

**PRESS CONFERENCE:**

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

**Mr. Michael Yost, U.S. Department of Agricultural Service Administrator**

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**Major General Kevin Bergner**

**Mr. Michael Yost**

**REPORTERS:**

**Najima[ph] Asadi[ph] from As-Safir Newspaper**

**Gina Chon from The Wall Street Journal**

**Andy Scutrow[ph] from Navy Times**

**Unidentified reporters from Radio Sowa, AFP, Al-Watan Newspaper, NPR Radio,  
The Iraqi Republic Freedom, and Al-Watan TV.**

**REPORTERS 1-16**

**\*REP1 = REPORTER 1**

**\*INT = INTERPRETER**

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Good afternoon everyone. I'm pleased to be joined today by Mr. Michael Yost who serves in the United States Department of Agriculture as the administrator of the Foreign Agriculture Service for our country. We all know that an important component of Iraq's economy is the agriculture sector. And Mr. Yost is here working with the U.S. agriculture attaché assigned to the United States Embassy here to support the Ministry of Agriculture in helping to revitalize their systems and their extension services. And Mr. Yost is going to talk to you about his partnership and his work with his Iraqi counterparts and with the U.S. agriculture team that's here working with them as well. Before I turn to Mr. Yost, I have just a few opening remarks this afternoon. Even though violence is dramatically reduced from 2006 and 2007, this has unquestionably been a tough few days and reflects what we have repeatedly said, that al-Qaeda – Iraq is a resilient, barbaric enemy. Some of this may be an effort to divert attention from Mosul and Northern Iraq where we have been pursuing al-Qaeda – Iraq. But regardless, we have consistently said this is a tough fight and although al-Qaeda – Iraq has been damaged, it remains lethal. Despite the gains of the past several months, we have additional work to do. It continues every day as Iraqi citizens call in tips. As Iraqi tribal leaders encourage the Sons of Iraq to join the security forces and help protect their

communities. As Iraqi soldiers and police patrol the neighborhoods. This fight continues every day as coalition forces train Iraqi forces, patrol with them, and conduct combined operations with them. And I want to spend just a moment to provide you a brief summary of some of those recent efforts. Yesterday, in an area of Diyala Province where al-Qaeda – Iraq has been attacking Iraqi security forces and our troopers, the Iraqi Army received a tip from a local citizen. That tip led soldiers from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi Army Division to a weapons cache that included hand grenades, rocket-propelled grenades, blasting caps, AK-47 rifles, and small arms ammunition. Also last Friday, Iraqi citizens southwest of Mosul turned in a cache of 90 millimeter mortars to the Iraqi police and coalition forces. Every day Iraqis reject violence. And every day Iraqi and coalition forces cooperate to help these people. Also on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March, Iraqi Army and coalition forces began a two-day cordon and search operation south of Baghdad. In that operation, Georgian forces supported the Iraqi troops. This operation cleared villages. It secured the Al-Batan Water Pumping Station. It seized weapons; destroyed two buildings that had been used for explosives and ammunition storage. And it resulted in killing two terrorists who had been operating in the area. And just yesterday, Iraqi police operating northeast of Samarra, found a significant cache of weapons while conducting a patrol. On

this patrol, the police officers discovered and seized 80 mortar rounds, 7 mortar tubes, a dozen rockets, 100 boosters, and 5 improvised explosive devices. All of these munitions were safely disposed of before they could be used in attacks. Amidst the progress over the past eight months, we and the Iraqi people indeed still face a tough fight. But we are pressing forward, not just in terms of security, but also with political and economic efforts. In that regard, on March 5<sup>th</sup>, officials from Iraq's Ministry of Industry and Minerals and the State Company for Dairy were joined by representatives of Al-Bala Construction Company to break ground for a new dairy facility. The Abu Ghraib facility is the headquarters for Iraq's state-owned dairies which includes facilities in Mosul, Diwaniyah, and Bayji. This multimillion dollar development will help support Iraq's demand for more milk by packaging and shipping out reconstituted milk, increasing production capacity of sterile milk to some 10,000 liters per hour, and providing more support for Iraq's schools. The construction of the facility is expected to take about ten months. And when it opens for business, it will employ some 150 residents of Abu Ghraib. Finally, this week the minister of agriculture also took a step forward by convening the first Ministerial Conference on Agriculture. Some 400 Iraqi representatives attended the conference coming from across the country. About 30 experts from the international community also

participated. And among them was Mr. Michael Yost who traveled from Washington, D.C. to participate in the conference. He also traveled here to consult with agricultural advisers around the country. It's a pleasure to have Mr. Yost with us today and share his insights into the agriculture partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture and the United States Department of Agriculture. And with that, I'll turn to Mr. Yost for some opening remarks. Michael...

**MR YOST:**

Well thank you, General Bergner. And good afternoon everyone. I came to Iraq this week to attend the Agriculture Coordination Conference. It was an outstanding success. It lasted two days: Monday and Tuesday of this week. On Monday we met at the Babil Hotel with...there were 30 of us and over...I think there were over 417 Iraqi people involved in agriculture both at the ministerial level, at the provincial level, and in the private sector. We went over a number of issues. But the two things that we really wanted to hone in on and emphasize were to improve the coordination between the coalition here and the Ministry of Agriculture to achieve the goals, to outline the prime minister's agriculture initiative. Secondly, we've sent a strong signal to all the provincial director generals of agriculture to work with our advisors in the Provincial

Reconstruction Teams. Now there's a lot to be done here in agriculture in Iraq. It's a huge challenge but a fantastic opportunity. I had the chance this morning to sit down with nearly 20 of our advisors of the Provincial Reconstruction Team and I learned a lot [about] what's going on here, what we're trying to accomplish, and what needs to be done. You know in the United States, California is our number one agricultural state. In many senses, Iraq resembles California when it comes to agriculture. You've got two rivers going down the center of the country. You've got up to a ten-month growing season. The ability to raise a lot of high-value crops. What our advisers to the PRTs are focusing on are a number of things, both short-term goals and long-term goals. Some of the critical needs are financing. We need to finance farmers. I mean this sector of the Iraqi economy has been in a state of neglect and mismanagement for a number of years. And we need to revitalize, particularly the private sector. Financing is one thing that we need to do. We also need to improve the irrigation. We need to improve the infrastructure of irrigation and the irrigation practices. The desalinization of the ground here...the land needs to be done. That's a little longer-term project. And then we want to revitalize the extension service here in Iraq. It should be, in some respects, easy to be done but it's also critical. It's the type of facilities we need to get going, get the research farms going, the extension farms going

[and] couple those with our land-grant universities back in the United States. We need to get new genetics, both plant and animal, over here. Get them on those farms. Demonstrate to the farmers over here in this country what new genetics can do for them, both animal and plant. As one of our PRTs said yesterday, he said, "You know our goal here, our job here is to let Iraqi farmers be farmers. And that's what we came over here to do and I think we have started the process." Thank you.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Great. Not too often we have a guy with the foreign agriculture experience of Mr. Yost. So I really do appreciate you taking the time to join us today and...

**MR YOST:**

My pleasure.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

...to take some questions as well. And so with that, we will be glad to take your questions. Yes, sir.

**REP1:**

Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:**

Najima[ph] Asadi[ph] from As-Safir Newspaper. What are the important subjects that have been discussed during the agricultural

conference within the two days?

**MR YOST:**

Well, a lot of it has been coordination; to make sure the, as I like to say, the right hand knows what the left hand is doing. So everyone involved, whether it's the Iraqi officials or the various stakeholders in the U.S. government and the coalition over here, knows what each other is doing. Some of the things we focused on are financing of projects, both in terms of how to finance farmers and also to get government funding out to the producers so we can get some of the more significant projects going including rebuilding and refurbishing some processing plants. We talked about the dairy plant. There's...we've seen poultry processing plants, tomato paste plants that are likely targets for refurbishing and revamping.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

I would just add, too, that the minister of agriculture, Dr. Ali al-Bahadili, really took this opportunity to brief his strategic vision and his plan to help along the lines Michael Yost just described and focused on the private sector and the importance of private sector financing and helping revitalize the extension systems. He also emphasized the funding strategy that would be necessary, both at the provincial level and at the national level, to help provide for a level playing field for Iraq's farmers. And so he took the first day of

the conference to layout the Ministry of Agriculture's framework for helping engage...

**MR YOST:** That's correct.

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** ...our country's partnership and the international community's partnership. Yes, sir.

**REP2:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Question from Radio Sawa. There were some reports saying that Admiral Fallon, the chief command[er], submitted his resignation. Do you think that this will influence the situation in Iraq? Do you think that this will impact the presence of the U.S. troops in Iraq in general? And a question to Mr. Yost. There are so many farms in Iraq that have not been used so far and some of the armed...or militias or groups control large, vast areas from the deserts and lands. So what would you do about this? Do you have cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and the security services to gain control on these areas and use them to improve the economy in Iraq?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Well, I'll start and take on your first question. It's interesting you asked that. In fact, this morning at our Battle Update Assessment, General Petraeus specifically addressed that question and has also put out a statement which I'll share with you as well: "Admiral Fallon is a true warrior who has served our country selflessly and honorably for more than 40 years. And over the past year, he has worked closely with Multi-National Force – Iraq as we charted a new course in Iraq and more recently developed a shared view on the recommendations for the future. Admiral Fallon has been a true warrior and we will miss him in the Multi-National Force – Iraq. So on behalf of all the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and civilians who comprise the Multi-National Force, we wish our senior shipmate fair winds and following seas in all that lie ahead of him for him and his family." And I think that summarizes best how the Multi-National Force feels about Admiral Fallon. Shukran jaziilan.

**MR YOST:**

And just following up on your second question about the underutilized land. Yes, I heard that from our advisors this morning about underutilized land. There's different parts of the country where security is better and they are out working with farmers. As a matter of fact, ten days ago when I was here on my first trip to Iraq, I was out with one of our advisors [and I] saw where they did a lot

of plasticulture and have planted a significant amount of vegetables in a number of places. The other huge issue with underutilized land here is the salt levels in the land. Irrigation practices in the past with flood irrigation has caused high levels of salt to form in the land and literally has impeded any type of commercial activity. That needs to be reclaimed and that's going to be a longer-term project.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Yes, sir.

**REP2:**

Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:**

You didn't answer my question concerning the presence of the U.S. troops because Admiral Fallon is resigning. Will there be an influence on the presence of the U.S. troops in the future?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Well, I think what I was trying to say is that the current strategy, the current way forward that the Multi-National Force is going as you have heard General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker discuss publicly, has very much been a result of a shared commitment on the part of U.S. Central Command and the Multi-National Force. But it's also a shared commitment on behalf of U.S. Central Command, the Multi-National Force, our joint staff and department of defense, and the national decisions by our country. And so the current approach and the way forward reflect the shared

commitment of all of those individuals, not just one individual. But I would point out that he has been very supportive and very much involved in helping craft that strategy. Shukran. Yes, sir.

**REP3:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Question from AFP. There has been an incident yesterday...or an accident in Nasiriyah and the death toll was 16. And eyewitnesses say the American forces opened fire after an IED went off targeting the Multi-National Forces. So what is your respond about this?

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** The Multi-National Forces did not open fire in conjunction with that incident. In fact, I think Iraqi security forces and others who were at the scene have confirmed that in this tragic attack, a coalition convoy was moving in one direction on the road and a civilian bus was moving in the other direction on the road and what appears to have been an explosively-formed penetrator—which we know they generally come from Iranian sources—was detonated and did not affect the coalition convoy as much as it affected the bus. There was one third-country national who I believe was a truck driver in the coalition convoy who was injured. And we are still working with the Iraqi security forces, those who were the...who are also now investigating the detailed circumstances of that attack, to learn whatever else we can about the specifics of the attack itself.

Shukran. Yes, ma'am.

**REP4:** Gina Chon. Wall Street Journal. General Bergner, you mentioned at the beginning comments about the last few days and the difficulties that Iraqis had faced and coalition forces as well. Besides al-Qaeda, how worried are you about the inter-Shi'a fighting that we've also seen in the last few days in the south...

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** Mm-hmm.

**REP4:** ...and the possibilities of that increasing as, you know, possible provincial elections come up later this year? And then for Mr. Yost, I was just wondering in terms of the challenges that Iraq faces between production issues and then processing to actually get some of these products to market if one challenge is greater than the other such as date production for Iraqis. This country used to be really famous for its dates but it seems like the processing and packaging facilities now is lacking so that most of the dates that come here are now imported. Thank you.

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** Well, I'll start. You know from covering Iraq that the nature of the security threats facing the Iraqi people and the coalition forces is very much a mosaic. And so al-Qaeda in Iraq, we have continued to

assess, is the one that is the greatest threat to security and stability in the near term and the one that we are focused a great deal on but not at the exclusion of the other security threats as well. And so we are focused on those and so are the Iraqi security forces. In fact, I would point out that, certainly in one of those incidents, Iraqi police and Iraqi Special Weapons and Tactics teams responded very well when they were actually engaged by extremist' elements. And they were supported well by coalition forces in responding to that threat. And so it is an area where we continue to work very closely with Iraqi forces, particularly in the south where they have achieved significant responsibility for being the first responders in places where provincial Iraqi control has been achieved. But they consistently do a good job of responding, whether it's criminal activity, whether it's extremist activity directed against security forces, the Iraqi police and the Iraqi Special Weapons and Tactics and the Iraqi Army, in particular the 8<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division in Diwaniyah, are doing a very good job in that regard. So thank you.

**MR YOST:**

Just to respond to your question about the challenges that agriculture faces here in Iraq, obviously there's a number of challenges. Production: in some respects it's the most critical but yet it might be the easiest to overcome. Also transportation: getting it from the farm to the processing plant, to the marketplace.

Processing: a major challenge. And marketing.

**REP5:**

Thanks. I just wanted to ask, following up on Gina's question. Do you feel...I mean there has been a tick up in the number of dead each month, Iraqi dead each month since, well, January/February. Are the strategic gains of the surge starting to be chipped away at, be eroded a bit? Is that what we're seeing now that the people you are fighting are becoming smarter and since troops are starting to leave as well—slowly, but they are leaving—are we starting to see then that there will be more and more violence each month now?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

No. I think...first of all, I'd go back to where I started the conversation this afternoon and that is that, without question, we have seen levels of violence come down significantly from 2006 and 2007. And we have also seen a significant improvement in the capability of the Iraqi security forces. We have seen a significant emergence of Concerned Local Citizens who are willing to voluntarily place themselves in harm's way in Iraqi communities across Iraq, in both Sunni, Shi'a and mixed neighborhoods, albeit predominantly in Sunni neighborhoods. And the collective result of those efforts is what is helping Iraq move forward. And despite the progress that we're making and despite the dramatic improvements over the past two years, we have said all along that there will be

tough days and there will be periods where we see al-Qaeda seek to adapt new tactics and new approaches. And we will adjust to those as well, as will our Iraqi counterparts. And to keep the pressure on them, keep pursuing them as we have been, in particular in the areas north of Baghdad now and into Mosul. So this is still very much a tough fight and it's going to continue to be one. But it is one where we are encouraged by the increasing capability of the Iraqi forces as well as the courage and commitment at the local level of the Iraqi people. Yes, sir.

**REP6:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Question from Al-Watan Newspaper. Question to Mr. Yost. You've said yesterday that we are committed with the plan the Iraqi officials set. Do you think that...or does that mean that the support will come through applying or implementing the long-term strategy between Iraq and the United States or the...or your office has another plan to develop agriculture in Iraq? The question has to do with the statement that you said yesterday.

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** Yeah. Just so I'm straight before Mr. Yost answers, are you referring to the current discussions between Iraq and the United States on...

**INT:** No. To the statement that Mr. Yost...

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:** Yeah. I see.

**INT:** ...said during the press conference; yesterday's conference.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:** I see. Okay.

**MR YOST:** We're looking to work with the Ministry of Agriculture here. They've got a well-defined plan and the prime minister has a well-defined plan for agriculture. We hope to be able to support that and to facilitate implementing that plan. We have a lot to share in terms of knowledge, technology, and thought processes on how we can carry out that plan...that plan can be carried out.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:** Yes, sir.

**REP7:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Question from the...question to General Bergner. The Mosul and the fight and the preparations...we've heard a lot about the preparation for the fight in Mosul and brigades are being sent there. So why hasn't it started yet so far? At the beginning you said that there are armed operations or actions that prevent us from...so why

is there a delay in carrying out the operation? Why do you always talk about the operations in the media?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Well, let me be very straightforward on this. The operations in Mosul are well underway. And we have actually been very forthcoming in the last few weeks in talking about some of the significant actions that are underway. This Saudi foreign national, Jar Allah, who was killed as a result of successful coalition operations in Mosul, was one of the key foreign facilitators in Mosul. There have been a number of other operations against either security emirs or foreign terrorist facilitators. And Iraqi forces from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Iraqi Army Division, Iraqi police under the leadership of General Wathek[ph], and coalition forces are working very closely to expand the number of joint security stations and combat outposts to improve the population security for the citizens of Mosul. In fact, in my remarks just a few moments ago, I talked a little bit about just southwest of Mosul in Ninawa Province, the tips that are leading Iraqi police, in this case, to weapons caches. And so there is a concerted effort underway in Mosul and in Ninawa Province to keep the pressure on al-Qaeda, to keep them from establishing operating bases and safe havens, and to pressure them further to protect the Iraqi people there. Shukran.

**REP8:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Question. There is an operation...the governor of Mosul talked about...and he said the operation has not started yet. The governor of Mosul said the operation has not started. And the Iraqi security forces said the operations will start or there will be a new operation. What is this new operation?

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** Well, I would refer you to Governor Durayd Kashmullah if those were his remarks. But I don't want people to be confused that there aren't military operations underway specifically targeting al-Qaeda – Iraq networks in Mosul. There absolutely are. And as I mentioned earlier, we have been reporting on those and providing the results of those operations. Underneath the mantle of that effort in Mosul, there will also be smaller operations that perhaps take place inside the city. There will be operations that might focus on the western part of Mosul or on the eastern part of Mosul or within certain districts of Mosul itself. And so those will be operations that focus the effort perhaps in a certain area or district. But they don't mean that operations overall aren't already underway. And so we'll follow up with what specific named operation they might have been referring to in Mosul. But there is no question but that there is a significant effort underway there. Shukran. Yes, sir.

**REP9:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Question to Mr. Yost. Is it possible to coordinate with the civilian societies in Iraq to eliminate the challenges...the civil societies? Or do you only coordinate with the Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture?

**MR YOST:** We're coordinating on several different levels. We are working here with the Ministry of Agriculture, but also our advisors are working with the provincial director generals of agriculture. And also, they've reached out and formed farmers' associations and farmers' unions in several parts of Iraq. And they've worked with them to come up with methodologies to move agriculture forward in this country. We're starting with distributing seed and we're looking at repairing some equipment and hoping to build on those success stories.

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** And I would just follow up to Mr. Yost's comment by pointing out that the civil affairs units, working closely with the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, are also and have also been working closely with Iraqi farmers at the local level where our forces operate. And we have helped and will continue help with things like local irrigation solutions.

**MR YOST:** Mm-hmm.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

We'll help them with finding the micro financing that can support their funding requirements for seed, fertilizer, pesticides, and so forth. And so that's also an aspect of the cooperative effort that is underway and that will continue to help shape and support the broader effort between the partnership between our Department of Agriculture and between the Ministry of Agriculture. Thank you.

**REP10:**

Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:**

Actually I have another point. The Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture is tackling the pests. And the central provinces and the south, in those provinces is limited or eliminating those operations is kind of limited. So it...I'm...he...this was not a question. Oh, he's asking about the methods of eliminating the pests and because the Ministry of...the Ministry of Agriculture applies those eliminating processes to certain provinces and not all.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

I see what you mean. Well, let me start and then I'll defer to Mr. Yost because I do know a little bit about part of your question. And maybe you are talking about the fact that aerial spraying for the duvus[ph] bug which is the bug that is the most dangerous to the date palm crop is limited to the central provinces of Iraq which is largely where the majority of the date palm focus is. The Ministry

of Agriculture does have a plan in place and the Multi-National Force is working closely with the agriculture attaché here to support them in the aerial spraying to help protect the date palm crop from this duvus[ph] bug that has always been a challenge for protecting the crop here in Iraq. There are some provinces south and to the north where aerial spraying is not performed and my understanding is that's generally a result of the insect being less of a threat and the lower density of the date palm crop in those areas. And the fact that this is a spraying program, a pesticide program that has a very limited period of time in which it can be conducted given the nature of this insect that it targets. So there are other solutions though that includes ground spraying against that problem. And those are also...my understanding is the Ministry of Agriculture is looking at ways to expand their support for that effort as well.

**MR YOST:** And just to add on to that, we do have a veterinarian over here from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. She's been working with the Ministry of Agriculture on several animal diseases and trying to come up with a plan to distribute vaccines.

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** Shukran. Thank you. Yes, sir

**REP11:** Adnan[ph] [unintelligible]. NPR Radio.

**INT:** Question from NPR Radio.

**REP10:** [unintelligible] Nasiriyah accident yesterday. Our sources there plus the police sources all say 16 civilians were killed yesterday. But I believe the U.S. Army is saying something different. So could you comment on this discrepancy in the number of casualties?

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** I would simply tell you that I'm aware of it and that our forces are working closely with the Iraqi security forces to reconcile those reports. But I can tell you that our information says that it was not a result of the coalition forces; any casualties were a result of the roadside bomb that was detonated. Thank you. Yes, sir.

**REP12:** Andy Scutrow[ph]. Navy Times. It's a question for Mr. Yost. Could you quantify Iraq's agricultural potential using your California comparison if you'd like? Where is it in relation to that potential now? Where was it at this time five years ago? And if you could put a dollar figure on what it will take to achieve the goals that you set out.

**MR YOST:** Well, 13% of the land here in Iraq is arable land so that it could be brought into production. It's a considerable amount of land. It's one of the few countries in this part of the world that has both—maybe

the only country that has both oil and water. So water is obviously vital to agriculture. Oil obviously would generate revenue that could be invested in agriculture. I'd have a hard, hard time coming up with a dollar figure on that. I think that the state of agriculture in Iraq is not much different now than it was 5 years ago, 15 years ago, or 25 years ago.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Yes, sir.

**REP13:**

Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:**

Question from The Iraqi Republic Freedom to Mr. Yost. Recently the conference that was held between Iraq and the United States about economic cooperation, one of its recommendations was to reform the agricultural sector in Iraq. How much do you think...how much money do you think we need to reform the agricultural money? And as an American side, what do you have to present to the agricultural sector in Iraq?

**MR YOST:**

Once again, I would be reluctant to place a figure on how much money it would take to get Iraq's agriculture up to where its full potential could be. It will take a number of years, I can say that I think with a great deal of certainty. I think what the major thing that the U.S. has to provide, particularly the United States Department

of Agriculture and American agriculture, is our expertise. We have it both at the department with a number of agencies that have people over here now, a number of people that we can draw on from Washington, their expertise, and historical knowledge. We also have our land-grant college system that we can draw on where we have a wonderful extension on every type of crop that's grown or livestock that's grown here in Iraq. And also, we have the private sector. Our private sector is cutting edge in the world. And we would like to bring some of our larger agribusinesses over here and have them talk to Iraqi government officials, province officials, and producers, and people in the private sector in agriculture, some of the budding agribusinessmen; have them demonstrate what their equipment could do for Iraqi agriculture, what their marketing expertise could do for agriculture. And even bringing our genetic companies over here, animal and plant genetics. I mean that's so critical to get agriculture going and it also is so cost effective. I mean even the smallest farmer can afford better genetics.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Yes, sir.

**REP14:**

Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:**

Question from Al-Watan TV. How does the United States view the agricultural future in Iraq? Is there any plan by the United States to

make the agricultural sector in Iraq one of the main areas of investment that will improve the situation in Iraq and the United States? And question to General Bergner. There is a concern among the Iraqis; we can't call it a declaration, but there's an increase about the armed groups now. So how would you comment about this?

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

I'll let you start.

**MR YOST:**

Okay. To say that there is a United States plan for agriculture over here, well, there certainly is not a USDA, United States Department of Agriculture plan. But we have several departments involved in revitalization of agriculture in Iraq: USAID, the Army. I think collectively we want to, as I stated earlier, facilitate and follow the lead of the Ministry of Agriculture and the director generals of the provinces here in Iraq because I think they have a better feel for what needs to be done in some respects. Once again, I think we can add a lot. We have a lot of resources in terms of knowledge and ability and I think that's where we can give the most assistance.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Yeah. I want to just make sure I'm straight on your question because what I wanted to make sure I understood was is there a separate plan perhaps. And really, what I think Mr. Yost is saying is

our effort is to help support the minister of agriculture's plan. And that's where we are focusing our collective efforts. And the minister of agriculture does have a plan...

**MR YOST:** Mm-hmm.

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** ...which he articulated during the course of the agriculture conference in the last day or two. And so that's...if you are looking for a specific plan, I want to make sure you understand that's where the focus would be—on Iraq's Ministry of Agriculture plan to help revitalize farming and their agriculture sector. In regard to your second question, coalition forces and Iraqi security forces continue to work very hard with the Iraqi people to further reduce the armed groups that you mentioned. And then specifically focusing on the pursuit of al-Qaeda and the continued disruption of any effort that they might seek to re-establish operating bases or safe havens in Northern Iraq in particular, but not at the exclusion of other places. In fact, you heard General Kelly talk about their focus in Anbar province as they would want there. They are watching very carefully to ensure that those who would seek to reassert themselves in Anbar Province are a threat that we are very prepared for as well as the Iraqi forces. So there is a great effort underway to keep pressing and keep the pressure on these armed groups that you

described. Yes, ma'am.

**REP15:**

I have two questions. General Bergner, can you provide any more details about the Mansour bombing on Tuesday? About how the bomber was able to approach the soldiers in the area and whether the procedures for soldiers on foot patrol in that area will change as a result of that bombing. And for Mr. Yost, can you speak more specifically about the genetic technologies you are envisioning that would be useful here? And how some of those technologies...what it would take to implement them and how real...what kind of timeframe are you talking about? Thank you.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:**

Well, I'll start. There isn't any additional information that I have to share with you this afternoon on the details of that attack. Our soldiers were engaged in a local operation. They were working in that neighborhood when this suicide bomber targeted them and our tactical commanders are the ones who will make any decisions as to whether there's an adjustment or any kind of new kind of new tactic, technique, or procedure that they would use. And it would not be one that we would want to publicly talk about if there were such an adjustment for the most part. That would be something they would use to adjust their own force protection arrangements. But I'm not aware of any. Thank you.

**MR YOST:** Well, the genetic technologies I referred to are relatively simple. It's like we've seen happen in many parts of the world. We have a number of animal or livestock breeding companies that could bring their genetics over here immediately. Through artificial insemination improved...dramatically improved the dairy and beef herds here as an example. We also have talked about the need to bring in new plant genetics here. Some of that probably would not come from the United States but could be sourced from the region. And we also talked about improving the barley and wheat varieties here and perhaps patterning that after what we did in the United States. It goes back to the researcher extension farms I referred to earlier where they would develop a system of improving the breeding of wheat and barley in particular and that would take a few years.

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** We're on a little bit of a time schedule today only because of some travel issues, so I've got time...we've got time for one more question. And yes, sir. Go ahead.

**REP16:** Asks question in Arabic.

**INT:** Actually I have one suggestion, it's not a question, for the state of agriculture...department of agriculture. Is there a way to make a

work house supported by the experts from the private sectors and the civil societies and present this on CDs to the Ministry of Agriculture or give it to the [unintelligible] so that we can get it?

**MR YOST:** I certainly wouldn't want to rule anything out.

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** Were you specifically asking for a copy of what the agriculture vision and plan is and so it could be distributed and reviewed?

**REP16:** Speaks in Arabic.

**INT:** No. There are some experts from the agricultural sector. They can't come to Baghdad or to the Ministry of Agriculture so that we can give all that Mr. Yost talked about to them on CDs, like on agriculture and irrigation. Can we send suggestions to them on CDs, let's say?

**MAJ GEN BERGNER:** Oh, okay. I understand. Shukran. We will work with you to get you connected to the right people in the Ministry of Agriculture so that you can provide whatever inputs or insights or suggestions that you would want to do that. I understand and we'll work with you after the press conference to help you do that. I want to just take a second to thank...to again say thanks to Mr. Yost and his expertise as the administrator of our Foreign Agriculture Service in the United

States and his time here with you this afternoon. And so, Michael,  
thank you very much for joining us.

**MR YOST:** Thank you, General. A pleasure to be here this afternoon.

**MAJ GEN  
BERGNER:** Shukran jaziilan and ma'salama. Thank you all very much.