

PRESS CONFERENCE:

Major General Mohammed al-Askari, Spokesman, Ministry of Defense

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PARTICIPANTS:

Major General Mohammed al-Askari

REPORTERS 1-10

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

**MG AL
ASKARI:**

As-Salāmu `Alaykum. [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Good afternoon. You are welcome in this press conference which will make...be brief. And we will focus on the strategy which be conducted by the armed forces since the 2008. In fact, we...the strategy of the armed forces focused in cooperation with Multi-National Force on four points. The first point is how to impose law and to regain the sovereignty of the Iraqi government to all cities. And as you can notice that it started by the Fardh Al-Qanoon operation in Baghdad and then to the north, east, south, west, and many provinces which were under control of the terrorists and organizations and some gangs and outlaws and militias. The second strategy point started with preactive operations which the initiative has been changed by the Iraqi government forces when they pursuing and targeting the objectives. And we have performed highly appreciated progress. And this strategy that we start attack the enemy and we select the targets and not to be in a defending place and to be...to have the reactive position. Therefore, I will give you a brief about the last ten days in this operation which is a preactive operation. We killed a key leader in Al Qaeda. His name is Abu Bakr Al-Saudi, with four associates who fled to...north of Thurthar. And yesterday there was...joint forces followed those terrorists and killed them all. They were wearing suicide vests and

they have explosive devices. This is a result, as I said before, it's...that the targets is not far away from the Iraqi Security Forces in all Iraqi cities. We captured 36 wanted individuals in Ninawa. For the last ten days we captured 14 wanted individuals in Chifil area in 13th of June. We captured 41 individuals in Basra. And yesterday we captured eight additional individuals. These operations targeted the key leadership of al-Qaeda and outlaws gangs. And about the third strategy is to the continuance assets of the terrorist gangs. We started to seize their power on their weapons...heavy weapons and the IEDs and the car bombs. And there was a direction by the commander-in-chief to start to control these resources because it's the main resource of many operations conducted against the innocent people. Therefore, we have a big total. And we can say that this month is very important because it's allocated to this...all the terrorist gangs and to find weapons... large weapon caches of al-Qaeda and outlaws and even the weapon trafficker. Therefore, we'll give some examples. In Baghdad, we have pictures from 1 to 8. You will see it on the screen. One of the brigades, the 22nd Brigade, seized four records, 28 block...C4 block, 18 grenade, and 33 mortar and variety of mortars in just one operation in Kadhimiya, north of Baghdad. In Basra, we seized explosive materials factory which has been hided [sic] carefully inside a house. We...according to tips from the individuals we

could find it which has two tons of explosives...high explosives materials, which is enough to make a big explosion in Basra. Therefore, the tip was very accurate. And they told us that we...at the beginning you will not be able to find the factory but you have to remove some walls and you can find it. In Basra, also yesterday, we had an operation north in Basra to be close to Al Imara security operations. We will focus on it later. Also, the progress of seizing the power of the terrorist gangs. We seized 130 anti-tank landmines and more than 80 landmines. This...these numbers maybe you will see as small numbers, but in military aspects that it's enough to kill many people and to destroy and damage vehicles. In Ninawa Province that we could find three rockets that...Katyusha rockets and many IEDs and one VIBD...VBIED. We have many statements focused on the large number of weapons and munitions and explosives which have been seized or defused by the Iraqi Security Forces. And this is good progress by the Iraqi Security Forces to decrease the power of terrorist gangs by seizing these weapons and IEDs and explosives to weakening the...these terrorist elements. The fourth strategy for 2008 which related to how to do those objectives and to prevent the terrorist gangs to use...get to their weapons caches. We focused on these actions by...under order of commander-in-chief. Conducted by trained and good-capability forces which good maneuver and good equipped with support with

the Iraqi Air Force and Multi-National Air Force. We have logistic support also. And we can quick reaction by even special forces and Ministry of Interior to go to any place in Iraq. Therefore, you can see that there are operations in Basra, Diyala, Mosul. And, as you know now, that commander-in-chief ordered to have separate security, but to have comprehensive security, especially after the progress in Basra. We continued the operations north in Basra and there is a big and wise cooperation in Maysan Province. It's not a military operation. On contrary, as we are mentioned by the statement of the commander-in-chief, this is...that will give a chance to make Maysan Province in general demilitarized area. This is not new but we did that before in Basra and Ninawa and now in Maysan. Prime Minister gives a chance to the armed groups to hand over their weapons and explosives and to clarify their statues in the security bases in Maysan. This operation is just to disarm the people and to restore the security and the governmental buildings to be back to the government. A plan which is not new, it was prepared since April this year when the commander-in-chief conducting the operation in Basra. Many...the locations from Maysan asked the prime minister to conduct a security operation to impose law and to restore Iraqi government sovereignty like in Basra. We deployed enough troops from Iraqi Air Force and armed troops and from Ministry of Interior. Good...perfect trained and

other troops will be deployed in Maysan and we are waiting the deadline. And after 18th of this month, the option will be in the hand of the field commanders to conduct that operation. I don't know if there is pictures on the screen or not.

This is about the operations. We have some general issues. First, you know that we seek as an Iraqi Army to be well prepared in readiness. We have deficiency in support equipment that we address this issue. And we are happy that first group of Iraqi Army graduated in Diwaniyah to use mortars—a different size of mortars. And we started forming heavy gun troops. And, as you can see in the picture 8 and 9, also we are working to fill all our needs, especially during the night, which we need a lot of efforts by the Multi-National Forces during the night. And we are starting to put plans to conduct these operations by ourselves. And you can see on 11 and 12 picture that you...Iraqi Security Forces... Iraqi Air Force conducting operations during the night. And we are doing our best to develop our Iraqi Air Force and bases by using helicopters for these kind of operations. And in next few years that we will have aircraft. And we put a plan to develop our Air Force and to establish new heavy-gun troops and it will be on stage. I don't want to take your time and I will give you the floor to ask me any questions. Yes?

REP1: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Ahmed Jassem from Arab newspaper. You talked about the four points that you will attack the enemy. We think that these points...to make it four points, it's very difficult, because you are facing a gang battles not a logistic battles. The second question. Yesterday, Iraqi National Team beated [sic] China but we couldn't know the total of killed and injured people. And can you issue a law against those people who shooting fire?

**MG AL
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: About the first question that we know...our strategy, because countering terrorism is different than the organized armies and we depend on intelligence. It's an information war. And it's very difficult, known by all military people. And when we put these four points to counterterrorism, it's not applied on confronting another army. It's a proactive operation depending on intelligence to take their weapons cache-...take over their weapons cache and explosives that will weakening them. It's not a regular war. Maybe it will be a part of military operations. And the second question about the Iraqi National Team winning that I congratulate all the

Iraqi people inside...outside Iraq, and this victory is because of the prayer of the Iraqis. But unfortunately that Iraqis are celebrating by shooting fire. We had enough that you are using weapons for more than 40 years. What's the reason for doing that? And people who were killed and injured because of these shootings. This...there is a law against that use...against people who are using weapons. But this is the culture of our society, and we hope that on next Sunday that Iraqi National Team has a big team...a big...match, and that will facilitate the...that we need the Iraqi people to celebrate not by shooting fire, to celebrate with a Gandhi way, not a revolutionary way. We should think to celebrate with Iraqi National Team rationally.

REP2: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Ali Asiri from [unintelligible] TV. My question, in Abu Ghraib area after...which was controlled by al-Qaida. Iraqi Security Forces and Awakening Councils beat [sic] al-Qaida and now Abu Azam and Abu Maruf, who led Awakening Councils, were dismissed from the area and the assassinations and killing back in the area and Muthanna Brigade occupied the bases of Awakening Councils and targeting the members of Awakening Councils.

**MG AL
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: I don't think...with respect, it's not an accurate information. Awakening Councils is an essential part of Iraq and the progress of the security operations. There is always coordination. And Baghdad Operation Command announced that there is no such information and they are working with Iraqi Security Forces and Multi-National Forces. Maybe there is some mistakes or problems, but it's very hard to coordinate with two sides – between Iraqi Army and the Iraqi police and the Awakening Councils and Multi-National Forces – to make this mix. The negatives are very low in a military aspect. I don't think there is any neglecting by the...to the Iraqi Awakening Councils. On contrary, the Iraqi government take care of them and the Muthanna Brigade is an Iraqi brigade. Sons of Iraq – they try to address all the problems. This is the combined work. It's very hard to have security operations like that.

REP3: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Timimi from Al Salam Channel. We were in Diyala and Balad Ruz area. The security situation needs a security effort. Can you and the Ministry of Defense...or do you have a security plan to control the situation in Diyala, especially in Southern Balad Ruz?

**MG AL
ASKARI:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

What you have said is right. There is information that the progress in many parts...especially after Ninawa operations. The terrorists [are] still moving and exist in Diyala. There are ongoing battles which a big support with the Multi-National Force to support us. You know Iraq is a big country. We need to impose law and we have plans. Diyala is not far away and we have a large...a plan for a large-scale security plan and we prepared troops to Basra. There is a fact that when you purge a city and you restore security, but you can't decrease the force that imposed law. This is what terrorist gangs try to do. When you attacked a city and went to another city, they will restore their forces there. We started that way. We have any operation in any province that we...we need to keep enough troops to keep the security situation. But Diyala is not that out of control. We have duties, like in Ninawa and Basra, and we have plans how to deal with those objectives. And we have good amount of Multi-National Forces there in Diyala. But when there is a good coordination with the Multi-National Forces that we have to purge Diyala because the impact of Diyala is a big impact on Baghdad and Kirkuk and other parts of Iraq.

REP4:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Daswan Jassem from Biladi. The military operation that you plan in Diyala and in Imara, can you give us details of the troops who will conduct the operations? And do you deploy forces from Basra? Is there any coordination with the security forces inside the city? And do you have a wanted list?

**MG AL
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: This is not a question. This is a press conference. The troops which is deployed in Maysan and it's a good trained forces from the special forces and Ministry of Interior – good armed, good equipped. I can't give you an exact number but it's enough to cover all the province; not the city center only but all parts of Maysan. We don't conduct any operation without any planning. This strategy started in 2008. We can't skip any stage in the preparation period of any security operation. These troops or reserved troops exist in Basra or Anbar. We can with a kind of maneuver to deploy these troops to another area to secure the place. We have highly coordination with Maysan Province and between militar-...Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense and Multi-National Forces and tribals. Too, we established support center. We have...we will have a comprehensive work. It's not a reaction operation. As I said before that we planned for this operation since April. And

there...maybe there is no need to use weapons. What if they...if everyone abide by the orders to hand over their weapons? We established a committee to give money for the delivered weapons and for any information. And if you have something well prepared we will be...we will success [sic]. But if one of those bases is missing, you will have a critical situation. About wanted people list...we have wanted people list. And since more than one year because...but no one could capture them in that area. But no one could go and capture them because they are well armed. It's like to go to capture people without any planning. We have names from Basra; wanted individuals from Basra and Baghdad went to Maysan. Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense are working together. Ministry of Human Rights working together to reach a good plan. You can see the crisis...or the...who were attacking the operations in Basra and Mosul and now how they are talking about the progress and the good performance of the security forces. We eliminate any mistakes and everyone was talking about it.

REP5: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Salaham Masalawi. Radio Sawa. In Maysan Province and the operations that will be conducted by the security force, but I am wondering that reports...there is an important for 25th Brigade to conduct this operation because it participated in Basra operation and

Ninawa operation. What is the importance of this brigade? Why there are reports about this brigade, the 25th Brigade from the 6th Division? Is the sky bird?

**MG AL
ASKARI:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

The 25th Brigade is working in Baghdad and we have good brigades. And the...we have forces in Anbar also. We have two divisions in Anbar. The 7th Division Anbar restoring security in Anbar. There is no such information. We have enough troops and we enhance the security in Baghdad. These troops are doing a good job and good equipped. And we don't have any problem to implement security in an area and not to do it in other area. And the names, you know...as you know that terrorist gangs issue rumors. We have many terrorist organizations or propaganda and they are doing the same. Each one has its own project to break the law and we are dealing with those organizations as outlaws organizations. There is no such information and we don't want to affirm it. This was announced before two or three days in media, but many organizations are old, too, and with new faces.

REP6:

Samar Al Dila from Turkoman Satellite Channel. Major General,

Iraqi Security Forces are fighting terrorism everywhere throughout Iraq. Is there any control on borders to stop the supplying them?

**MG AL
ASKARI:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Of course, commander-in-chief has a big plan to control Iraqi borders. And even in Maysan operation there is special forces to control borders to prevent any weapons smuggling. And there is...as I said that there is a special force for...to support the border forces. And we cannot reveal all the plans, but I can assure you that the end of this year there is a real action for all Iraqi borders in troops, equipment, intelligence works, and many aspects. This issue always discussed by the prime minister, and he listens to our ideas how to secure the Iraqi borders. And we have many directions on this issue. And in the next few months you will see good achievements to secure the Iraqi borders – western, eastern, northern, and southern. Yes, you.

REP7:

Mike Tharp. McClatchy Newspapers. Sir, what do you think of Muqtada al-Sadr's announcement that he is dividing the Mahdi Army into two groups? One main group will focus on cultural resistance, a much smaller group on armed resistance. What is your interpretation of that action, sir?

**MG AL
ASKARI:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

In fact, as our security forces that we consider all the announcements, but it's up to the government which will decide. And our side that, as the security forces, that we deal with anyone break the law regardless to their backgrounds as we are executive security forces that we deal with all outlaws on an equal basis. These announcements, the government will respond to it. Yes, we are part of the government, but it's not our responsibility through... When we talk about politic, that we will be not in a good position. Therefore, our operation is very clear that we work according to the law and we deal with the outlaws equally – with all outlaws – if they are from terrorist organizations or outlaws or others.

We have just five minutes.

REP8:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Mahmoud Felji from Ninawa Organization. I will go back to Diyala Province. Diyala Awakening Council member Sadima Jabouri said that one of...the failure of the...he warned that the failure of the security operation because there is not enough troops in Diyala and the political conflicts which still exist

in Diyala. The first question: what is the troops that you will deploy to Diyala and when? The second question: what you can say about the political conflicts? Do you want to give us the plan?

**MG AL
ASKARI:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Yes, we have the 5th Division and supported by a brigade, and we have good personnel from Ministry of Interior with support with Multi-National Force. But Diyala area is very big, and it's very difficult to be controlled. And you have forests, valleys, mountains. It has borders. And if you want to talk about Mosul, is different than Diyala or about Anbar or Basra. There is a big variety in Diyala. We are planning, including myself, to give a big focus on Diyala. There...we have to conduct a big operation in Diyala and enough troops to control Diyala, but as I said, that we had planned. Basra, with economic importance, is different than Diyala or Mosul or Anbar. Each city has its own...we...you have a military operation but you have...you should have plans and you work according to the...your capability. Therefore, you cannot cover all Iraq...all over Iraq at the same power. But we have the basic essentials. And we started in Baghdad and Basra and Ninawa, and then we will go to the other targets. Hopefully that you will see the change and you can see how...where...how we were conducting operations last

year and now, how to maintain the security situation.

REP9: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: [Unintelligible] Ahmed from Iraqi Freedom. I have two questions. Can you describe the impact of al-Qaida on Iraq and its threat against the security forces and about the Southern Operation. You will just focus on Maysan or do you have other provinces that will...you will have security operations?

**MG AL
ASKARI:** Speaks in Arabic.

INT: I will answer the second question. We will not stop in...only in Maysan. All the cities in July that we will take the responsibility and Diwaniyah from the Multi-National Forces. And we have the...enough troops to take this responsibility and we are honored to take this responsibility. The security operation is not taking it apart. We have to follow up all the objectives. And we have to enforce law. And all should be abide by the Iraqi law and no one can have weapons...has weapons against the Iraqi Security Forces. And we have to continue our political and service plans. This is about operations in the south. About al-Qaida organization, as you know that al-Qaida established a big organization after 2003 and in 2004. And we don't...we didn't have enough security forces, and

there was chaos at that time. The...we didn't have any Iraqi Army or Iraqi Security Forces to work together and they could establish safe havens to them. We started operations against al-Qaida. You know the first strike was in Anbar, the big uprising in Anbar. We don't say that al-Qaida was eliminated...is eliminated but we could control their capability and their impact has been decreased. Yes, they are conducting some operations here or there. But before they were frightening the Iraqi people, they were controlling cities, targeting the mosques of the officials. But now they don't have these places. The main thing that he lose...lost the support of the Iraqi people. This is the progress of the Iraqi Security Forces on the government. You can see the highway from Baghdad to Amman and [unintelligible] to Damascus. No one could guarantee the safety. Yes, they have small groups and they have some reactions. They are conducting operations here and there. But real impact? You can see it more than me. Al-Qaida 2007-2008 is not like al-Qaida in 2004 and 2005 and even 2006, which reached highly impact at that time to destroy the infrastructure in Iraq. We think that they are dying as a...and many of al-Qaida members fled out of Iraq or inside Iraq to other areas and, as I mentioned before, terrorists who were killed in Northern Thurthar. And we have in 2004, 2005, 2006 we couldn't follow them to other areas. But now [unintelligible] we have the ability to do that and we have the

information about them. I don't think that al-Qaida still have strong impact. And there is some examples that they are dying by using women and children in their suicide bombers, and they are focusing on children now, because they lost the ability to recruit adults, Iraqis, and the progress of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to strengthen relations with other countries that prevent the coming of the foreign terrorists. Al-Qaida does not have good environment here. It is a false environment. We decreased the period of al-Qaida in Iraq, and we will not allow it to continue it. The last question.

REP10: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: I have just one comment. You said 100% and I have a statement from Barham Saleh that the Iraqi situation is still [unintelligible]. Dr. Barham Saleh is a man who talks about another issue. We cannot separate it. Barham Saleh's duty to prime minister and he's a good figure and he...he's saying that if you not maintain what we have been...what we have achieved that we cannot progress.

**MG AL
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: He...I heard his statement. He was talking about general strategy, and he was talking about even another subject. About these progresses if it will not be continued, we have to maintain this

power and we have to develop ourselves. There is no contradiction on this issue and Dr. Barham Saleh is a famous person, and he's well-known how to deal with issues honestly. And I thank you.