

**PRESS CONFERENCE:**

**Lieutenant General Frank G. Helmick, Commanding General, Multi-National  
Security Transition Command Iraq  
Mr. Abd al-Qadir al Mufriji, Minister of Defense**

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**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Lieutenant General Helmick  
Minister Abd al-Qadir al Mufriji**

**REPORTERS 1-16**

**\*REP1 = REPORTER 1**

**\*INT = INTERPRETER**

**LTG HELMICK:** Well, good afternoon to all of you and thank you for joining us. It's a pleasure to be here today with Mr. Abd al-Qadir, the minister of defense, to highlight some of the recent accomplishments of the Iraqi military.

The Ministry of Defense has a current operating strength of 206,000 including 202,000 Army, 2,000 in the Air Force, and 2,000 in the Navy. The performance of the Iraqi military during operations in Basra, Sadr City, Amara, Diyala serves to illustrate the improved capabilities of these forces as they continue to improve with each operation.

Since June of 2007, 15 months ago, the military forces have grown by approximately 72,000. The minister is committed to building a security force necessary to win the counterinsurgency fight and provide an environment of sustainable security for the country of Iraq. The minister of defense has developed a plan and strategy to grow and train the Iraqi military force to accomplish that goal.

The Iraqi Army currently has 13 infantry divisions and 1 mechanized infantry division. There are over 100 battalions of these divisions taking the lead in operations, and that is a good news story.

The Iraqi Air Force continues to increase its personnel and equipment capacities. The Air Force currently has 75 aircraft and anticipates receiving 14 more aircraft by the end of 2008 and 34 additional aircraft in 2009, which will give them a total of 123

aircraft. The Air Force is expanding its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability to provide targeting and intelligence imagery to not only the military forces, but the imagery is also being used by other agencies in the Iraqi government such as the border enforcement agency and the oil police.

The Iraqi Navy operates out of Um Qasr and has 1 float squadron and is accelerating the growth of 2 Marine battalions. The float squadron conducts 42 patrols per week and provides security for the 2 offshore oil terminals. One of the Iraqi Navy Marine battalions provides point defense for the offshore oil platforms and conducts visits, board and search and seizure operations. The second Marine battalion protects the Port of Um Qasr.

The increased capability of the Iraqi Security Forces helped set the conditions for the U.S. to redeploy all five of the surge brigade combat teams along with 2 Marine regiments and 1 Marine expeditionary unit. Because of the increased capability and professionalism of the Iraq Security Forces, the Australians and the country of Georgia's troops have already redeployed, and the Polish ground forces are preparing to redeploy shortly. All of this shifting of forces and responsibilities are in large part to the tremendous effort of the Iraq Security Force. Just yesterday, the United States

president, President Bush, announced more U.S. forces will be reduced with 4,000 departing by year's end and another 4,000 by the end of January, 2008, for a total reduction of 8,000.

Building a military is hard work and fighting a determined and ruthless enemy at the same time makes the challenge even more difficult. We are making progress towards sustainable security but we're not there yet. There's still fighting ahead and work to be done to increase the Iraqi Security Force's support capabilities. With the accelerated growth of the military force, logistics, sustainment, infrastructure maintenance and repair continue to be major areas of emphasis. Together with our Iraqi partners, we are committed to building the Iraqi Security Force and remain on the offensive.

I am grateful to Minister Abdul Qadir for his leadership. He is leading the way for the Iraqi military forces to become a professional and credible force to protect and defend all citizens of Iraq. And I look forward to your questions. And I will ask now the minister if he would like to make an opening comment.

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** As-Salāmu `Alaykum. [Unintelligible.] I have nothing further to add to the general, only that we wish to present ourself to our

people that we're ready to fill the commitments...fulfill the commitments to be the protectors of this people and to have capacities...self-dependent capacities in protecting our land, our air, our shores. We will work hard and seriously. And we are going to plan with all...the rest of the ministries, especially the Ministry of Interior, to work and to exchange the fighting roles with total coordination under the supervision of the Iraqi government and the Iraqi Parliament. Insha'Allah and [unintelligible], we're going to work on the right path and we're going to detect the security violations. And we're watching our enemy that is targeting our people. And we're sure of what we're doing and we're sure we're going to achieve the goals we have planned.

**LTG HELMICK:** Yes, sir. In the back.

**REP1:** Sam Dagger with the Christian...with the New York Times—excuse me. I just have a...sort of a couple of questions relating to the Awakening councils.

**LTG HELMICK:** Okay. We're only going to take one question per reporter. But go ahead.

**REP1:** Right. Okay. I'll try to sort of consolidate it into one question I

guess.

**LTG HELMICK:** And please tell us who it's for.

**REP1:** Excuse me?

**LTG HELMICK:** Tell us...is it for the minister?

**REP1:** No, it's for yourself, sir.

**LTG HELMICK:** Oh. Okay.

**REP1:** Basically...I mean why the deci-...? I mean you've just highlighted the accomplishments of the Iraqi military. What has driven the decision to handover the whole issue of the Awakening councils over to the Iraqi side? And have you received any guarantees that, you know, these individuals will not be prosecuted, arrested, kicked out of these councils. You know, what guarantees have you gotten from the Iraqi side about this?

**LTG HELMICK:** Well, really this is a good question for the minister to answer, and then I will add my comments to that. Mr. Minister?

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** I would answer your question. The Sahwa or militias, all of them, they're our sons; they're Iraqi citizens. In case they had certain violations, certain crimes, they have entered the security process and they have offered achievements. We consider any Iraqi citizen who violates or deviates from the right spot is a loss. But these citizens have gave...have shown great efforts to the security. The government doesn't need to offer guarantees or proofs. These, the sons of the government, the government is in total responsibility for these people when we receive them...their file from the Multi-National Force. It is a natural thing; it is not abnormal or extraordinary some-...matter that you're wondering and concerned about them. The government is elected. It represents the people. They are our sons. But the government might arrest or detain some elements. The ministries, in this case, are responsible for protecting them from being attacked or harassed by other organizations such as al-Qaida or the Ba'athist Party. The government is responsible for all its sons whether they were Sahwa or any other title. The government is going to be loyal to them more than any other part.

**LTG HELMICK:** Yes, sir.

**REP2:** E'ad[ph] from Iba[?]. Mr. Minister, the Ministry of Defense is

adopting a contract to export some weapons. What are the relativity[sic] of this contract?

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** It is not one contract; it is a group of contracts of the ground forces, the air forces. It is...they're on their way to be concluded. I'm not ready to discuss the details of these contracts. But these contracts are going to let us depend on ourself...abilities.

**LTG HELMICK:** Just a second. Just a second. Yeah.

**REP3:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Radio Sawa. [Unintelligible]. Mr. Minister, there is an objection from Kurdistan Regional Government concerning...conducting contracts on purchasing F-16 aircrafts. What is your answer to this? And Minister, is the Iraqi Security Forces and Iraqi Army ready to receive the security file in Baghdad after the pullout of the forces?

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** F-16 that is purchased by the Iraqi government, it is to develop the capacities of the Iraqi Army and to protect all Iraq including Kurdistan region. We are responsible to protect the borders...the region borders. It is our duty as a federal army. We are there. We

are present to protect our people, not to shoot them. We are responsible to build an army that is self-contained, and to build an air force. It is expected and the guarantees...the Iraqi Army is...consists of all of nationalities...Iraqi nationalities to protect all [unintelligible].

**LTG HELMICK:** Let me just add on, if I could, Mr. Minister, about the...since you brought up the F-16 issue, that the Iraqi request for price and availability information is being reviewed in the normal channels of business for the foreign military sales process. And it is not uncommon for one of our partners to request price and availability information. And we do that on a regular basis for all of our partners. And sometimes the requests are just for planning. Let's see, who...? Over here? Yes, sir.

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

**INT:** [Unintelligible] News and Bilad News Agency. Concerning Hanakim[ph], Mr. Minister. There are some U.S. movement to...towards solving the crisis there. It is with the recommendation from the Iraqi government and Ministry of Interior? Or is it an individual movement from the U.S. side?

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** The crisis, we see it in media but not ex-...does not exist on the field. The crisis, maybe a lack of coordination is what's causing this whole issue. The Omens of Op-...the Omens of Prosperity in Diyala is about reached to completion...its goal. But as for Hanakim[ph], if we have crisis there, how are we conducting our operations there? The planning...the local government, [unintelligible], we have coordination with them. Until now, no Iraqi Army have entered Hanakim[ph];all the operations were conducted outside Hanakim[ph] borders. The closest army troops for national...for the Iraqi Army and national police is within 400 kilometer from the borders of Hanakim[ph]. This whole issue have been exaggerated. There are no mediations. We work directly with the region...the officials of the region; they talk to us as we talk to them. We have one point, one focus to talk about and we have total understanding.

**LTG HELMICK:** Yes, sir.

**REP5:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Chief Editor, Al Raya Newspaper. My question concerning the last campaign by Ministry of Defense to recover the...recruit the members of old Iraqi Army. We would like...we see some banners hanging at the walls of the ministry. The officers are asking for them to be hired again.

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** It is, of course, a plan supervised by the government and the prime minister to finish the former Iraqi Army issue. They used to submit their situation to the offices of Ministry of Defense and they had a timetable. All Iraqi former army elements had a certain headquarters in which they can submit their names. The...this Army, the new Army is five years old now. The...we need lower ranks. We need sergeants. The remaining officers are going to be departed to the warriors' office in order to join and take a num-...a certain number from them, support unit, or maybe Air Force unit, a naval force. We are waiting for the retiring and service law issuance as the Parliament is going to vote on it. Once it is enacted, all of them are going to be retired. And by this we're going to turn a whole page and they're...all of them are going to receive their allocations.

**LTG HELMICK:** Yes, sir. In the back.

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

**INT:** Free Iraq Radio. Mr. Minister, there are some statements of you when you were at the U.S....when you were visiting the U.S. You talked about the preparedness of the Iraqi Army and they are able to

control the borders. The government now is insisting that the year 2011, it's the year for the U.S. forces to withdraw its forces. What do you say about this? Is the Iraqi government able to control the security file?

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Yes, thank you. I would like to correct your information. Our abilities to be able to control a total security force with our self contained is by the year 2011 and the beginning of the year 2012. It is clear to the government. And we...the government made its technical decision based on precise information. The...we...building an army that is capable of building and defending borders according to the new strategy of the Iraqi Army: maneuver...able to be...conduct maneuvers and to stop more than one attack. As for air defense, ground air defense, we need so much amount of money. We need time in order to import. We may not be able to finish these with this limited time. We might need another budget.

As for the borders and defending them, the...our country might find other methods to protect the borders with our neighboring countries. This is a mere technical issue.

But the subject, when we are going to be able to depend on

ourselves and be able to control security, as you have said, until the year 2011 and according to scientific planning. It is very precise.

**LTG HELMICK:** Yes, sir.

**REP7:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Irasad[ph] Newspaper. Mr. Minister, how come no...not enough forces have been prepared after pushing the terrorists outside Ninawa?

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** [Unintelligible] Operation in Ninawa, it was a successful operation, and the operation includes Ninawa. Now we have Ninawa as province. The security there is very good. But the problem is in Mosul. Mosul is not Ninawa. Mosul is the center of Ninawa. If we look at on a daily basis, the attacks...the incidents and all the govern-...all the provinces aside from Mosul are very rare. Sometimes it is zero attacks. But it is Mosul which is...which witnessed problems. But the number compared to [unintelligible] is very...you see a very big difference. In Mosul, from 30 to 40 operation in Mosul previously. Now, maybe four operations now we would see in Mosul. The terrorists had the control in Mosul, but now we are in charge there. We are the...following up these groups.

So Ninawa and Mosul are under our supervision.

**LTG HELMICK:** Yeah. Let me just tack on to what the minister said, and I think it is a point that is worth underscoring. In June of '07 in this country, there were 1,400 incidents a week – some kind of attack on either a coalition force or an Iraqi civilian or an Iraqi military unit – 1,400 a week. Today it's about 125. And that's based in large measure to the great work that the Iraq Security Forces are doing throughout the country as well as the coalition force. So that's a significant accomplishment. Yes, sir.

**REP8:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Mr. Minister, Darsanam[ph] Radio. Omens of Prosperity in Diyala, where have you reached with it? Would you please tell us about the time duration that it's going to take in order to accomplish the mission?

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** As you know, any military operation, it has different phases. We can say now we have finished the first phase and now we're starting the second phase. Operations of Prosperity have been divided into southern...south...areas south of Hamrin Hil[ph] and north of Hamrin Hil[ph]. We have finished the south areas – Boras[ph],

Kanaan, Balad Ruz – and we were able to cleanse these areas. Now we've moved to the northern, Hamrin Hills[ph], and we are continuing our efforts there. Now we can say we're in the process of fixing our bases in these areas in order to keep security there and to provide us from total control on the frontiers of Diyala.

**LTG HELMICK:** Yes, ma'am.

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

**INT:** [Unintelligible] Newspaper. Mr. Minister, some areas started closing...locking.... The entrances and exits of some areas have been closed...locked by checkpoints. Until when are we going to be isolated? The...we are witnessing some traffic jams and on the highway also. In Zayouna area we have this case. It is very unpleasant traffic jam. Do you have some search campaigns...search operations in Zayouna areas? Is the Army able to enter the houses there in a formal...formally?

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** For us in Baghdad Operation Command, we are studying the issue of removing the blockers and to adopt temporary checkpoints which is better for us. But for the areas, we do not enter an area with no legislative orders. The area, 714 in Zayouna, it witnessed more than

1 incident and we conducted searching operation there.

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

**INT:** Do we...do they have a legal authorization?

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Of course. There are no search operation conducted without legal warrant. The 4...the 714 area, we have some question marks concerning this area and we need to understand this.

**REP10:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Nina News Agency. Mr. Minister, Human Rights Agency asked the Iraqi Parliament...discovered...talked about a prison that's called Al Cherta[ph] Prison. They said the human rights rules are being violated in that prison. And you are...you have been rep-...informed of this incident.

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** I haven't heard about this prison and I was not informed about the violations. In Basra, I have operation command there. We, as Army, we have no prisons or detentions there. As Army, we only have the temporary arrests. We cannot keep someone more than 72 hours. The sides that are going to receive the individual from us are the

Ministry of Interior or Ministry of Justice. Maybe the prisons are jammed or crowded. In this case we need to keep our prisoners for a longer time and we have...we face certain problems because we're not prepared to receive prisoners for a long duration. In Basra we have the Operation Command and Division 14. We have not heard of this incident and I don't have such information to talk about. In Basra, now I have the general-inspector of the Ministry of Defense and he has a full committee that is...that inspects about such cases in case they were aware of some violations.

**LTG HELMICK:** Yes, sir. In the back, please.

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

**INT:** Al Abdulya[ph] Agency, Turkish agency. Minister of Defense, Iraqi government is receiving the Mujahedin-e Khalq camp.

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Iraqi government is asking to get them out as they are a terrorist group. This is part of what's called sovereignty. There is a camp of some organization and this organization works away and violated the law. We have many clues. The Iraqi government is entitled to be the guard around the borders of this camp. It is not acceptable that the Iraqi government not to be responsible for any camp inside Iraq.

And the subject of the departure of the organization of Iraq, as a minister of defense, it is a legitimate right for the Iraqi government. But with hum-...by using humanitarian ways and methods by political organizations as human rights, the Ministry of Defense with...not violating the international law, but to be supervisor...have the security supervision, it is our right as government.

**LTG HELMICK:** Sir. In the front.

**REP12:** As-Salāmu `Alaykum. Ahmed Jassem. [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Mr. Minister, you have talked about the end of Omens of Prosperity Operation. But we believe that you have an idea about when Iraq is going to be disarmed. Another question is...

**LTG HELMICK:** Just one question, please.

**REP12:** [Inaudible.]

**LTG HELMICK:** Thank you.

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** We are working on disarming Iraq. Our plan to disarm Iraq starts from the heavy weapons and the medium weapons. The general

idea is to have one weapon in each house for self defense. Also, Ministry of Defense have a total plan about the procuring of weapons to include it within the law and to give a badge for carrying or procuring the weapon. We are working on this issue. Everybody is aware about the massive amount of weapons in the military...the former military and that have entered every and each Iraqi house all over Iraq. We need time and we're working on a plan as a government.

**LTG HELMICK:** Yes, sir. In the back.

**REP13:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Al Isbayan[ph] Newspaper. My question to Mr. General Helmick. You've talked about some recommendations and General Petraeus report. Would you tell us?

**LTG HELMICK:** Yes, I will highlight again the troop reductions. It's basically what the president of the United States announced yesterday is that there will be 4,000 reduction in the coalition force by the end of the year and another 4,000 by the end of January, which would equate to 8,000 between...when we begin this in...by the end of January. That is a significant number of soldiers to leave. And the only reason we can do this is based on the security situation on the ground today

and based, in large measure, by the capabilities of the Iraq Security Forces. Yes, sir.

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

**INT:** [Unintelligible] Iraq Agency. General Helmick, as you are responsible to evaluate the security situation, after delivering the security responsibility in Anbar, what is the next...the following province? My second question is to Mr. Minister. The...

**LTG HELMICK:** We're going to do one question at a time and if we have time we'll get another one.

**REP14:** [Speaks off microphone.]

**LTG HELMICK:** Thank you very much. Shukran. That is a...about the provincial Iraqi control situation is very, very important to this country. And as all of you know, on the 1st of September, Anbar Province went into provincial Iraqi control. And again, that could only have happened because of the current situation, the security situation on the ground in Anbar and the capability of the Iraqi Security Forces. And when I talk about Iraqi Security Forces in this case, I not only mean the military, but also the police forces. All of these are conditions based. So it depends on the conditions on the ground in

that particular province. And, as you know, today we have 11 of 19 provinces under Iraq-...under provincial Iraqi control.

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

**INT:** My question: what is the next province? What is the next province?

**LTG HELMICK:** And I can't tell you that answer. I don't know what the next province is. Again, it is based on the conditions on the ground.

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** There are two provinces on the way very soon. We are not allowed to give you the names, but two provinces, not only one.

**LTG HELMICK:** Yes, sir.

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

**INT:** Baghdad Radio. Mr. Minister, some areas in Baghdad is ha-  
...welcoming the Iraqi Army to protect it and not to be protected by  
any other forces.

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** Yes. There should be a trust in all the forces available, not only the  
Iraqi Army. The forces are here for protecting the Iraqi people and

we need to be frank about this issue. The Iraqi Army—the government does not make it to make it a police, to do the police task. The Army is responsible to protect the frontiers. Our job now is to backup the Ministry of Interior. Once the people involved face some certain situation that they would ask for our help, we would get involved and help them. But the future of the Army is to be the protector of the borders of Iraq, and we are here. The security forces, especially at the Ministry of Interior, is developing and they are very keen on protecting the security of the citizen. And I'm sure they're work is going to be better than the Army itself because this is their job description. It is their job to protect the citizen and our job is to protect the frontier. We are working that the Ministry of Interior is going to receive the security.

**LTG HELMICK:** Okay. We have time for one more question. Yes, sir. Go ahead.

**REP16:** [Asks question in Arabic.]

**INT:** Mr. Minister, I'd like to ask about the coordination between you and Ministry of Interior. There are some issues that your work are...is interacting with them, the interior and the defense. Have you mediated to solve this issue?

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** The question is not clear. There is no interaction between us and we work as one command. Each week we have two meetings: one meeting for work in Baghdad, the second meeting is all over Iraq. Our plans that we put Ninawa operations, Basra operations, Anbar operations, Diyala operations, they are with the pl-...joint planning and working with the Ministry of Interior and with total coordination with the Multi-National Forces. Until now, we do not interact. But we can say we are one power that works an organized manner and we have one commander, the prime minister, the commander in chief. We do not have interaction. We are interacted in the first place.

**UNIDENTIFIED:** [Speaks off microphone.]

**LTG HELMICK:** I'll ask the minister. Do you want to take one...?

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** It is a trap. You're just asking me...

[Laughter.]

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Continues speaking in Arabic.]

**INT:** ...and you're forgetting the general.

**LTG HELMICK:** It's [unintelligible]...

**MIN AL-QADIR:** [Speaks in Arabic.]

**INT:** You're tiring me with your questions.

**LTG HELMICK:** Okay. Ramadan Karim. Shukran jaziilan. Thank you very much.

**MIN AL-QADIR:** Shukran jaziilan.

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