two men for information about Concerned Local Citizens in the towns where they lived. They wanted to know who supported the Concerned Local Citizens and who was seeking to join the volunteer groups. They were beaten and questioned during 11 days of captivity. The soldiers confirmed that both men clearly had suffered at the hands of their tormentors and were bruised and bloodied as a result. The enemy also continues the use of indiscriminate violence that kills and injures the young and the old, men, women, and children. On Friday, in the Ur neighborhood of Northeastern Baghdad, extremists killed a local woman and a child with an improvised explosive device. And on Friday in Tal Afar, Iraqis were attacked during an Ashura gathering at a local mosque. Nine Iraqi citizens were killed in that attack and 14 were wounded when a rocket was fired into a group of citizens gathered for that peaceful religious celebration. And on Monday, in Baiji, an al-Qaeda in Iraq terrorist desecrated a funeral ceremony when he detonated the suicide vest he was wearing. All of this is further evidence of the nature of al-Qaeda, their use of

indiscriminate violence, their corrupt Taliban-like ideology, and the targeting of innocent civilians—even those mourning the passing of a fellow family member. Al-Qaeda in Iraq not only targets women and children but—as we are witnessing in recent months—they also prey on their innocence and have used them as suicide bombers. On Sunday, a young boy whose family is from a tribe that is linked to al-Qaeda in Iraq, walked into a gathering at an Awakening Council leader's compound and detonated a bomb inside a box of candy, killing himself and four others. And yesterday, in Baquba, a young man placed a heater in front of a high school which detonated upon being set down. The explosion killed the boy, another Iraqi, and wounded some 27 others. It is unclear whether that young man was a witting or unwitting victim of the terrorists but it is clear that he was another young casualty of their violence. Coalition and Iraqi security forces are also targeted by these suicide bombers that have been unleashed by al-Qaeda. And it's been coalition and Iraqi security forces [that] have successfully intervened in a number of instances to keep suicide terrorists from reaching their targets. In the process, these brave troops and Iraqi security forces are exposed to extraordinary risks. The following video clip is an example of that tough fight our soldiers are engaged in. Before showing it, I want to note that no coalition forces were killed or injured as a result of the suicide blast that you'll see. During a recent operation,

coalition forces targeted an al-Qaeda in Iraq leader associated with a terrorist group north of Baghdad. During that operation, a terrorist emerged from the building and appeared to be holding something in his hands. When he continued to move toward our forces, he was engaged with small arms fire which detonated a suicide vest he was wearing. The second portion of the video of the same objective shows the ground force which was then engaged from inside the building. Another terrorist, who was armed with explosives, caused a second explosion on the other side of the building. In the first video you saw him come out of the building. In the second one here, he will be on the top side of the building there by the red dot. And as coalition forces are being engaged by small arms and maneuvering, he sets off the second suicide vest. Again, I want to emphasize that none of our forces were killed or injured in these engagements. During this operation, our forces were engaged with small arms fire by another terrorist. Coalition forces returned fire and killed the attacker who was wearing the suicide vest you see here in this photograph. And in a separate operation, coalition forces killed another suicide terrorist equipped with a dual-initiation system which you can see could be fired either by a trigger device on...near his hand or one that was mounted near his belt as is shown in this photograph. These are just two of the many suicide bombers who have been interdicted before they could reach their

targets thanks to the courage and tough fighting that our soldiers and the Iraqi security forces continue to undertake. Even amidst this barbaric violence or perhaps, because of it, brave Iraqi citizens are stepping forward from all communities to serve their country. These brave individuals join knowing they will face a ruthless enemy. And many have already seen first-hand the violence of these terrorists in their neighborhoods. On Monday, 1,830 of these citizens became Iraq's newest national police officers as they were recognized at a graduation ceremony at Numaniyah National Training Center. The graduating class represented the diversity of Iraq. They represented all sects. They represented all ethnic backgrounds. They represented all the religions of Iraq. They also represented the diversity of technical skills the academy develops: democratic policing and human rights, crime scene investigation, antiterrorism, survival skills, defensive tactics, and the use of fire arms. The specialized training includes advanced fire arms, urban operations, search techniques, close-quarter tactics, and additional courses in leadership and logistics. The national police are increasingly representative of the diversity of the Iraqi people and are taking important steps to remove the sectarian influences that have challenged the force over the last few years. This graduation is progress towards full representation of all Iraqis. Most importantly, this graduation is further testimony of the willingness of Iraqi

citizens to serve their country, protect their communities, and confront this barbaric violence. A tough fight remains ahead of us and we are working closely with Iraqi forces, with the citizens of Iraq, the Government of Iraq, local leaders to keep the pressure on the extremists and continue improving the overall security situation across Iraq. Shukran jaziilan. Thank you. And now I will be glad to take your questions. Yes, sir.

REP1: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: After the full amnesty was passed by the Parliament, is it possible to include or...to include the detainees that are actually within the Multi-National Forces...within...is it possible to include the detainees within the Multi-National Forces within this law again?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: I couldn't hear the very first part of the question. Was it about the amnesty law? Is that...?

INT: Yes.

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Okay. I got it.

REP1: Repeats question in Arabic.

INT: After the full amnesty has been passed by the Iraqi parliament, is it

possible to include the detainees inside the Multi-National Force's detentions? Is it possible to include those again?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

First of all, I would point out that the law that's currently being debated by the Government of Iraq and the Council of Representatives is an Iraqi law that will address those individuals under the control of the Iraqi security forces, their confinement facilities. And so it will address those under the control of the Iraqi government. It is specifically...my understanding is that it's specifically written and intended to address guidelines for those individuals. Shukran.

REP2:

Asks question in Arabic.

INT:

Leon Nasri from Al-Arabiya TV. I'm asking about the events...the recent events and that actually are outside the control of the Multi-National Forces in areas in Basra and Nasiriyah for instance. What is the recent information that you have regarding this...or regarding these groups? How they got to those places? Where did they bring the arms? Et cetera.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, first of all, I would start by saying that the Iraqi security forces in both of those instances, under the leadership of the Basra Operational Command which is the police forces headed by General

Jalil and the Army forces headed by Lieutenant General Mohan, by all accounts reacted very well to a very difficult and complex attack by those extremists. And that the 8th Iraqi Army Division forces which were under the leadership of General Othman also played a role in helping maintain control and then rapidly return the situation to the rule of law. So the Iraqi security forces were confronted with a very difficult and challenging circumstance. And by all accounts, reacted very well both in terms of those on the scene and in terms of their ability to marshal additional forces to help bolster the capability of the Iraqi security forces in both places. So overall, I think the Iraqi people should feel that their security forces performed quite well. The extremists who tarnished the important Ashura observance were from a group that has created those kinds of confrontations for the Iraqi security forces in the past and clearly shows no respect for the citizens of Iraq and for the important religious observations that were underway. And my understanding is that they have detained a significant...the Iraqi forces have detained a significant number of those extremists and they are continuing an investigation to understand exactly how they were organized and what charges will subsequently be brought against them. Shukran. Yes, sir.

REP3:

General Bergner, it's a perennial question; I'm sure you've come

across it many times. But, sir, there are many groups within Iraq from different sectarian confessions who practice the same kind of methods that you were detailing and outlining in the video that you showed and then prior to that. But how can you be so sure that all the actions that you mentioned were the result of al-Qaeda in Iraq and not these other groups who, as I say, have used exactly the same kind of methods?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, first of all, I would start off by saying that there is...we absolutely agree with you that there is a mosaic of threats against the Iraqi people that count a number of different extremists. But I also would point out that the suicide bomber and the kinds of technique that that has been used with in the past has very much been a signature-style attack that's frequently associated with al-Qaeda in Iraq. In these instances, our intelligence and our targeting information that led us to those objectives were the basis for our understanding that these were al-Qaeda terrorists and that they were associated with al-Qaeda terrorist activities. And so we had intelligence that confirmed that for us in addition to our historical understanding that those kinds of devices that I showed you there today are frequently a trademark of an al-Qaeda attack. Yes, sir.

REP4:

Asks question in Arabic.

INT: A few days ago in a late hour, there has been an incident after the Multi-National Forces raided one of the houses in Al Amman neighborhood in...southwest of Baghdad. And the owner of the house was killed. So do you have any detailed information about this?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Yeah. I am aware of an Iraqi special operations force operation that was conducted in Al Amman against an extremist that they had targeted. They had intelligence against that individual and my understanding is that during that operation, he was either pointing a rifle or had picked up a rifle and was about to employ it against the Iraqi special operations forces when they took action against the hostile threat. And I believe that's the incident that you're talking about it which was, according to the Iraqi special operations forces and our understanding as well, against an extremist who was associated with a number of different attacks against the Iraqi people. Shukran. Yes, ma'am.

REP5: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: You said that the talking about terrorism inside Iraq and the operations that the Iraqi people face from terrorist operations, there are victims. And you said that women and children were the victims of the terrorist activities. And the United States is a great nation and

we know that. So why can't America, with all its technology, to seal the borders with the neighboring countries? Because through these borders, many things come into Iraq. And we can't eliminate terrorism if there isn't cooperation between the Multi-National Forces and also the Iraqi forces in sealing the borders. Because if you seal and control the borders, security will be much improved in Iraq.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well first, I would say that you raise a very good point that the security of Iraq's borders is a critical aspect to the national security of the Iraqi people. It is the focus of a number of regional working groups. Iraq is leading a conference with its neighbors with a specific focus on border security and ways that Iraq and its neighbors can better cooperate to improve security along the shared border that they have. So there is a multilateral effort underway at the diplomatic level that also involves the technical experts from the Department of Border Enforcement—Major General Mohsen's border enforcement experts—that are engaged with their counterparts in each of the countries that they share a border with. There is also a strong coordination and teamwork between the coalition forces and Iraq's border enforcement forces as well. This involves representatives from the United States Government Department of Homeland Security that are providing customs,

immigration, and other expertise on the border and actually working with their Iraqi colleagues. It also involves the use of shared technology like backscatter radar devices which are able to examine vehicles without having to unload all of the contents and screen for contraband and, in particular, things that could render...be a threat to the citizens of Iraq. And then there is a training effort that's underway as well where the coalition and Iraqi forces are collaborating to help train the necessary experts—both for border security but also to actually operate the Ports of Entry. And then lastly, I would say there is an effort underway to modernize and improve the Ports of Entry so that they are organized and they are structured in such a way that they can provide the best affect in helping secure Iraq. Most recently, the border crossing at Al Qaim was reopened after a very extensive renovation effort. And there are similar efforts underway in some of the other Ports of Entry as well. So it's a multifaceted approach to—what I think all of us would agree with you on—is an absolutely important requirement for the national security of Iraq. Shukran. Yes, sir.

REP6: Ahmad Kareem, AFP. Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Since January 10th, there has been air strikes in Arab Jabour area and you targeted over 100 locations but, however, until now you haven't said anything about the casualties of the enemies from al-

Qaeda. So...and what is the danger of the objections for the places that you have bombed? Are there weapons caches or what?

MAJ GEN BERGNER:

I couldn't understand from the question exactly which area you were asking about. Or was there a specific area?

REP6:

Speaks in Arabic.

INT:

Arab Al Jabour.

MAJ GEN BERGNER:

Okay. Yeah. There has been a very difficult security threat to the citizens of Arab Jabour, south of Baghdad. You have heard some of the operations that are underway to clear deep buried improvised explosive devices and to target weapons caches that had been established there; some quite some time ago. And the Multi-National Division that operates in that area, Multi-National Division – Center which is built on the 3rd U.S. Infantry Division, has undertaken a number of operations to target those IEDs which represent a significant threat both to the coalition and to the Iraqi people and to target the weapons caches that have been placed there. They are increasingly supported in that effort by the local citizens—some of them organized into local security forces which you've heard referred to as Concerned Local Citizens and some referred to as Iraqi security volunteers—but also increasingly

supported and assisted by the civic leaders and the tribal leaders in that community as well. So it is a place which has suffered significantly from terrorism and it is a place where there is a collective resolve and a significant effort underway by both the coalition, the Iraqi security forces, local citizens, and local government to improve the security situation there. Shukran jaziilan. Yes, sir.

REP7: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: The recent events in Basra and Nasiriyah layout where the.... Do you think that al-Qaeda has changed its style? Do you think al-Qaeda changed its style in the recent opera...events in Basra and Nasiriyah?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Well, I think that the intelligence that the Iraqi security forces have developed in regard to the extremist attacks in both Basra and Nasiriyah suggest it is extremist groups that are not associated with al-Qaeda but associated with other extremists. And so those groups are the real source of the threat to the stability in Southern Iraq. That's...those are the ones that the Government of Iraq and the Iraqi security forces believe are involved. Shukran. Yes, sir.

REP8: Asks question in Arabic.

INT:

Where have you reached concerning the...importing the weapons or machines that detect the car bombs that were supposed to be distributed all over Baghdad?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

There are a number of technologies that are available both to the coalition forces and to Iraqi security forces that are being applied to the challenge of locating improvised explosive devices and, specifically, vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices before they can be used. They are deployed in places where they make...that they provide the best opportunity to interdict. And they are employed in a way that protects their detection so that their deterrent value and their actual operational value can have the full affect. So we don't talk in detail about exactly where they are located and we try not to talk too much about how many there are and exactly what their capabilities are because we want to protect that in a way that gives them the best chance of having the success that we all—and I know everybody here—hopes that they are able to achieve. But I would just address your question by basically saying we are applying the full range of technological capabilities, tactical capabilities, local human intelligence, and the cooperation between local citizens, their security forces, and the coalition force so that there is a multifaceted approach to dealing with that. Because it isn't just about technology; it's about the whole range of

intelligence and technological solutions. Most importantly, supported by the citizens of Iraq to reduce the capability for terrorists to move those weapons into their neighborhoods. So thank you very much. Shukran. Yes, ma'am. Tina.

REP9:

Thank you. Back to the situation in Basra and Nasiriyah. As far as you know, is...are the people that were involved the same group that was involved in the fighting in that area—I guess it was in Najaf a year ago—the Soldiers of Heaven, or the Army of Heaven or an offshoot? And also, these groups, you know, they really don't...they're not militias really. They're not al-Qaeda. They really are off the radar. So what is the game plan, if any, for dealing with them? Because they kind of...they can tend to just crop up in unexpected places as we've seen.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Yeah. There were members of what you referred to as the Soldiers of Heaven who were associated with the attacks in Basra. They are, as you described, an extremist splinter group; an extremist element that may not fit neatly into another naming convention. But they do share the same disregard for the rule of law. They share the same disregard for the security and the safety of the Iraqi people. And they represent a significant...in that regard, they are a significant threat to the stability of and security in the communities where they

operate. So the Iraqi security forces are working against those organizations. They are developing the intelligence necessary because they are a recognized threat both in terms of their instability and in terms of the threat to security against the Iraqi people. But it is very much an Iraqi security force, Government of Iraq-led initiative in those provinces where provincial Iraqi control has been achieved. I think I would go back, Tina, to the point that in both of those instances, the Iraqi security force response to the circumstance that was created was actually very timely. It was well organized. And they were able to maintain the rule of law and maintain order even amidst a very difficult threat to them. Yes, sir.

REP10: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Kasimir[ph] Baqabi[ph] from.... The Iraqi government is the preserver of the Awakening Groups due to some official documents that.... So do you have any mechanism to change that? Do you have any mechanism to change that?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: I'm sorry. I didn't understand the first part of the question. Any mechanism to change what?

REP10: Repeats question in Arabic.

INT: The Iraqi government is kind of consis.... The Iraqi government is

kind of preserver because of joining some of the Awakening government and that that is due to some official documents that DOI has against some of the Awakening Groups. So do you have any mechanism to change that?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, what I am aware of is the prime minister and the Government of Iraq have committed to work with the Concerned Local Citizens to...and the broader Awakening Group as you refer to it, to help those individuals; those that are qualified, those that are screened and vetted and capable of serving in the Iraqi security forces to transition and become legitimate members of the security forces of Iraq. There are several thousand Iraqi citizens currently going through that process. A couple of thousand, some 2,000, have already completed the process and the actual training and are serving in the Iraqi police in Western Baghdad. Several thousand more are in the process of either completing the screening, waiting for their school assignment, or preparing to begin their actual training. That doesn't count the several thousand in Al Anbar Province who have already gone through the screening, the vetting, and are either members of the police in Anbar Province or the 1st and 7th Iraqi Army Divisions stationed in Anbar Province. So there is actually a...there has...first of all, there is a commitment by the Government of Iraq to work with the Awakening Groups. There is a

mechanism that's in place whereby members of these groups have the opportunity to seek to serve in the security forces. And then there is a process that is actually working to bring those who are qualified and interested in serving into the security forces. The Government of Iraq is also committed to another path which could result in finding civilian employment for those members of civilian groups, civilian...Concerned Local Citizen Groups who are not going to go into the Iraqi security forces. But as the security situation improves, they will be in need of civilian employment. And so there are programs that are being developed under the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, under the Ministry of Industry and Minerals, and that involve the Ministry of Education's technical colleges and training programs to make them accessible to all of the citizens of Iraq but also the Concerned Local Citizens as a way to help move them from a security role into a role where they have a civilian job in their country. So both of those are underway and there is progress being made in bringing them into the...bringing them down those paths. Shukran. This gentleman was next.

REP11: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: If you go back to the, also, events of Basra and Nasiriyah, when you said that there extremists at work against the government and also target the Iraqi government and they are not al-Qaeda but you say

that they belong to another sect that is tried by another side that actually happened in south. Thank you.

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Yeah. I think the best way to characterize those who belong to a religious sect and subscribe to an extremist policy, some of them have been identified under the title of the Soldiers of Heaven and others may come from other extremist groups that are not associated with them. Shukran. Yes, sir.

REP12:

Asks question in Arabic.

INT:

My question is about the Awakening Groups. And after making or the vetting process, some certain problems...security problems appeared. So what is your procedure when something like this happens? When you discover that there is a security problem or...

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

I was just waiting for him to finish. He talks slower than you do. Shukran. First of all, when Concerned...when an Iraqi citizen steps forward and says he wants to associate himself and help protect his community, that's an important step that needs to be understood just in the context of the courage and the commitment to want to now work to enforce the rule of law in their community. And so there are a number of people who are making those decisions now that wouldn't have made those decisions a year ago. And they are

making decisions to no longer tolerate al-Qaeda or special criminal groups that are operating in their neighborhoods or members of other splinter groups, extremists. They're making decisions to step up and help stop the violence in their neighborhood. Some of them come from backgrounds where they were at one point fighting against the legitimate security forces of Iraq and the coalition forces. But they've made a decision to change that and to start working towards security and stability in Iraq. Reconciliation is all about a government reaching out to and finding ways to work with its former enemies, not its friends. And so part of this is about reaching out and helping those who were once fighting for the wrong purpose but who are now willing to serve for the right purpose to become part of that right purpose. In the process of that, there will be individuals who have done things in the past that have to be addressed and that's what the Government of Iraq, the security forces, the intelligence services will have to assess and they'll have to make those kinds of judgments about the suitability of each of those individuals. I should point out though, that as these Concerned Local Citizens undertake that transition, one of the first things they do is they sign a pledge of loyalty; a pledge of loyalty to commit their honor to work towards the security and stability of their community and their country. They are then also screened and vetted for exactly the kinds of things that all of you would expect

them to be screened and vetted for—to make sure they can be reliable and that they are suitable for making that transition. And in cases...in most cases, there are tribal leaders or civic leaders or others who are willing to speak on their behalf and to help commit...to support that transition to go forward. So there is a process of assessing individuals, of improving their accountability. And that also includes their entrance into the biometric data system where fingerprints and digital retinal scans, weapons serial numbers, all of those things are taken as well which provide another measure of accountability as they make that transition. So there will be information that sometimes will raise concerns but it has to be understood in terms of the transition that that individual is committing to make. And it has to be understood in terms of the safeguards or the accountability checks that are being instituted by the Iraqi forces, our forces, and the Government of Iraq. Shukran. Yes, sir.

REP13:

Alpere[ph] Teqalif[ph] from IHA. Again, back to Basra and Nasiriyah. If the Iraqi security forces are capable of control of the area there, where is the line for the Multi-National Forces to gain control over that area? That's my first question. The second is, how concerned are the citizens in Basra and Nasiriyah? How many of the Concerned Local Citizens do we have there?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, first of all, I would say that Nasiriyah and Basra's achievement of provincial Iraqi control is a reflection of the shared assessment that their civil authorities and the Iraqi security forces are able to deal with the threats to security and the threats to stability in those provinces. It doesn't mean...it doesn't suggest that there is an absence of violence or an absence of threats. It suggests that they are able now to deal with those threats as they are...as they confront the Iraqi people. And I think the performance of the Iraqi security forces, both the police and the Army, in both of those places, is a testimony to the fact that they can deal with those threats—even very difficult ones like we saw in both of those cities. So provincial Iraqi control and the sustained effort by the Iraqi security forces is not measured by the absence of violence. It has to be interpreted in terms of their ability to deal with those who will continue to try to cause violence in their communities. And so by that measure, I would say that the Iraqi security forces continue to show they are capable of dealing with it—even difficult situations like that. And the second part of your question was?

REP13:

How concerned are the local citizens in that area...

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Yeah.

REP13: ...about the Concerned Local Citizens?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Yeah. The Iraqi security forces and the government leaders in those areas are working closely with the citizens to strengthen the bond between those who govern and those who are providing security and those who are in need both effective governance and security. And it is one where they are continuing to grow in terms of their capacity and their capability. But it is one where you see, increasingly, the citizens in those provinces becoming part of the solution, working more closely with their security forces, and working more closely with their government. There is still much work to do there. There are still many competing agendas. There are still significant criminal activities that are seeking to disrupt security and stability there as well. So there is much work to do. No question about it. But the overall capability of the Iraqi forces and those who are governing there to be in the lead in dealing with those challenges and working with the citizens in those communities is moving forward even amidst the challenges that they still face. Yes, sir.

REP14: I'd like to go back to the point you were making about the willingness of the Iraqis to make that transition—to step forward

and work with not only Iraqi government forces but MNF-I forces. Now I accept your point that, you know, people have reached a certain point at which they don't want to see their communities threatened by, you know, violent forces and terrorist forces. But over the last five years, I think it is undeniable to say that what has prevented a lot of ordinary Iraqis—you know, honest citizens who, you know, love their country—from stepping forward and making that transition is the notion and the idea that the MNF-I are still, you know, a foreign military power in Iraq. And there has been this stigma that has been very difficult to shake off over the last five years for MNF-I and the Iraqi government. So what do you think has changed in the last year that makes Iraqis want to step forward where they were uneasy at first, you know, perhaps a year or two ago, with working with MNF-I forces and Iraqi government forces?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, I think I would just go to one specific example that I can remember. One of the leaders of these Concerned Local Citizens in a neighborhood in Northeastern Baghdad who said, “We used to think that the coalition forces were here somehow for an unhelpful purpose and al-Qaeda was in our neighborhoods. And we since learned that it is al-Qaeda and their corrupt ideology, it is their indiscriminate use of violence, and it is their barbaric practices that are really the enemy of the Iraqi people.” And in his words...his

words were something to the effect of, “We have now come to understand that. And we understand that the Multi-National Force is actually seeking to help us rid our communities and our neighborhoods of those terrorists.” And that was their specific basis for making that transition and taking that step. So I think it is very much a part of the Iraqi people’s collective judgment that those terrorists are not what they want in their neighborhoods. Their ideology, their violence, and their corrupt, oppressive practices, their desire to create a Taliban-like state here in Iraq is something the Iraqi people reject. And I think that rejection by the Iraqi people has been a critical element of improving the trend in security and the path that the Iraqi people are now on. Yes, sir.

REP15: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: I’m sorry to ask but...okay. Concerning Diyala Province, there have been some joint operations with the Iraqi security forces and you announced that some of the operations ended but the terrorist groups also went back to those province. Concerning the Soldiers of Heaven, it appeared in Al Serba[ph] area in Najaf Province and they also appeared in Basra and Nasiriyah. And according to the information that we have, the security forces captured Abu Muthada[ph] in Nasiriyah awhile ago. Do you think that Soldiers of Heaven have or apply the same mechanism or they can move easily

and also follow the same method that al-Qaeda is following?

**MAJ GEN
BERGNER:**

Well, first I would say that the change that's underway in Iraq is really the near term and the future solution that will help improve security and stability for all Iraqis and that is a decision at the local level by the people of Iraq, the Shabal[ph] Iraq, that they will not tolerate the violence and the extremists in their communities any longer regardless of where...of who those extremists are and what their ideology is. And that seems to be one of the consistent and more enduring characteristics of the change that's underway. The Iraqi people—whether they are in Southern Iraq or in Diyala or in Ninawa Province or in Anbar Province or here in Baghdad—they are rejecting the violence and they are rejecting the extremists that are causing the violence. And by that rejection and their willingness to work more closely with their security forces and with the Multi-National Force and with their governments, they are changing the atmosphere; they are changing the circumstance and making it more difficult for extremists, as you describe, to be able to move around or be able to organize themselves to have freedom of movement or freedom of action. And so it's that courage, really, of the Iraqi people that is changing the dynamic in such a way that it is making it more difficult for these extremists to perpetrate the violence and to terrorize Iraqi citizens. Shukran. We'll take one more question if

there is one. Okay. I thank you very much. One...I'm sorry. One last question. Okay.

REP16: Asks question in Arabic.

INT: Are there any good intention...have you seen any good intentions from the JAM after being free? This is concerning the detainees from JAM inside the Multi-National Forces?

MAJ GEN BERGNER: Well, first, I would say that Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr's pledge of honor to halt attacks is being honored by those who are faithful to him. And those who are honoring his pledge are contributing to the improved security situation in Iraq. It is improving the situation. It is improving the basis for reconciliation—an atmosphere for national reconciliation to move forward. It's allowing the Multi-National Force to focus more on al-Qaeda and the other extremist elements that are a threat to the security of Iraq. And so this step is a helpful one to the Iraqi people, to all Iraqi people. Shukran jaziilan. Shukran jaziilan and ma'salaam. Thank you everybody.