

**PRESS CONFERENCE:**

**Brigadier General David G. Perkins, Spokesman, Multi-National Force – Iraq**

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**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Brigadier General David Perkins**

**REPORTERS:**

**Ahmed Jassem from Western Agency  
Jonathan Blakely from National Public Radio  
Jerry from AFP  
Larry Kaplow from Newsweek  
Omar[ph] Hamdani[ph] from Baghdad TV  
Lucy Ryan from Reuters**

**Unidentified reporters from the New York Times, Iraq Al-Hor, and Azbariya[ph]  
Magazine**

**REPORTERS 1-15**

**\*REP1 = REPORTER 1**

**\*INT = INTERPRETER**

**BRIG GEN  
PERKINS:**

Well, good morning and As-Salāmu `Alaykum. I am glad to join you here today. There has been an abundance of discussion in the news concerning the U.S. legal framework for operating in Iraq beyond December 31st. And I want you to know that our partnership, with the support of the Government of Iraq, grows and matures every day.

We believe it is important for our two nations to develop a bilateral agreement, one that strengthens Iraqi sovereignty. The Multi-National Force – Iraq staff is currently working operational- and tactical-level details so that we can move forward together. To do so, we must continue to communicate with the leaders of the Government of Iraq in a professional, prudent manner that allows all involved adequate planning information.

To that end, we are coordinating a number of specific actions that we have had success with in the past to ensure that we can work together in the future. To maintain a constant flow of information to the Government of Iraq at all levels, General Odierno, Lieutenant General Austin, Lieutenant General Helmick, and other senior leaders are fully engaged with government and military officials in the Government of Iraq, and want to provide complete awareness of our ability to provide support now and into the future.

As you have seen over the past few months, the partnership between the Iraqi Security Forces and coalition forces continues to grow stronger and it's contributing to the more durable, but still fragile security around Iraq. The Sadr City demonstration highlights the key tenets of democracy now alive and well in Iraq – free speech, freedom of expression, and the right to peacefully assemble. Additionally, no reports of violence. I want to commend the Iraqi police and security forces for the exceptional role they played in maintaining the peace during this event.

From my observations, this progress couldn't have been possible without the support of the Iraqi people. I am amazed to see the resilience and dedication of Iraqi citizens coming together as one people, taking back their country from the terrorists, criminals, and special groups. Unfortunately we still see attacks on regular citizens going about their daily business from many criminals and terrorists who don't want these citizens to have access to personal freedoms or the ability to make decisions on their own.

One of these groups, Katai'b Hezbollah, an extremist group believed to have Iranian support and guidance, continues to attempt to threaten Iraqi sovereignty by conducting operations against Iraqi

citizens and security forces in Iraq. Utilizing Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force and Hezbollah training, funding, and weapons such as the improvised rocket-assisted mortar or IRAM, Katai'b Hezbollah tries to intimidate the Iraqi population and conducts direct attacks against Iraqi security and coalition forces. Indirect fire attacks also illustrate the total disregard they have for the safety and well being of Iraqi citizens.

The Iraqi Army, working in Sadr City recently, found and cleared a significant cache located in a commercial area of Baghdad. Not only did this find include 34 fully functional explosively-formed penetrators and 160 bricks of plastic explosives, it also had 3 hydraulic presses and a punch machine to manufacture the explosively-formed penetrators. There were significant amounts of copper shapes, PVC pipes, and formed...explosively-formed penetrator plates. Additionally, there were 14 107-millimeter rockets. The Iraqi Army's work here not only took dangerous weapons out the hands of criminal elements, they were able to take a significant manufacturing and production capability away from the enemy. This is the second cache found and cleared within 2 kilometers of this area over the past 30 days. The cache was found behind a false wall and it appears the machinery recovered had also been recently used.

While some groups continue to disrupt the lives of citizens in this great country seeking to spread chaos, other groups have come to realize that Iraq is healing and on the mend, getting better day by day and want to help in any way they can. We have seen a recent increase in regional support as other countries are revitalizing their involvement with Iraq. The countries of Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Syria, and Jordan all recently appointed their new ambassadors to Iraq. There have also been some very important visits from distinguished diplomats such as the Egyptian foreign minister, the Lebanese prime minister, and the Turkish deputy foreign minister.

With the Iraqi Security Forces improving in both ability and capacity, with increased regional support and, more importantly, with the continued strength and perseverance of the Iraqi citizen, Iraq continues to distinguish itself as a country able to stand on its own. Iraq is also establishing itself as a strong and viable business partner in this region of the world.

Thank you very much and at this point I'm willing to take your questions. Sir.

**REP1:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Ahmed Jassem, Western Agency. You talked about partnership between you and the Iraqi government. In case there is no agreement signed, will this partnership continue? And will you still support the Iraqi forces?

**BG PERKINS:** Our focus at this point in time is to work through all the details so that we can continue to partner with the Iraqi Security Forces and the Iraqi government as we have in the past and to ensure that there are the appropriate legal instruments so that we can continue to move forward and continue to have this great effect that we have had so far. So our discussions between the two governments and with Multi-National Force – Iraq, are laying out specifically what are those legal instruments, what are they required to be, how can we work this together so that we both end up with the result at the end that we want and have a win-win situation. So we see this as a way to continue our partnership that in the last five years has proved so fruitful.

Sir.

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

**INT:** [Unintelligible]. The Abu Kamal[?] within Syria had many debates.

The Syrian side is saying that these American raids hit civilians while the U.S. Army is saying that...the U.S. military is saying these are rebels. The GOI and COR took a position and said...and asked for an investigation of this raid. Can you explain this operation and whom did you target? And disclose what other intelligence information that guided you to this location. Thank you.

**BG PERKINS:** I have nothing to add on that. Thank you. Sir.

**REP3:** [Unintelligible] with the New York Times. Do you think the stepped up activities of Hezbollah brigades is linked to perhaps the agreement that the U.S. and Iraq seek to sign? I mean is it timed to perhaps derail any potential agreement here? Thank you.

**BG PERKINS:** We have seen continuing activity by Katai'b Hezbollah. They are responsible for some of the more sophisticated weapons out there such as the IRAMs that I spoke about before. And they've had a continual level of activity. It is no secret that Iran has tried to interfere into the bilateral discussions between the United States and Iraq and have tried to interfere with the sovereign decisions of Iraq. So this has been an ongoing issue and it is one that the Iraqi people do not welcome this outside interference into their bilateral negotiations and outside interference, quite honestly, with their own

sovereignty. Sir.

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

**INT:** [Unintelligible]. You mentioned the increase of the ISF and this is an indication for a good agreement. The security agreement is depending on many tenants; most importantly is the security forces. But the problem of the Sahwas, the Sons of Iraq, which is not included yet. And also, you mentioned the increase of capacity of the Iraqi Army. Minister of interior said that the forces are not ready yet within the Ministry of Interior. What's your comment?

**BG PERKINS:** Two parts; one, the transfer and transition of the Sons of Iraq is on track, it is a multiple-phased operation. The first phase was the transfer of the responsibility of about 50,000 Sons of Iraq here in the Baghdad area to the Iraqi government. That occurred at the beginning of October. The second phase will be in November where they get paid by the Iraqi government. The Iraqi government has set aside money. We are working with them through the details of payrolls and all that. So that is on track and will continue to progress.

With regards to the Iraqi Security Forces, again, this has been one of the very great successes with regards to the partnership of the

United States and the Government of Iraq and, quite honestly, the people of Iraq. And so this is why our leaders are engaged with the Iraqi government to ensure that the legal requirements that are necessary for this partnership to continue are in place so that we don't have any reduction in the cooperation between the United States training and equipping the Iraqi Security Forces, so that we don't have any drop off as far as our ability to work together with the Iraqis and continue their progress. And they have shown great progress.

So again, this is a great example of how the legal authorities we are currently under have brought great progress to our partnership and that is why we are putting so much effort into negotiating the continued legal authority so that this partnership does, in fact, not end.

Sir.

**REP5:** [Unintelligible] Agency. My question is about the recent [unintelligible] the Christian families in the northern province. Are the coalition forces involved in tackling this issue? Thank you.

**BG PERKINS:** Yes. In fact, I just got a report a few hours ago that over 150

Christian families have returned in the Mosul area. And so we are working very closely with the provincial authorities in that area as well as some of the national forces have been moved up there, a police brigade has been moved up there, as well as working with the Christian leaders to ensure that 1) security is re-established so that they feel free to move back in, and 2) that as the displaced Christians move back in, they are free from any additional threats to cause them to move out.

So we have been very engaged, both with the Christian community, the provincial leaders, and the national government. And, of course, many positive statements of affirmation have come from the prime minister on down condemning the threats against the Christians, condemning the attacks on them. And I think it's a great example of how the Iraqi community, all ethnosectarian backgrounds, have come together to condemn and work together to bring them back to their place where they have left from and their homes.

Sir.

**REP6:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Iraq Al-Hor. [Unintelligible]. General, there are many different opinions about the agreement. Militarily and politically, what are

the consequences of not signing this agreement before the end of this year? What are those consequences without having a legal framework?

Another question. Was it taken the responsibility of security today. There was...the authority for MNF was also given to arrest some wanted persons. There have been objections to such authorities because the province is going to take. What are your comments?

**BG PERKINS:** The first part, with regards to and the authorities, again, over the last number of years we've seen a remarkable partnership between the coalition force and the Government of Iraq and the people of Iraq. Things that have led to great partnership and cooperation in counterterrorism. We've worked very closely together to provide border security. Any number of construction projects have been built, [coughs], excuse me, both with coalition and Iraqis working together. As we work together and provide a very stable and secure environment, that entices foreign investment to come in and for foreign investors to take capital assets and put them at risk.

And so those are the kind of things that we want to continue to partner with the Iraqi government and the Iraqi people to make sure that there are the appropriate legal authorities and technical

agreements so that those things can continue to move forward. So we have seen over the last couple of years, really a win-win situation with regards to the Iraqi people, the Iraqi government, and the coalition forces. And we think this is exactly the kind of model that we want to move forward in the future because it affects security, it affects political progress, economic and governance. And those are the things that all Iraqi people can agree upon that they want progress in.

So these authorities that both sides are discussing in the spirit of cooperation. They are discussing them with respect for each others' sovereignty. And they are discussing them with the point of view that everybody has the same outcome in mind – that is a win-win situation. These are the type things we think motivate everyone to come to a very useful conclusion to maintain this partnership.

With re-...the second question was...? What was it?

**REP6:** Wasit.

**BG PERKINS:** Oh, Wasit. Yeah. Exactly. Well, again, another great example of the benefits of the partnership. The 13th province to transfer to provincial Iraqi control, as you said, that was conducted today. The

Iraqi people and the Iraqi government are now in the lead in that province. The security forces will continue to be in support as they are in the other 12 provinces that have undergone this. And as you well know, the other 12 provinces, after they have gone through the transfer of authority to the Iraqi government and the provincial government, have really been great models of success.

So this is just one other example of how the strategic partnership that we've had over these years has produced benefits for both the coalition and the Iraqi people. And we see this continuing forward throughout the other provinces.

Sir, in the back.

**REP7:**

Hi. Jonathan Blakely from National Public Radio. Three questions if I could. To piggyback on the Wasit Province, are you on track with the other five provinces? Can you—I know you can't talk about a timeline, but what provinces are coming up next and what problems are you coming up with with the other provinces?

The other question. The International Committee of the Red Cross said today that despite security improvements in Iraq, the country's infrastructure remains—they called it dire. Particularly they were

concerned about the country's water problems.

And the third question, can you say anything at all about Syria and Abu Kamal?

**BG PERKINS:** Okay. The first question with regards to the other five provinces. As you know, the final determination on when those transfer is an Iraqi determination once the national government and the provincial government have come to the conclusion that the situation on the ground is such that they can transfer responsibility and that the security and command-and-control apparatus is in place in that province. So that is ongoing in the remaining five provinces.

Obviously we work very closely with them and we will go through the same province...or the same process we have in the 13 that have transferred so far to ensure, in fact, that that continues on. We've had great success and so we...it validates our model. We think we're very confident that we know what the security situation has to be. We know what the command-and-control structure has to be. So again, we are reassured by the success we have enjoyed so far that we have the process down properly.

The second one with regards to services. That is obviously a very

key component of maintaining long-term security here in the country. It is a concern of the average Iraqi citizen. It is a concern of Multi-National Force – Iraq. And it's a concern of the government. We have worked very closely with the government, especially Deputy Prime Minister Asawi who has now come on into the government and is really heading up the services sector. We have recently sat down with him and are putting together a model where you have reconstruction centers that will be set up in the various provinces where you will bring together various ministerial reps from across the government so that you can start to get a synergistic effect between, say, the ministries that deal with water and electricity and public works and all that. Because it really is a combined effort because of the enormity, as you said, of some of these projects. So this is becoming a main focus.

And our ability to focus on these projects is a result of the increase in the security situation. When the security situation is very bad, it's very difficult to have resources to focus on the reconstruction. It's very difficult to actually have people engaged in that because it's very dangerous for them. So the fact that we can now transition some of our focus away from security and onto construction, onto the provision of services, and focus leadership time in organizing that, again, is a benefit of this partnership we have enjoyed and it is

now become a major focus, both of MNF-I and the Iraqi government.

And I have nothing else to add on any other topics.

**REP7:** Back on the ICRC report. Is there anyth-...are there specific parts of the country that have water problems worse than other parts of the country?

**BG PERKINS:** Well, I would say that that is...obviously out in some of the rural areas is actually...in some of the more difficult areas to get to because they don't have the infrastructure there. But water, sewage, electricity—some of these basic services are the things that we are focusing on at the highest level. And again, we have found that some of the biggest challenge is integrating the provision of these, integrating the reconstruction of them, and then integrating the national efforts with the provincial efforts.

Over here. Sir.

**REP8:** Jerry from AFP. Would you elaborate a bit more on this Iranian interference in the bilateral negotiations in so far as pitting Washington and Baghdad? We often see U.S. commanders

speaking about it, but very few times we really see very hard facts as to what exactly are the Iranians doing. How are they interfering? Is it at a political level, at the diplomatic level? What exactly are they doing? Can you elaborate a bit more on that?

**BG PERKINS:** Well, I think recently, if you just look at some of the statements that the Iranian leaders make, it is not helpful to the bilateral negotiations that are going on, again, between two sovereign countries, the United States and Iraq. And so as the United States and Iraq continue a bilateral negotiation based on their own sovereignty, external influence and statements from other countries are not welcome and are not helpful and they, quite honestly, do not...are not respectful of the sovereignties of the countries of those involved in the negotiations. Thank you.

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

**INT:** [Unintelligible]. My question, General, is if the agreement was not signed, will the U.S. forces withdraw all of it from Iraq and even Kurdistan and every other part?

**BG PERKINS:** Well, again, what we are focusing on is ensuring that our partnership continues. And so as we have operated under the previous years that we've been here, we are focusing on the legal

authorities that are necessary to maintain this partnership as we move forward, to make sure that there is not a gap in that partnership, to make sure there is not a gap in any of those legal authorities. So the focus right now with both governments are on the negotiators coming to resolution on an agreement which provides the necessary legal protections both for the U.S. forces as well as the Government of Iraq, that both of their sovereignties are respected, and allows our very strategic and profitable relationship to move forward.

Sir.

**REP10:** Thank you. Larry Kaplow with Newsweek. Considering that...you know you're three months past the original target date for the SOFA and only two months left to work it out. Are you and the coalition making contingency plans for when things start to have to be changed in case there is no SOFA agreement by December 31st? Even everything from how to handle packing certain things up, confining people to bases, starting to move things out if that's going to be necessary. Is that planning underway?

**BG PERKINS:** Well, as we engage on a daily basis with the Government of Iraq and the Iraqi Security Forces on all the activities we conduct here,

these are the kind of things that we lay out in detail with regards to these are the requirements that we have to conduct these partnership activities here in Iraq, these are the legal authorities we have to have, and work together on how we can move that forward. So we are always in discussions both with ourselves and the Government of Iraq as to what the requirements are so that we can move forward and have plans to make sure that, in fact, that....

**REP10:** I asked about your talks with the Iraqi government. I'm asking whether the coalition internally is making plans on contingencies for actually packing things up, moving people out, and confining people to bases if the SOFA is not finished by the deadline of December 31st.

**BG PERKINS:** Well, again, at this point in time our focus is determining what we have to do to maintain the course that we're on and how we can continue our partnership. So we are looking very closely internally into how we'd continue to do the activities that we're doing. How to...how do we work in cooperation with Iraqis. And what are the minimum authorities we need to maintain this partnership. So that is our focus at this point in time. Yes, sir.

**REP11:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Omar[ph] Hamdani[ph]. Baghdad TV. Some politicians ask the American forces to find other options or solutions about the security agreement. Is that is what is going on? Are you going to propose some new...other suggestions about the agreement?

My second question is related to Al-Bukamal. Is this message to the neighbors of Iraq who allow the terrorists to come through the borders to Iraq? Is this a message that you are sending to the neighbors to make them stop this? And will it be repeated in the future?

**BG PERKINS:** Again, back to the strategic agreement, what we are doing from the Multi-National Force – Iraq point of view is that we are looking very closely at all of the activities that we do here in Iraq, all of the partnership that we have going on with the Iraqi people, and determining what are requirements to continue that. We then pass those requirements on to the negotiators which are under the embassy lead here with the Government of Iraq and they, of course, are the ones who are actually negotiating the agreement with the Government of Iraq. What we focus on on the Multi-National Force are, [coughs], excuse me, what are the technical and legal authorities we have to have to continue to conduct activities that we have found so beneficial to conduct with the Iraqis so far.

Sir, back there.

**REP12:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** General, in case the agreement was signed between Iraq and the U.S., surely there will be...both sides will have benefits. Can you say what those benefits...the most important benefits for the U.S. from this agreement?

**BRIG GEN PERKINS:** Well, I think the good news about all this is that all of the benefits are jointly shared by the Iraqi people and the coalition forces here. We have both sacrificed a lot over these number of years to bring a stable, secure, peaceful, democratic society here to Iraq. And that is why I think both sides are working so hard because nobody wants to turn the clock back. Nobody wants to lose the security that has been hard fought and gained. Nobody wants to lose the economic progress. Nobody wants to lose the political process.

So there are no particular parts of this that are advantaged to one side or the other. Both sides win as we conclude this agreement. And again, it is across the spectrum from the security gains we have won together, the number of economic gains that come from construction projects, economic gains that come from foreign

investment, and the political process. It comes from providing a stable, secure environment so that democracy can go forward.

So again, the good news is that this is a win-win situation and upon the positive conclusion of these negotiations, our partnership will be even stronger and both sides will have the protections they need to ensure their sovereignty is intact and that our partnership can move forward.

Yes, ma'am.

**REP13:** Lucy Ryan from Reuters. Could you go into more specific detail about what activities would be affected if there was a gap that we've been discussing? How would this affect Iraq's economy, the transport, security if we do end up not having either a UN extension or a pact by January 1st?

**BG PERKINS:** Well, again, the areas that we've been able to make progress in over these years with our partnership is quite wide so we need to have authorities to continue activity in all of those areas. So, as I said, obviously security is a major one, there's been a major effort here. So we have to have legal authorities to conduct security operations and continue to partner with the Iraqis. We have to have authority to

conduct border security operations that we do out there. Any number of construction projects that are done in coordination with the Iraqis. We have adequate legal protection to do those now and authorities. We will...that is what we are focusing on in the future so that those happen.

Obviously the ability to provide a stable and secure and predictable environment allows foreign investors to come in here with some level of assurity[sic] that that will continue. So we...our partnership allows that to move forward as well. So there's really no area that we, as a coalition, and that the U.S. operate in that is not governed by legal authorities.

**REP13:** What about State Department activity?

**BG PERKINS:** Well, there are a number of things—and I guess when I say the U.S. I should make it more broadly. There are a number of things that the coalition force does, the U.S. forces do, that enable others to accomplish their mission. Other international organizations – the United Nations, non-governmental organizations – benefit from the activities that the coalition forces do here, the ability to provide security, the ability to provide movement and things like that. So these things are all interrelated so it's hard to pull just one piece out

and say this is the only thing that's affected, and that's the only thing that is affected.

When you stand back and take a look at Iraq and the progress that has been made over these last five years, it is a combination of the efforts and sacrifice of the Iraqi people, the efforts of the Iraqi government, the efforts of the U.S. government, the efforts of our coalition friends, the efforts of NGOs and other international organizations that come in, and they're all intertwined. So if you pull one pillar of that out, you now seriously degrade, I think, the ability for the others to progress forward which is why there is so much attention being paid and so much effort being put into these negotiations because we want all of that effort to continue. We want all of those pillars to stand. And we want this entire team that has been so successful in the past to continue to move forward.

Sir.

**REP14:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** General, you spoke about the PICs in many provinces. I would like to ask you is there any intention for the coalition forces to transfer the Green Zone responsibility to the Iraqi Security Forces? And do you intend to move to another area in the Green Zone to give this

authority and responsibility and decision-making and military decision-making for Iraqi government?

And you refuse to also answer Abu Kamal incident. I would like to ask you how many coalition...how many foreign fighters are being monitored by the coalition forces?

**BG PERKINS:** With regards to the transfer of other areas, Green Zone. Obviously the goal is to transfer all of the provinces and areas that are currently under coalition control to the Government of Iraq. That's the desire of all Iraqis. That is the desire of the U.S. and the coalition forces. And we have made great strides in that. And so that is a goal that I think everybody shares. And it is one that, again, great progress is made towards. So clearly that is what we're working for. And again, it takes a strategic partnership to bring that to fruition.

Question over there? Sir.

**REP15:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** [Unintelligible] Azbariya[ph] Magazine. General, are there any indications that there is interference from Iran to oppose the agreement...to stop the agreement other than the statements as

you've mentioned?

**BG PERKINS:** Well, the public statements from the leaders of Iran are obviously the most obvious and the most disconcerting because it comes from the leaders of the country and it is indicative of the intentions of the leadership of the country that they want to interfere with the sovereign ability of Iraq to negotiate a bilateral agreement. So I think that's probably enough of a sign to show that their intentions are not to let Iraq execute its own sovereign right.

Question?

Okay. Well, again, thank you very much for this afternoon. Thank you for your time here and have a good day.