

**PRESS CONFERENCE:**

**Major General Mark Hertling, Commander of General Multi-National Division –  
North and 1st Armored Division**

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**Major General Mark Hertling**

**REPORTERS:**

**Gina Chon from The Wall Street Journal  
Jonathan Blakely from National Public Radio  
Brian[ph] from NBC**

**REPORTERS 1-12**

**\*REP1 = REPORTER 1**

**\*INT = INTERPRETER**

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

As-Salāmu `Alaykum and good afternoon. Ladies and gentlemen,  
it's been about three months since I last spoke to this group down

here in Baghdad, coming down from Tikrit which is where we are stationed. I know many of you are interested in the security conditions in the north. But I know some of you are interested in some of the other things that are going on in the north so I'll try and cover both of those things in an opening statement. First of all, in terms of security, since June of last year, the significant activity in the northern provinces as we measure them have been reduced by about 75% across the board. It's gone from about 2,600 reported events a month in June of 2007 to about 650 in June of 2008 and that's continuing to decline so far this month in July. The number of IEDs that we have seen in the northern provinces have decreased by about 50% since February of this year from about 950 to about 430 as measured in June and those also continue to decline. That's not to say we still don't have threats. The largest threats that we are seeing from both terrorist and criminal organizations are suicide vests in the southern province of Diyala and vehicle-borne explosive devices throughout the provinces but specifically in Mosul. And what I'd like to say about those two things, because it shows the barbarous and evil intent of our enemies and why they must be destroyed in Iraq so Iraq can continue on, is by our count the number of killed Iraqis from suicide vests has been about 250 since the first part of the year. The number of Iraqis killed by vehicle-borne explosive device is in the neighborhood of about

1,500. These are random violent acts conducted by these criminal terrorists and that's why we are continuing to go after not only the ones that do these things, but the networks that support them. Continuing operations; I brought this map here just to show you the areas that we operate in as you all well know. Here is the City of Baghdad and all of these provinces are the Multi-National North Division's operation areas. We are continuing to conduct – with my brother, Lieutenant General Riyadh – Operations Month of Two Springs in Mosul and Ninawa along with the 2nd Iraqi Army Division and the 3rd Division...3rd Iraqi Army Division with elements of coalition forces continue to operate in Mosul and throughout the province. We are beginning, as announced by Prime Minister Maliki, the operation, Omens of Prosperity. Please don't fault me for my pronunciation, Bushar[ph] Aqar[ph], the operation Omens of Prosperity in Diyala Province. And that will begin in early August. And while those two operations are being led by the Iraqi Army, we will continue to partner with Iraqi security forces and begin conducting our own operation which is called Iron Pursuit. Now that's an operation that's directed against all the support zones of al-Qaida in Iraq. And our message in conducting that operation is we have secured the key cities of the north. We have seen al-Qaida continue to be pushed into what we call "the support zones" or the areas of the desert. And we will continue to

pursue them into those areas, relentlessly pursuing them and showing them there is no sanctuary until they leave this country. With that as the security breakdown, what I'd summarize by saying is security is better in the north. It's better throughout Iraq. You all know that. It's getting better daily. Right now as we speak there are over 1,200 new Iraqi policemen in training academies throughout our four academies in the northern provinces. Additionally, the Iraqi Army continues to grow in both capability and size. We conducted...as an example, we conducted this last Wednesday a combined air assault with Iraqi forces in Diyala Province that consisted of about half-and-half Iraqi Army-U.S. Army at a two-battalion assault into an area that has been the sanctuary of al-Qaida. And we're continuing to clear those areas as well. This improved security has allowed a greater economic development in the four northern provinces and I'd be happy to talk about that. The markets are open and getting better every day. The roads are being paved. As I flew down here for a commanders' conference yesterday, I saw personally three different asphalt crews on the different roads throughout different areas of the provinces. I saw hydroelectric lines going up throughout the provinces and being repaired. Electrical towers that are going to bring better and increased electricity. Generators have been moving throughout our provinces. We just moved several large generators into Samarra last

week. And the exports are increasing as well. The oil exports, as you know, are at a record high. That also allows for greater political interaction between the Government of Iraq and the provincial governments which we're seeing as they prepare for the upcoming vote. And I'd like to talk about that as well. But those are my opening statements. With that, I'd like to take any questions. Yes, ma'am.

**REP1:** Gina Chon. Wall Street Journal.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** Hi, Gina.

**REP1:** I had two questions. One, what your comments were about some of their recent military officials who have talked about al-Qaida leaving Iraq for Afghanistan and how that's affected your area of operations? And my second question was in regards to Mosul, there have been reports before about assassinations of professors and certain other professional groups. And I was just wondering what the situation is now? If you're still hearing reports of that happening there?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** Yeah. I'll answer the first one, the first question about the al-Qaida leaving Iraq. I really don't concern myself with that to be honest

with you. That's for my higher commanders to concern themselves with. My concern is making sure that we go after 'em in my area of operations. If they leave Iraq, that's fine with me. But all I'm concerned about is either killing them or capturing them and getting them out of the way of the Iraqi people so they can improve security in the northern provinces. In terms of individuals being killed, that's true. There are intimidation tactics going on throughout the northern provinces. Al-Qaida, we think, has been targeting not only Iraqi security forces, writ large, but specifically in some cases, Iraqi police. They are targeting in some cases Iraqi intellectuals because they know these are the individuals who are speaking out for a more representative Iraq and a more inclusive Iraq. So, yes, that intimidation and murder campaign certainly is ongoing. I don't believe it's at the level of extreme yet but there are some instances and we track that every day as part of our significant activity looks in the various provinces. Yes, sir.

**REP2:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** That was...a report said the [unintelligible] of the operations in Mosul. Also previous statement, Iraqi officials said there are currently revise the operation in Mosul regarding the operation. Is it really the first military campaign failed in Mosul?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

I'm sorry. Say again the last part.

**REP2:**

[Repeats question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

When the second phase of military operation in Mosul will begin, do you think it's really the military operations in Mosul have failed?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

No, I would not say the military operations in Mosul have failed at all. In fact, what I would say is General Riyadh's operations have been a great success. There are still attacks going on in the city but they have been significantly reduced. What is occurring – and I was just in Mosul last Wednesday and, in fact, I 'd like to talk a little bit about that. I was in Mosul last Wednesday and what I saw compared to three months ago was a completely different city. First of all, we drove down the Baghdad Road in Western Mosul and construction projects were beginning to actually be done by Mr...or Dr. Chalabi. He actually has paid the money and some of the construction projects are beginning to work now so there's good emphasis there. And I'd invite you to come up to see it for yourself if you'd like to go out there with me. Then I went to downtown Mosul to the Babaltu[ph] marketplace. I walked several kilometers of markets and there were, by my estimations, between 20[000] and 30,000 people in the market at that given time. I talked to many of the shop owners in the market and they were saying how successful

the security operations had been, but they were now looking for improvements in the economy, better jobs, more people to get back to work because, as you know, there's still a high unemployment in Mosul. But I think the combination of the security plan – by General Riyadh; by his division commander, General Abdullah, in Mosul itself; by the security plan out east by General Khorshid and the 3rd Iraqi Army Division – has significantly reduced not only the attacks, but the flow of insurgents into the city. What needs to happen now and the Iraqi government and the provincial government is working on this is continually improving the economic conditions of the city. When I walked the Baghdad Road three months ago, it was completely open. There was no one there. It looked like a bad day in a city that had been experiencing combat. When we drove down that road this week there were women and children out. I, in fact, went to a barbershop and talked to some of the men that had opened a barbershop there, talking to them about upcoming sports events and the Olympics and things like that. So there is beginning to be a return to normalcy in the city. It still has a way to go. And in fact, General Riyadh is continually conducting operations in the various neighborhoods of this city with two million people in it in Ninawa Province. Yes, sir.

**REP3:**

As-Salāmu `Alaykum.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

Alaykum As-Salām.

**REP3:**

[Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:**

Iraqi citizen feel right when security improved, especially in the northern province. But we wondering now...we are...my question about provisional's election council. Iraqi citizen waiting for this moment after eliminating the terrorists. Now he's waiting for provisional councils. You're talking about [unintelligible] battle in Mosul. Iraqi citizen feel the security but the employed problem still in the city; big problems in the city. And its present a big problems in the city and it's hurt all the Iraqis. Please, will you give us clarifications regarding this issue?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

On the elections? The question is on the elections, I believe. The election registration is ongoing. In fact, I was just talking to some of the governmental representatives this morning and heard the very good news that of our four provinces, three of them are the top three in the country right now in terms of voter registration. Number one is Ninawa. Number two is Salah ad Din. And number three is Diyala. So the voter registration is ongoing. I think we have to contribute to the campaign to make sure people understand that the registration for voting is for all Iraqi people and it is for allowing

them to vote later on in the general elections that will elect their provincial councils and their governors. In terms of security, what we have seen so far in the voter registration centers, I have watched, in fact, with amazement at the Iraqi Army as they have secured these centers and made them safe for the people to come and register. And in fact, in some areas, specifically in Ninawa, General Riyadh has had to balance, as any good commander would have to do, continuing operations with securing the voter registration sites. And he's had both of those things in his mind as he's planned his operations over the last several weeks and as he continues to do things. But he's been in very, well, as all the military officials have been, all the Iraqi military officials have been in close cooperation with their governments, the provincial governments and with the central Iraqi ground forces command in terms of securing those sites so that voting can be more transparent and representative across the northern provinces. Shukran.

**REP4:** As-Salāmu `Alaykum.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** Alaykum As-Salām.

**REP4:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Can you give us more details regarding the military...upcoming

military operations conducted by Iraqi forces in Diyala? Especially this province witness so many displaced and IED attack and VBIED attack. The second question is can you tell us also about the...where the al-Qaida hiding right now? What the logistics support they obtain from where? Where they got their logistic support?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

Yes, sir. Shukran. The upcoming Diyala operations, I've been extensively involved. Lieutenant General Ali who is the commander of the Iraqi Ground Forces Command has literally displaced himself and elements of the Iraqi ground forces from here in Baghdad to Diyala Province and they've established a headquarters outside of Baqubah. They have...they will be bringing together in early August the elements of four Iraqi Army divisions, some additional national police, and they will be linked very closely with the Iraqi police forces in Diyala Province itself. General Ali has also had conversation with the Sons of Iraq groups. In fact I was at that meeting that he had last week with the various sheiks and tribal leaders who were the leaders of the Sons of Iraq. And he's given them...first of all, he thanked them for all their services to the province in the past. He then said that they must be aware of the ongoing...of the upcoming operations so that they remain secure as well and that they could best contribute to the security of the people of the province. And third, he promised them that in the future

government as things became more and more secure, the Government of Iraq would continue to work on getting all of them long-term jobs. In terms of the security of the provinces, the cities of Baqubah and Muqdadiyah have become relatively secure. There have been indicators and events that have occurred which has drawn the attention of the media, rightfully so, such as the suicide vest that occurred in Baqubah last week. But in fact, that was one of only a few events that occurred in that city last week. But it was so spectacular in nature that it draw...it drew the attention of the media and the press, rightfully so. But the al-Qaida elements that we've seen have sought refuge in the rural areas all around the major cities. And I could point to areas in the map where we believe they are and those are the areas that we will be conducting operations, not only with Iraqi security forces, but with coalition forces as well to pursue them as they have continued to try and find safe havens in the deserts and the hills and the palm groves. That's all part of the operation. And I think with the amount of forces that are coming into Diyala, some might say, well, al-Qaida is going to run away like they have before in Mosul. Well, we've all seen that they didn't completely run away, but some of them went into hiding and then came back. And even as they tried to come back, we've gone after their hiding places and pursued them there relentlessly. For my brothers, Diyala...the province of Diyala is about the size of our

state of New Jersey. It is a very large province. And it conducts...there are a lot of great things that occur in the major population centers of this province. But there are also very many hiding places in the rural areas and those are the areas that now the Iraqi security forces have to go after. I think the increase in the number of Iraqi policemen that will contribute to this as well and the number of Iraqi security forces that are going there will help improve the security of this province. Shukran. Yes, sir.

**REP5:** [Unintelligible] from AP. From...thank you. One Yankee paper said around 60,000 Iraqi soldiers and policemen be participating in this upcoming operation. Can you confirm that?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** No.

**REP5:** Okay.

[Laughter]

**REP5:** How American troops deal specifically help the Iraqi soldiers?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** How will they help them?

**REP5:** Yeah. Help.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

Yes. I won't tell you how many forces will be contributing to the operations in Diyala, but there are more forces than that were there before. They will...American forces will be contributing by partnering with our Iraqi brothers, both in the Army and in the police. We will be providing what we term enablers – fire support, some intelligence. I shared a significant amount of intelligence with Lieutenant General Ali yesterday in terms of where we think al-Qaida is hidden. And he's shared the same with me. As we conducted this air assault operation he gave me some intelligence that we knew nothing about. Artillery. Some logistics. A lot of engineers. And some aviation. And what I mean by aviation is helicopters that will deliver soldiers. So all the things that we term enablers that the Iraqi Army is becoming more and more capable of but has not reached the level that they'd like to be, we will be contributing to this fight. Yes, sir.

**REP6:** Hi. Jonathon Blakely from National Public Radio. I'm going to...I kind of [unintelligible] so excuse me. But I kind of have three questions but I'm going to try to squish it all together.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

Okay.

**REP6:** Can you repeat one more time the names of the operations and how they're...yeah.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** I can. The first one in Ninawa that's been ongoing for...since the 5th...since the 10th of May, excuse me, is Um Al-Rabi'ain, which is Mother of Two Springs. The second one which is going on in Diyala right now – and please, don't laugh at my pronunciation – is Bushar[ph] Aqar[ph], which is Omens of Prosperity. And the operations that we are conducting throughout the north, lumped into the category of Iron Pursuit because we are the “Iron” division. But you will see a bunch of other operations: Saber Pursuit, Bastogne Pursuit. And that...those are being conducted by our brigades throughout the north in partnership with the Iraqis.

**REP6:** You talked about hiding places, but can you talk even more specific challenges that will be faced? Specifically in Diyala when that operation gets underway.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** Challenges in terms of our fight against al-Qaida?

**REP6:** Exactly.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

Yeah. I think the combination of how...I'm sorry. I didn't answer the gentleman's question from before: how they are getting funding to conduct these operations. And we're seeing kidnapping rings, extortion plots, murders for hire, as well as some other areas: corruption in some businesses and extortion. So this enemy that we're fighting continues to try and take away from the society through a variety of means to get funded to do the things that they're doing. We're also seeing some what we call "harvesting" of weapons from the old Iran-Iraq War along the border where there are just flat out some weapons transporters, people who are dealing in arms who have no ideological bent other than making some money, selling some weapons to the extremists and the criminals. What will be difficult is it's hot out there and dusty. Visiting with General Ali a couple of forces that were on the ground in an area to the east of the province on Wednesday of last week, temperatures were 127 degrees at the time and soldiers were doing what soldiers do under heavy armor in both the Iraqi and the American forces and doing a very good job at it. And they're still out there right now.

**REP6:**

Would you call this perhaps one of the greatest and most difficult challenges for the Iraqi Army to date?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

It is an interesting challenge. And I think as we've watched the Iraqi

Army over the last several months conduct operations in Basra, in Sadr City, in Amara, and even to a lesser degree in Mosul, those were all cities which had very specific enemies that the Iraqi Army was going after. Now we're talking about an operation that is going across an entire province. It is going to be very challenging for both them and us. This is a big area. So what I think it might be better to characterize it as, hey, this is not only challenging but they're stepping up to it. This is an Iraqi Army that a few months ago was still building itself. And now they have a great deal of capability and they are tackling a problem throughout an entire province. It's going to be challenging. Yeah. Absolutely.

**REP6:** And finally, as you talk to Iraqis in the north, there is an ongoing drought. Have they spoken of it and can you just talk a bit about...

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** The drought?

**REP6:** Exactly.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** Oh, absolutely. The worst drought from what I understand in about 15 years. The governors of various provinces, specifically Governor Ra'ad of Diyala, Governor Mustafa of Kirkuk, Governor Kashmoula of Ninawa are all attempting to look at ways to mitigate

the effects of the [coughs] drought. Governor Ra'ad was able to get some additional money from the Iraqi government on drought relief. And he is, in fact, in the process of drilling 184 wells. By my last count which was early last week, he has...he's completed 44 of those to try and get some drip irrigation systems in. Now, I'm really stepping off in an area where I don't belong, into the farming ring[?]. They are also looking at some other techniques which changes the way they do business...they, the Iraqi farmer does business. We have contributed to that by attempting to get a Team Borlaug from Texas A&M University to help their agricultural outlook in terms of those provinces. But in talking to the governors and some of the farmers and some of the farmer co-ops, the crop levels are down about 70% and they're trying to work themselves through that right now. It's going to be a very difficult year for the farmers in all of the eastern part of the provinces. And what's problematic about that is it will also affect them next year because of the ongoing seed value change and things like that. If you take a look at not only the—because it's all irrigation—not only are the rivers dry, but the key lakes in not only the province are down by 15 to 20 meters, but also the lakes in the Kurdish regions are down as well so the Kurds can't share a lot of the water with them. It's a very difficult challenge. It's al-...quite frankly, when I walk away I say, "Gosh, the Iraqi people are unbelievable! They have dealt with

terrorists, criminals, insurgents, and now they have to deal with the drought, too. And still they are standing up and doing some pretty good things.” I hope that answers your question. Yes, ma’am.

**REP7:** As-Salāmu `Alaykum.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** Alaykum As-Salām.

**REP7:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** After the operation in Diyala there will be more operations. Does a timetable put by Multi-National Forces so the security will be as stable for all the province even if you got 95%?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** Is there a plan? I’m sorry. I didn’t know if there was a question in there or not.

**REP7:** [Speaks briefly without translation in Arabic.]

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** What was the question again?

**REP7:** [Repeats question in Arabic.]

**INT:** After the operation in Diyala there will be more upcoming opera-  
...military operations? There are a timetable put by government or

Multi-National Forces so that security will be normal in all of provinces[?] even if we got 97%?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:**

Yeah, I think I understand the questions. Will there be additional operations after the one in Diyala? There is one thing that is occurring right now that's been very interesting to me. As we've conducted operations in all of the northern provinces there has been a movement that is beginning to gather momentum called reconciliation. We have had over 2,100 former insurgents in our area of operation who have turned themselves in and said, "I don't want to fight anymore. I'm tired of running. I want to be part of the political process." A lot of those have been in the Southern Salah ad Din area and some in the Kirkuk-Northern Salah ad Din area. But these have literally been insurgents that have come in, they have been not hard-core ideologues, but they have been insurgents who have fought the government who said, "We just want to sleep in our own home at night. We want to join the political...." In fact, one of them told me, he says, "The future of Iraq is the finger, not the gun." It was a pretty interesting conversation. But we think more and more of that will happen as individuals begin to see the increasing strength of the Iraqi government in terms of securing their people. We are still attempting to get the right amount of security forces on the street – Iraqi police and Iraqi Army. We are

still short significant numbers in the northern provinces. And at the same time, I think a growing economy will significantly help things as well. Right now there is still too much unemployment and when there's unemployment people sometimes do bad things. That's a roundabout way of answering your questions. Will there be continued operations? There will be as long as the Iraqi security...as long as the Iraqi people are threatened. Would we like to stop those operations and just get back to normalcy? Absolutely. But part of that depends on the insurgents either going away or being killed or captured. Yes, sir.

**REP8:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Do you think...what the reason behind the draught in Diyala Province? The Kurdistan region's got to do anything with this problem?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** No, I know that they do not. The reason for the drought is a lack of rain. If you take a look at the average rainfall within the last two years, it's been significantly reduced throughout all of the eastern part of Iraq, but specifically the northeastern. The Kurdish region has also been significantly hit. As part of our area of operations, we...while we don't have forces in the three Kurdish provinces, I do visit there often to maintain relationships with the Kurdish

governments. And I've been to all of the Kurdish lakes and they are significantly down in terms of their water level. So it's affecting the Kurds as much as the Iraqi provinces as well. So, no, in fact, Governor Ra'ad did, in fact, go up to the governor of Sulaimaniya, Governor Dana, and asked for some additional release of water. And he did get some, but not enough to completely relieve the drought within the province. Yes, sir.

**REP9:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Al-Qaida used to establish schools to train terrorists. But you trained a university in Kurdistan. Why can't you establish such a university in Salah ad Din or Ninawa Province?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** Well, I think that there are schools and universities in both of those provinces. Tikrit University is very thriving. The university in Baqubah is a very thriving university and it is back and operational. Mosul University is one of the biggest universities I've ever seen. So all of those provinces are all...they all have their education system and they're all coming back to a prosperous level. What I will tell you is one of the things that we are coordinating with the Iraqi government with is something we are calling a JTERP program. Joint Training Education [and Reintegration Program]...and I can't remember what the rest of it stands for. But

it's the equivalent of a community college where we are, in fact, training young men and women to have goals and skills that will be returned to the society. And we are working very closely with the Iraqi government at establishing these very small schools to get more people employed to contribute to the communities where they live. Shukran. Well, I don't think I have any more questions. Thank you all very...yes, sir. I'm sorry. One more question.

**REP10:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Welcome you in Baghdad.

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** Shukran.

**REP10:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Can you tell us about the situation...security situations in Samarra City? And do you think the quiet...it's quiet enough to let the people return their home in the city?

**MAJ GEN  
HERTLING:** I think what you'll find is...the answer to your question is yes. The security condition has improved dramatically in Samarra. In fact, there was...I just saw before I came in here a report on one of the U.S. channels about a reporter who had gone up there and reported how security had improved there. And by the way, before I answer

the question, I would invite any of you to come up to any of the northern provinces, anywhere you'd like to go and we will show you around the various cities so you can see for yourself how security has improved. But in terms of Samarra, the markets are beginning to open up right now. Many of the people have returned and are going back to their homes. There are still some challenges in terms of them getting...many of the people going back to the homes that they left. But I think that what you would find if you went to Samarra is the mosque is being rebuilt right now. There is a corporation there. The streets where the construction are going into the mosque have been walled so the truckers and the construction workers can get in there very easily. But the rest of the city has returned to near normal-like patterns. And I think that you would be amazed if you were to go to the City of Samarra today how it's improved over the last six months. The first time I went to Samarra in January, I was shot at three times as I rode around the city. Just the other day I walked from the patrol base down to the Golden Mosque as it...to watch it being reconstructed and talked to some of the people. I had chai with a few shop owners on the street. And it was amazing the changes in the security conditions of that city over just the last several months. Okay. Thank you all very much. I appreciate it. And thank you for what you are doing. Ma'salama.