

PRESS CONFERENCE:

Rear Admiral Patrick Driscoll, Spokesman, Multi-National Force – Iraq

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PARTICIPANTS:

Rear Admiral Patrick Driscoll

REPORTERS:

**Jim Wade from Random Lengths
Ahmed Jassem from Iraqi Media Union**

**Unidentified reporters from Nina Agency, Radio Sawa, Kuwait TV, Haba[ph] Radio
and Newspaper, Free Iraq Radio, and ABC News**

REPORTERS 1-14

***REP1 = REPORTER 1**

***INT = INTERPRETER**

**RDML
DRISCOLL:**

As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Good afternoon. Thank you for coming today. I have a...some brief comments and then we'll take some questions.

A terrorist killed by coalition forces during an operation in Mosul on October 5th has been positively identified as Abu Qaswarah. Abu Qaswarah, also known as Abu Sara, was the al-Qaida in Iraq senior leader in the north. A Moroccan native, Abu Qaswarah had historic ties to al-Qaida founder, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and senior al-Qaida leaders in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Abu Qaswarah took the role of senior al-Qaida in Iraq emir of Northern Iraq in June of 2007. He was al-Qaida in Iraq 's second in command and served as AQI emir Abu al-Masri's senior operational leader.

Significant intelligence collected in the hunt for Abu Qaswarah led coalition forces to a building in Mosul that served as a key command-and-control location for al-Qaida in Iraq. Upon entering the building, forces were immediately fired upon. Coalition forces returned fire in self defense, leading to the death of five terrorists. It was later determined that one of the five was positively identified as Abu Qaswarah.

Abu Qaswarah was a charismatic AQI leader who rallied AQI's northern networks in the wake of major setbacks to the terrorist organization across Iraq. He was responsible for organizing and leading AQI efforts in Northern Iraq, including operations against al-Qai-...against Iraqi and coalition targets in Mosul. Abu Qaswarah oversaw the failed attempt to destroy the Mosul Civic Center during the holy month of Ramadan, an attack that could have killed several hundred people. And as you may recall, this was the attack where they went from a building, they tunneled down underneath the street, had a large tunnel that went underneath the civic building there, and they were planning on planting explosives and blowing up the building. And this was defeated by the security forces.

A foreign terrorist who trained with al-Qaida in Afghanistan, Abu Qaswarah directed the movement of foreign terrorists in Northern Iraq. Such foreign terrorists have been responsible for multiple suicide attacks against Iraqi civilians in the northern cities of Tal Afar and Mosul. Abu Qaswarah reportedly killed foreign terrorists who changed their mind and wanted to return to their home countries instead of carrying out terrorist attacks against Iraqi citizens.

Abu Qaswarah's death will cause a major disruption to the al-Qaida networks, as he played a significant role in trying...in tying numerous al-Qaida links together in order to conduct terrorist activities in Iraq. His death will significantly degrade AQI operations in Mosul and Northern Iraq, leaving the network without a leader to oversee and coordinate its operations in the region.

Abu Qaswarah is another example of how al-Qaida in Iraq has been forced to rely on foreign terrorists to carry out their vicious attacks on the Iraqi people as well as Iraqi and coalition forces. The Iraqi people do not want them here and coalition and Iraqi forces will continue to work together to weed them out of the country. Radical terrorists who commit murderous acts against the people of Iraq have no place in the new Iraq.

In closing, I'd like to comment and offer condolences to two recent tragic incidents. We do see continued efforts of repression by those who fear freedom and equality for all Iraqis. Our condolences go out to the families and friends of COR member Saleh al-Ugaili and journalist, Mr. Diyar Abbas Ahmed of Eye News Agency. These were brave patriots who were dedicated to building the new Iraq. And these attacks upon them were attacks not only against the individual, but also against democracy and freedom for all Iraqis.

And with that, I'll take your questions. Sir.

REP1: Hi. Can you talk or just give us an update on the problems going on with the Christians and the violence that's going on with Christians in Mosul? If you could, even talk about what I guess is the political nature of this violence going on with the Christians.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** Okay. I'm not quite hearing you, but I guess...talks about Christians up north?

REP1: Exactly.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** Well, obviously this is a routine that we've seen by al-Qaida and terrorists here in Iraq, where they try to pit one group of people against another. And they start by killing some of that group in hope of getting retaliation and starting the spool of sectarian violence. As you know, this is a concern of the prime minister. He's ordered two national police battalions up to the Mosul area to protect the Christians and it's getting a lot of attention there right now.

REP1: [Unintelligible].

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** Sure. Please.

REP1: What can the U.S. do in this regard?

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** Well, obviously General Hertling and MND-North is very much involved and aware of this and is participating in those processes to provide security, but also to talk about the way ahead in terms of integrating them into the process up there to ensure that they're protected. Sir.

REP2: Yes, sir. My name is Jim Wade, Random Lengths News. That's L-E-N-G-T-H-S. I'd like to turn to the area of Beladiyat, where the Christians, Muslims, and Jews lived peacefully for centuries. Now I patrolled that area, sir, with the 10th Mountain Division in February, late January, early March of this year. Absolutely, we saw no violence. We were never subject to any enemy attacks while we patrolled there. And the Christian families that we stopped in and visited always would invite us in for chai or tea, they cooked us meals. The Muslims, the same thing. What is the difference between Beladiyat, where they live in harmony and have for centuries, and other areas of Iraq that still are problematic with insurgents?

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** That's a great question. And I think the difference is in the attitude

and acceptance. You know those who have bought into the new Iraq and want to move forward have rejected this idea that violence is an acceptable way of trying to get what you want. This is what al-Qaida does. They go into an area – Sunni-Shia, Kurd-Sunni, Christian, whatever the mix is – and they try to kill and assassinate certain groups to excite sectarian violence and cause more violence. In places like you mentioned, the people are living together. They have good security. And they're focused on the future; they're focused on the way ahead as opposed to those that are, you know, suffering these terrible attacks that often results in more violence. So I think that's really the key difference. Sir.

REP3: As-Salāmu `Alaykum. [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Salām. Nina Agency. My colleague talked about sects of Muslims and Christians and Jews. Are there any statistics about this, coalition forces about those existence in Iraq, about those minorities?

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** What type of statistics are you asking about? What type of statistics?

REP3: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: Statistics about the existence of those sects. Now, for example, Iraq

is a mix of many sects of Muslims and Arabs and Kurds and Christians, and Shabak and others. Are there, in Iraq, Jews...a Jewish minority in Iraq? Thank you.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:**

I think over, you know, obviously Iraq is a historic land and I think there has been representation of all the major religions here in the country for some time. There are...I don't think there has been polls and census taken that have good numbers. In fact, yesterday there was some media reporting that the Ministry of Planning was going to initiate a census for the first time to get a good idea of where the people lived in order to do proper planning. But I think all those that you mentioned are represented here in Iraq. Sir.

REP4:

As-Salāmu `Alaykum. [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

Radio Sawa. General Odierno said today that some Parliament members are receiving bribes from Iran to oppose the U.S.-Iraqi security agreement. Do you have evidence about this? My other question is you mentioned that these operations that are going on in Mosul against Christians have al-Qaida fingerprints, while a spokesman for the minister of interior refuted that and he said there are political parties behind that. What is this contradiction? Thank you.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:**

Thank you for your questions. The first point. What General Odierno said was that we have intelligence indicating that Iranians...some elements of Iranians are attempting or will attempt to use bribery to try to influence Iraqis on their vote for the upcoming SOFA. He did not say that any Iranian or any Iraqis had accepted or indicate that they would. So it's important to make that distinction.

There are indicators that Iranian agents may come across the border and use money or other bribes to influence Iraqi politicians. A whole different matter whether the Iraqi politicians would accept that. In fact, you know, we truly believe that the Iraqi politicians would not resort...would not give in to that kind of bribery if they think that the...it's much more important to represent the people.

The second question is, you know, they're investigating now up in Mosul. They're trying to determine who committed the 10-12 murders that we've seen of Christians and the active use of intimidation and extortion to drive those people, the Christians, out of their homes and out of the City of Mosul. And so...you know this is a typical al-Qaida-in-Iraq tactic. But with the security forces that are up there now and are looking into it, they'll determine exactly what happened and I'm sure we'll hear the exact reports. Sir.

REP5: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: [Unintelligible] from Kuwait TV. My first question. Are we starting to go back to the violent cycle that we are now hearing the return of car bombs and IEDs in Baghdad? This is my first question. My second question is there are press leaks that indicate that U.S. forces will withdraw some additional forces. Is this a routine rotation or a new replacement, a new deployment?

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** Okay. Thank you for your question. What we're seeing in terms of violence, you know if you look at it and you measure it, we are seeing a low level of violent incidents here for the last four or five months. And we were concerned, as you all know, in the past, during the month of Ramadan, we have seen, in the past four years, a spike in violence. What we saw this year was, although we had a few very high-profile attacks, the total number of attacks and the total number of casualties was actually equal to the month before and the month before that. So we didn't see a violence spike in Ramadan like we normally do. In the last quarter, we've seen a drop of over 77% in violent attacks in the last three months compared to the three months before that. And in Baghdad, over 90% in the drop of attacks.

And so what I think we're seeing is, in the media we see now these attacks and they get a lot of media attention, but if you look at the numbers, security continues to improve. It's showing a degree of durability in terms of lasting. And so even though they do have the high-profile attacks that we see in the media—and they're terrible attacks. They're, once again, al-Qaida, special groups criminals using explosives in cars or motorcycles or in some form to kill innocent Iraqis who were at the wrong place, at the wrong time. And the Iraqi Security Forces and the coalition are dedicated to continue to improve security. But we're seeing violence still is at a low level and maintaining that.

And your second question was...? Let's see. Can't read my own writing. Oh, press leaks. In terms of...you know negotiations are ongoing and I think we'll have to wait and see what happens in terms of negotiations. Okay? Sir.

REP6: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Ahmed Jassem. Media Union...Iraqi Media Union. All Iraqi and American military command that they are together in one trench and when you execute a raid together, in one file. But there is differences in statements. The U.S. military always talks about perhaps that terrorism will come back and return and the security is

not permanent, is not.... And Iraqi military command are talking about no way that terrorism will come back again to Iraqi people. So what are you pledging the Iraqi people with no return of terrorism? And what are the belief about the return of terrorism to Iraq again? Thank you.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:**

Well, I think the goal of everyone in Iraq – Iraqi Security Forces, coalition security forces, and the government – is to ensure that we don't have a resurgence of terrorism. Al-Qaida has been greatly weakened in the last year as a result of the surge, the Awakening, and the increased capability of the Iraqi Security Forces. There's no doubt that there should be increased confidence by everyone in terms of how they're dealing with the security situation.

We've taken, you know, five brigade combat teams and redeployed them to the United States. We're going to redeploy an additional 8,000 by the end of January. And so this is a lot of combat power coming off the battlefield. But we're seeing increased levels of security at the same time. Why is this? It's because the Iraqi Security Forces have grown by over 150,000 during this period and they are demonstrating increased professionalism, increased capacity to support themselves, and increased sophistication in how they conduct themselves. They're Air Force now, as you may know,

they just graduated their first class of pilots that started at the very beginning of the pilot training program and have graduated now. The Iraqi Navy is patrolling the territorial waters and protecting the oil platforms. We're seeing the gradual improvement of capabilities.

I think where the difference may be is the estimation of how vicious and how determined al-Qaida is to come back. And so there's caution on the part of the coalition that we don't want to give any ground back that we've all fought hard to gain.

REP7: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: [Unintelligible] correspondent. [Unintelligible]. Where have you reached in investigating the killing of Diyar Abbas Ahmed, our colleague? And what are the new plans to protect journalists as coalition forces, and Iraqi journalists now goes out with coalition forces and cooperate with them to tackle those problems suffered by Iraqis. Thank you.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** Okay. I think, if I got your question right, you're asking what are we doing to protect...more protect Iraqi journalists.

REP7: Yes. Sorry. [Continues speaking in Arabic.]

INT: [Unintelligible]. What did you reach in the investiga-...what's the result of the investigation of the killing of our colleague, Diyar Abbas? Because you are responsible...

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** Hmm.

INT: ...our colleague in [unintelligible], Eyes[sic] News.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** Right. I understand. I think the investigation is still ongoing. But what I have said many times to many of the people here in the press room is that number one, I have the utmost respect for Iraqi journalists and Pan Arab journalists that cover what's going on here in Iraq. It's a dangerous job as you just indicated. And it takes great courage to do that job. It's essential though. It's a very key part of democracy and to freedom and to ensure that the rule of law is there to protect the Iraqi citizens. A free press keeps, as we say in the United States, keeps the honest people honest. And it's a watchdog kind of job that the press has to do in order to ensure that your individual rights are protected. And so, here in Iraq, it takes a lot more courage to be a reporter than it does in the United States or in Europe, that's for sure. But it's a critical function that has to be executed.

And the coalition works very closely with the reporters that are embedded with them to provide them protection. And in talking to Major General Askari from MOD and Karim Khalaf from MOI, they are developing the capabilities to embed reporters with them and provide them protection they need. Sir.

REP8: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: Astafar[ph] coming from Haba[ph] Radio and Newspaper. I have two questions. Yesterday was a visit of Bazalt[ph] Balzani[ph] and Turkish delegation about the PKK. Are there any role of the U.S. military to solve the dispute between Turkey and PKK? My second question. Iranian ambassador in Iraq stated that Americans are paying millions of dollars to media persons to stop the facts and.... So who are those people who are taking money to play the image of Iranians?

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** Hmm.

INT: Thank you.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** First, your question about the PKK and the dispute between Turkey and the PKK. This is a political issue between the Government of Iraq and the Government of Turkey. Multi-National Force – Iraq is

here to provide security for the Iraqi people, to build the capacity and capability of the Iraqi Security Forces and that's our role. And I would defer any questions about the way ahead or the processes there to the Government of Iraq and to the Government of Turkey.

The media contract you mentioned that's in the media now back in the States and actually in the region, is a contracting vehicle, if you will. It's an offer, and it is in the future. There is currently no business assigned to those contracts. It's an offering. And so it's a contract that went out for bid and proposals. And currently there is no work assigned to those. You know I work in Multi-National Force Strategic Communications as a spokesman and I have contractors that work with me. And they're paid to support me in my effort here. And that's the kind of monies that they go...that goes for those kind of contracts. Sir.

REP9: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: [Unintelligible]. The recent bombings in Karada is repetitive in the same area for some places that have seen repetitive attacks within six months. Did you oversee this in the intelligence work about the recurrence? Because we haven't seen any inspection or scrutiny about those places and searching for them. Why? The other thing is the jurisdiction of the immunity of U.S. soldiers is out there

strongly, the negotiations. We would like to know from you, as general in the U.S. military, why is the U.S. asking for the immunity of the U.S. soldier?

**RDML
DRISCOLL:**

First question, the networks in certain parts of Baghdad. This goes to the ferocity, if you will, in the determination of al-Qaida. They work in networks and they still have some networks that are viable and conducting terrorism and, you know, using these bombing attacks to attack innocent Iraqis. And so they are the focus of the security forces there.

The Baghdad Operational Center with General Abud and the coalition forces focus very keenly on the networks and targets...collects intelligence and goes in and tries to eliminate them. It's a difficult challenge. It's hard to do. But over time, with the surge and having people in those neighborhoods, we've been very effective at reducing those attacks. Is the job done yet? No, it's not done yet. And that's why it's still important that we focus on al-Qaida and continue to go after these networks and take them apart. Where do they get the supplies? Where do they get the munitions? Where do they get the cars or the suicide bombers that are going to carry these weapons? And how do they execute and try to go after each part of those networks to interdict and prevent them? But it's

not over yet. It's going to continue to be a, you know, a fight here in Iraq until al-Qaida is driven out.

The second question was about the ongoing negotiations for the future agreement between the sovereign country of Iraq and the sovereign country of the United States. As a member of Multi-National Force – Iraq, I'm not part of that negotiation process. That's the U.S. embassy that is involved in that. And so I really can't comment on where it's at and what they're, you know, what debating and arguing about. Sir.

REP10: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: [Unintelligible] Kurdistan. General, there are agenda...foreign agenda in Iraq. Every day we have a certain problem in a certain area, like what happened in Mosul with Christians, or what...in the south with Shiites, or in the western areas with the Sunnis. These movements, is it possible to stop from the outside before they come into Iraq? This is the first question. Secondly, the transfer of Sahwa responsibility to the Government of Iraq, don't you think it's confusing timing for Iraqi government, especially from the rallying and material aspect? Thank you.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** Certainly that...that is a...your first question goes to, you know,

foreign agendas and interfering in the interior affairs of Iraq. And the prime minister last year, you know, went to Iran, in August of 2007, and asked the leadership in Iran not to interfere in the internal affairs of Iraq. You know he said trade between the two countries is something that should be welcomed. I mean historical neighbors. They share a long border. It's good to have commerce between the two nations. But it's not good for elements in Iran to want to bring in terrorist weapons, supply networks and things like that. And so the foreign influence there is negative.

On the other hand, what we're seeing now is some very positive foreign influence. We're seeing the ambassador from Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE, Jordan. We've seen the foreign minister of Egypt visit. The prime minister of Turkey. Prime Minister Siniora from Lebanon come to visit. We're seeing eight Arab nations now offering and bringing their ambassadors to Baghdad. So we're seeing a great embrace, I think, of Iraq and recognition now that Iraq is standing up and violence is way down. And also trade, economic stability, and opportunity in Iraq is up. And so, you know, I see it, you know, more in a positive light now than a negative light.

And as you know, large contracts from international firms have now

been let that are going to help build Iraq's economy. The Chinese are going to come in and do some work in the gas fields down south and build a large power plant to generate electricity. The French have a large contract in Baghdad to rehabilitate the water filtration plant which is going to be key for Iraqis. There was a contract signed with General Electric to buy, I believe it was six megawatts of electricity generation, which is a lot of electricity. It'll take time to get that in here, but those are the kind of things that I think are very helpful in terms of how the neighbors are treating Iraq. And I think, for the most part, it's positive.

Your second question on the Sahwa. Right now, 51,000 Sons of Iraq have been transferred from coalition control to Iraqi control. And these are the Abna al-Iraq in Baghdad. And so now the Baghdad Operational Center under General Abud has command and control of those Sons of Iraq.

We have watched very carefully as this process has taken place. And the Sons of Iraq are coming and reporting to the Iraqi commanders in the neighborhoods. They are still doing their security patrols. They are still reporting to work as they did, you know, before 1 October. And the process is going very well. The next challenge we're looking at now to see how it's going to go is

on 1 November when the Government of Iraq has pledged that they will pay the salaries of the Sons of Iraq.

And so this is a transition process that is really, you know, a good indicator of reconciliation. I think everyone recognizes the value that the Sons of Iraq had in fighting al-Qaida and putting them on the run and keeping them off balance. And I think now that they've done that, they need to be incorporated into the fabric of Iraqi society. And the goal is to get them transitioned to the security forces or into the job market to give them jobs. And that's the goal. Ma'am.

REP11: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: [Unintelligible]. As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Free Iraq Radio. I would like to ask, we have joint plans with the Iraqi Security Forces for security in Baghdad, and these plans are certainly are perhaps daily updated or weekly or monthly. I think the new plan to protect Baghdad is to increase the checkpoints, which has also increased the jams in the traffic in the streets of Baghdad. And these are also jams for Iraqi forces. Is this part of your new plan, especially that it is causing the risk for the Iraqi citizens who are driving their cars and there can be any car bomb anytime that put them at risk.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:**

I don't know the exact details of all the plans in each neighborhood of Baghdad as the local commanders take a look at security locally and make adjustments. They have, over the last several weeks, began removing some of the temporary security barriers in order to free up traffic and remove some checkpoints.

But as the gentleman asked just a few minutes ago, there are still networks...terrorist networks there that are using bombs to attack innocent Iraqis. And so the threat isn't completely gone. So commanders...local commanders on the ground are going to continue to make decisions based on what makes sense tactically.

You know I was flying over Baghdad a couple weeks ago. And it was a nice day out and I was amazed to see how the traffic...how much traffic there was and how much traffic was flowing. In the past, you know, traffic in Baghdad has been backed up in a lot of places because of security barriers and checkpoints. And it appeared to me to be much better than it has been in the past. But now that security has improved, business is taking off. People need to travel to get to their work. People need to, you know, go to the places and visit they haven't had a chance to do. So this is compounding the problem. I think as security continues to improve, these situations will take care of themselves. By the...I see you have a follow on so,

please, go ahead.

REP11: [Speaks in Arabic.]

INT: I hope these things will be solved and that we will see Iraqi and American vehicles are moving in Iraq and will increase this improvement.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** Shukran. Thank you. Sir.

REP2: Yes, sir. One final question. Jim Wade, Random Lengths News. The traffic jams. Now isn't that actually, sir, a sign of success that the people are, indeed, out on the roads? They're looking to the future. They're on the roads for a reason – to go to work.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** I think so. I think it's a...you know it's a curse of every big city is traffic is a problem, a normal city, because they have places to go and business to attend to and people to visit. And that's a good sign that people are out.

I mean if you go back to a year ago, to 13 or 14 months ago when there were cities...blocks of cities here in Baghdad were just abandoned. There were no...the families had abandoned them for...out of fear of attack from al-Qaida. We've seen dramatic

change. But as the leadership has said, it's fragile and we have to keep after it. We have keep doing the things that we have been doing to ensure that al-Qaida doesn't come back, does not start doing massive bombings, that doesn't excite sectarian violence, and keep on the road towards building the capabilities in the Iraqi Security Forces so they can provide the security and the government can focus on what we call the essential services to get the people the services they need to get jobs, to provide for their families, and to basically get back to normal life. And that's the goal. Yes, sir.

REP12:

[Unintelligible] from ABC News. Sir, it is accompanied by a female American soldier. She's trying to get an Iraqi dog outside to America. I don't know if you have any update about this. Do you think this dog will...can be outside Iraq or not? Thank you very much.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:**

The dog's name is Ratchet.

[Laughter].

**RDML
DRISCOLL:**

I think we've had a record number of questions about this dog in the mil-...in our Media Operations Center, which is pretty amazing. So

it has grabbed the attention, I think, of a lot of Iraqis and a lot of Americans as well.

I can just tell you what the rules are. The rules are that, you know, American soldiers don't adopt pets and can't bring pets back and forth. And I don't know the status of this particular canine and what its future is going to be. Follow on? Okay. Go ahead.

REP12: There's an animal human rights...American animal human rights coming to Iraq. I wonder if you are aware of this. Are they here yet? Or are...and are they...do they have the right to take this dog outside or not?

**RDML
DRISCOLL:** I'll do my best stiff-arm on this one. I'm not an expert on canine legal issues, and I don't know what's going to happen to tell you the truth. But it obviously is a story that's an interesting one and shows kind of the human side of things here which is kind of nice. Sir.

REP13: [Asks question in Arabic.]

INT: An Iranian official, he said that the Iranian visitors are being harassed by U.S. forces at the Kud crossing. What do you...what is your comment about that?

**RDML
DRISCOLL:**

I'm not familiar with that particular crossing, but the Iraqi border guard are the ones that man those...the crossing stations. There are some coalition forces that are there to help train and provide assistance, but the Iraqis are in the lead in all of those stations. And so I would question whether that is an accurate statement or not.

I think we have time for one more question. Okay, sir.

REP14:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

Admiral Driscoll, we really now hear about the British government is withdrawing...potentially or possibly withdrawing from Basra. In case they do redeploy, can you fill the gap? And you well know that Basra has a very significance for the Iraqi people. Thank you.

**RDML
DRISCOLL:**

Absolutely Basra is, you know, it's a key to Iraq. You know it's the lungs of Iraq, if you will, in that waterway that leads down to the northern Arabian Gulf. It's the place where 90% of the commerce of the country flows through. And of course, the two oil platforms there is where 95% of the revenue flows out of. So it's a key area that must remain secure.

As part of the coalition, the British forces have done a great job in moving us down the road and enhancing security and stability. But

as we're seeing now, not only the Brits but, you know, the United States has taken 35-40,000 troops off the land here and returned them back to the United States. And we've seen other countries redeploy – the Polish brigade on the 5th of October has redeployed their brigade as well. So this is the trend.

And as I said earlier, the reason we can do this now is because of the increased capability of the Iraqi Security Forces. Their growth in numbers, in capability and sophistication is allowing us to maintain and improve the security situation, including in Basra, as we drawdown the coalition forces.

And this is, you know, there's a lot of discussion about negotiations and how and when and things like that. But there isn't much disagreement, I don't think, on the fact that, you know, the Iraqi Security Force are getting larger, they're getting more capable. The Iraqi government is improving its ability to meet the needs of its people. We have the provincial election law that's passed and we have local elections that are about to take place. That there's progress. And with this progress we hope to continue to just drawdown coalition support as we all hope for.

Thank you very much for coming today. Shukran. Shukran jaziilan.

