

PRESS CONFERENCE:

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

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PARTICIPANTS:

Major General Mohammed al-Askari

REPORTERS:

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Ali Lias[ph] from Al Hurra

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Ala Timimi[ph] from Azamar[ph] Newspaper

Unidentified reporters from Radio Sawa, Mawa[ph] Agency, Iraq Al-Hor[ph], Reuters

REPORTERS 1-11

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

MAJ GEN AL As-Salāmu `Alaykum. [Speaks in Arabic.]
ASKARI:

INT:

Welcome to our conference for Enunciation of Peace Operation in Maysan Province. In fact, the operation, which is begun in Maysan Province, is [a] very distinguished operation in military basics. The good preparations and the deployment and getting the direction and maneuvers and the accurate carrying out and there is no...any discrimination detention. And as you can see that all the targets is limited comparing with other operations. This operation is [unintelligible] due to some reasons, the good preparation, because we prepared the plan as soon as April, after the operation in Basra. And as you know, there is no separate security situation. The decision of the commander in chief, Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, before the end of this month and before the provincial election, we should secure all cities. Therefore, the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior put a schedule in coordination with Multi-National Force to clear up these cities according to the importance of the city and the priorities. Therefore, as [the] prime minister mentioned that there is an...a military operation in Diyala. I don't want to take much of your time. I will give you a brief of the mechanism of the operation in Maysan. As I said, operation planned for three phases. The first phase to get the operation...deployment of the armed forces and to focus on the intelligence to get the targets. During this phase, we have...that...prime minister give period of four days to provide opportunity to the outlaws to deliver

their weapons and to make Maysan [a] weapons-free zone. And actually we get success in this phase. And we found many weapons caches and munitions, even in rivers and cities and farms and we get a large amount of weapons, landmines, and explosives. The second phase, after this period, started with the surge operations in Imara by the west and east...west and north side of the city for two days. And we start the second point of the second phase in the eastern side of the city and we could get progress until now. And you can see in the slides [that] we captured 95 wanted individuals; 21...we have explosives and weapons [and] munitions, 21; and explosives, 130; heavy guns 71; 150 weapons. And we have rockets, 240 millimeter, and 5 kilos of C4. And factory for IEDs and [unintelligible] and other of munitions. This morning the Iraqi national police seized, in Ali Al Garabi[ph], 47 Katyusha rockets. The third point of the second phase by giving a three days period to the political parties which occupied government buildings. After this period, we will evacuate all the buildings after the three days period. And this is the third point of the second phase. The third phase, which will start after the end of the second phase, is go to the outskirts of Imara in Maysan Province to make the city [a] weapons-free zone according to this operation. And by the way, all the operations which is conducted by only Iraqi security forces, by Iraqi Army, and the Iraqi national force. The role of the Multi-

National Force is just to support and to monitor the sky and especially the eastern border of Maysan Province. They were providing us with pictures. This is only the role of the Multi-National Force. They didn't participate with the Iraqi security forces. This is an important role to monitor all the skies and they could control the border of Maysan Province. And even the...because their aircrafts have the capability of combat capability. Before the start...the beginning of the third phase and as a force to the sheiks of Maysan and the reconciliation committee about information to the armed men who could not get benefits of the previous decision, they would like to have amnesty to hand over their weapons. Therefore, this decision must be taken by the commander in chief. And the commander of the ground forces talked with the prime minister about the willing of the armed forces to hand over their weapons. Therefore, they request to have another amnesty or period. And eventually [the] prime minister gave them a period of seven days, started since today. I would like to give details about this period. The beneficiary of this period not to be surrender to the Iraqi security forces. But he has to go to the head of his tribe and to give a pledge from the sheik and not to do armed activity again. And we will cooperate with the sheik of his tribe and the individual. And everyone has to pay attention to this information. And we opened [a] center to receive them and we have

[a] committee established to coordinate with the reconciliation committee and head of sheiks...tribes. These two points should be paid attention by all the people there through the head of tribal sheiks. The operation was wide with no incident by any...there is no fire from any Iraqi security forces or the outlaws. It's due to the results of the operations in Basra and Mosul and Baghdad. They...there is no force compare with the Iraqi security forces capability. Therefore, the noble status of the sheiks of tribes in Maysan, they received...they welcomed Iraqi police and they put signs to ask for imposing law and welcoming the central government forces to impose law. The visit of the prime minister was very important to Maysan Province and he took important decisions for the political and economic and services conditions. We have many serv-...details that we.... I would like to give you the floor to...for your questions and I will give you answers.

REP1: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Ahmed Jassem. Al-Arabiya Newspaper. General, before few days, Omar[ph] Rabbyan[ph] operation was concluded. What was the progress in Mosul? I know we are talking about Enunciation of Peace Operation in Maysan. We know that we...you face armed groups and this is very difficult for any army

to conduct such operations. But we can see that the means that the Iraqi Army conducted and especially the progress that you have been achieved without any fire. What are the reasons that you...secrets?

**MAJ GEN AL
ASKARI:**

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

In fact, there is no secrets. It's the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi national police capability are developed and even the Multi-National Force's role in the training and arming the army. The operation has been changed. When the citizen feels that he is a part of the security because there's no security forces without...cannot get any progress without cooperation with the citizens. As I mentioned in Basra and Maysan, the tips came from citizens. People, even children of eight, seven years-old tell us some information about weapons in their schools. Many share...give us papers with information and when we check the information, they give us information about wanted individual and where their location and where their weapons and munitions. When the citizen starts feeling that this is his country, this is his responsibility. We seek to develop our capability but Iraq is a large...big country. Everyone should contribute in establishing security.

REP2: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Radio Sawa. General, you conducted two military operations in Mosul and Basra and now there is ongoing operation in Maysan. How did you deal with borders? Is there any support from out borders? Is there any weapons from out of Iraq through the borders? My second question. How many captured persons in Enunciation of Peace.

**MAJ GEN AL
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: As I said before, this is a very distinguished operation. We did an accurate information and especially the borders. As you know, the borders patrol...we have six countries on our borders. Therefore, before the beginning of the...this operation, we supported...we deployed a brigade. And as I mentioned before, there is...there was an accurate monitoring by the Multi-National Force for all the borders. Therefore, there is no worries about borders because it was controlled. The last two of captured personnel. Many targets we could see, but we couldn't capture them because we are waiting warrants from Ministry of Justice. And we brought judges and they issued warrants to capture those individuals. And they renew some of warrants, including some officials and some officials in the security forces. And we are waiting an additional warrant. As I said,

95 individual[s] were captured with warrants. Except when they...we see someone who is doing a bad thing in front of us. And we get before a few days information from a child and we found weapons in one of the citizens' house. Therefore, when we found such an amount of weapons – 10 rifles, TNT and IEDs – this is a reason for capture that individual.

REP3: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Ali Lias[ph]. Al Hurra. General, you have mentioned before that warrant is for 500 wanted individuals. Are they included in the amnesty law for this seven days period? And about the rockets that you mentioned, 240 milli[meter]. Their source? And about the borders. There is previous statements that the borders with Iran and Maysan Province is bad for smuggling weapons. How would you deal with that?

**MAJ GEN AL
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: This is three questions that you mention. The first question about the warrant. Definitely. When [the] prime minister give[s] a period, if anyone benefits of this period who didn't do any crime against Iraqi people would take advantage of this period. But there is a

difference between people who surrender themselves and the people who are captured. The amnesty for all individuals except the people who committed the crimes against the Iraqi people. But we cannot take the right of the citizens who have a case in the court against someone. And about the border, I talked about this before. Yes, the...Imara or Maysan Province have long borders with Iran and we put a plan to deploy more forces with the aircraft monitoring. And we have progress in controlling the borders. That your third question is...these rockets, 240 millimeters. We have catalogs and we seized these rockets. And we referred to the ad hoc committee to evaluate the source of these rockets. And then they will give a report to the prime minister. And we have some expirations [?] of that rockets. And that committee will define the source of those rockets.

REP4: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Mohammed. Mawa[ph] Agency. About those individuals who are captured, 95. Do you have other nationality between them?

**MAJ GEN AL
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: No. All of them Iraqis.

REP4: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: We have news that many wanted individuals fled to Iran. Would you ask Iran to deliver them?

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: We thought about people who fled to...out of Basra when we started operation in Basra and in Mosul, but the result that we captured most of them from Mosul in Anbar and in Tikrit. And we have, as you can [see] on the slide that we have give[n] instructions to other provinces in Nasiriyah and Wasit and Diwianiyah and Basra to conduct support operation. And they captured—I think you will see the numbers on the slide. We captured some of the fled wanted individuals. Two, we are focusing on making Maysan weapons-free zone. And we don't care about people who fled. On the contrary, we have our procedures to secure the province and not to allow the outlaws to go back to the city. We cannot achieve objective and to give it easy. Therefore, we give instructions to all the security forces about their information – names, pictures. It's a matter of time when we will capture them. It's important to secure the city even if they fled out of the city, you achieve the progress.

REP4: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: About Ministry of Defense? Minister give a period to the people who occupy the government building for 72 hours. You previously did the same before. And the second question about the operation in Diyala. Do you have any information about it? This period I would like to clarify it, especially in Maysan Province. I talked with national police. They received all the government buildings and, in fact, that Sadr Trend evacuated the buildings. And according to the instructions of the prime minister, the first party that you start to evacuate their buildings, started with Dawa Party. There is no discrimination and you started with Dawa Party? And also, we don't want to say it, but I have to. In Maysan Province that the citizens who occupied the buildings they will give them compensations to give them opportunity to see...to have another place to live.

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: About Diyala. I talked about Diyala and [the] fact that Iraq...when you can see in the map of Iraq there is many...some red spots in Diyala and Mosul. And this is according to our evaluation. And the plans for Diyala which were prepared a long time ago. But we started with Ninawa and Basra and that postponed the operation in

Diyala. And we have good preparations for Diyala and we...to clear it up completely. Diyala Province severed from the terrorists, but we need more additional forces and to fight especially the terrorist organizations in Diyala. There is a clear instruction by [the] prime minister to prepare plans and to prepare forces. And we are waiting the instruction to conduct the operation very soon.

REP5: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Iraq Al-Hor[ph]. General, many of these operations, there is no surprise element. And many operations announce before a few days of conducting it. Therefore, it gives [an] opportunity to the armed people to fled...flee from the...these cities. And we are talk about the operations in Hamrin Mountains.

**MAJ GEN AL
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: The surprise, it's not an organized battle. We depend only...especially on intelligence information. As you know that Iraqis...there is no red zone just in Diyala. And therefore, everyone knows that the next operation [will be] in Diyala, even if you didn't announce about it. In Imara we kept silent to say there is no operation in Imara. But all the new...media put in the news that there is tanks and forces deployed in Diyala. Therefore, it's not in

our control. You cannot keep secrets. And when you have [an] operation you have to prepare for that operation. Even in Mosul we changed the time of the operation and everyone see[s] the tanks and the forces. We know how to deal with it. In Mosul, we know where they fled. On the contrary that it's a part of the plan to make them flee from the habited cities. But when you allow him to flee and not to follow him, this is a mistake. And Hamrin Mountain, it's a continuance [of] operations by the 4th Division in Hamrin Mountains and in other parts of Diyala. This is a routine operations. If you have information about any place.

REP6: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Reuters. General, you have said that you...we cannot achieve the progress and to give it easy. And I just want to have to ask you a question. Before a few weeks that you conducted an operation in Ninawa and to purge the city of the armed people. But yesterday the city witnessed armed activity and car bombs.

**MAJ GEN AL
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: The...Mosul is a green zone and it's...but there is some red spots in it. According to our information that Iraq...most of Iraq's cities are

secured, but we have to support some places in Ninawa and Diyala. As you mentioned that we have expert who are working with the Ninawa op-...security operation. Ninawa is a big city and we need efforts to secure the city completely. And you will address these red spots.

UNIDENTIFIED: General, all you are Iraqi media. Do you have any foreigners to give them opportunity to...a few [unintelligible].

REP7: Thank you. Doug Smith from The Los Angeles Times. Actually I was going to ask you about Diyala. I thought you said earlier it had started today, the operation.

MAJ GEN AL ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic briefly without translation.]

REP7: I thought earlier you said that the operation in Diyala had started today. It sounds as if you said it was prepared to start any time now. Is it actually underway?

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: The preparation...we have plans for Diyala. It's a matter of time. It's just a matter of time. We have to wait the instruction from the

commander in chief. We have prepared forces who will participate in this operation. And we have points on how to start the operation. Everything [is] well prepared and we have all the account in Diyala. And according to my own assessment, it will be very soon after we will finish the plan.

REP8: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: General, there was a resistant...a resistance in Ninawa and even in Basra from the armed group. But there is not any resistance in Maysan. Do you think this is a plan from...or strategy from the militants to do armed activities after the security forces leave Maysan and what [is] the role of the sheiks in Maysan?

**MAJ GEN AL
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: After they see the capability of the Iraqi security forces, they consider that this is the confirmant-...confrontation that they will lose. Therefore, there is no reaction from them. We will keep some forces to prevent any armed men to return to the city. And we have a determination about this. [The] prime minister order[ed] to establish three regiments to give a job opportunity to the people of Maysan and do...and enhance the role of the sheiks and tribes in Maysan. Therefore, we don't think that they have the capability to

return to and to do armed activity in Maysan. We [are] prepared to keep Maysan secured.

REP8: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: The role of...the request of the tribes?

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: They ask prime minister to keep forces and to keep the security. And most of their request to...for basic services because Maysan Province was ignored. They need basic services, job opportunities, and care. And I think you can see yesterday that the prime minister allocated \$100 million for Maysan and allocate[d] one of the ministers to supervise the services, out of the budget of the province to establish committees and field...to do services for the citizens.

REP9: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Haidr[ph] Qavam[ph] Jalidit[ph] Al-Hawat[ph] Newspaper. When you capture outlaws and terrorists do you have any information after the investigation that they are supported by city council or members of the city councils in Maysan [unintelligible]?

**MAJ GEN AL
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: Many of the captured personnel, they are from the city council and working...some of them working with the government. We can't hide that. This is a...there are warrants against them. They get use of their positions to do outlaw activities.

REP9: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: There was no supervision?

**MAJ GEN AL-
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: Yes. Definitely. This is a reforming process. It's...Fardh Al-Qanoon is not to impose law on the citizens. We have to impose law even about us. We captured Colonel Hakim[ph] and we don't hide anything. Therefore, we are not afraid. Anyone [who] violate[s] [the] law, regardless of their position, will be captured. Yes, you.

REP10: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Ala Timimi[ph]. Azamar[ph] Newspaper. Many letters executed in Baghdad urging people about...to be careful of the Iranian intelligence.

**MAJ GEN AL
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: I don't have any information about that. Who distribute these letters? We have a battle against terrorism. And we have...and you know we have many enemies. We are acting with facts...dealing with facts. This is impossible. We have to protect ourselves, have to follow up targets, have to secure the situation. But we don't care about this. There is no impact of these things on [the] Iraqi people. There is no impact on the security plans. The last question. Yes, you. Last question.

REP11: Do you have any more information about the...who was responsible for the bombing yesterday in Sadr City?

**MAJ GEN AL-
ASKARI:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: Our information is that the...they didn't target the Multi-National Force, but they target city council members. But the presses[?] of the Multi-National Forces or other officials, it was by chance. This is the first investigation results. They planned to target the city council members. But coincide with that operation, the presence of the Multi-National Forces and from the U.S. Embassy, they

conducted that operation against.... We will have results soon and we have instruction from the prime minister for the military personnel to reappoint the officers and to establish ad hoc committees to reappoint them. Some officers that were threatened. Therefore, prime minister give them a chance to rejoin the security forces.

REP11: [Asks question off microphone.]

MAJ GEN AL-ASKARI: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: Ad hoc committees established for officers and soldiers about this and we give you a simple picture about what had happened in Maysan. It's [a] very distinguished operation. I think the security forces get benefits of the previous operations in Basra and Ninawa and Diyala and they performed in a good way. Thank you very much.