

PRESS CONFERENCE

**GENERAL RAYMOND T. ODIERNO, COMMANDER MULTI-NATIONAL FORCES –
IRAQ WITH VARIOUS MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA**

DATE:

16 SEPTEMBER 2008

TRANSCRIBED BY:

SOS INTERNATIONAL

REPORTERS 1-11

REP1 = REPORTER 1

PH = PHONETIC

GEN. ODIERNO: First, good morning. As Salamu 'Alaykum. I just want to -- Just a few words.

First off, it's a proud moment for me to be given the responsibility to take command of Multi-National Force-Iraq and continue the mission here in Iraq as we move forward. And as we've said many times, everyone is encouraged by the progress that has been made here in Iraq, but we still have a lot of work to do. That project -- That progress is fragile, but us working with the Iraqis, Iraqi Security Forces, the Iraqi government, believe that we will -- we'll be able to continue this success as we move forward.

So with that, I'll open it up for any questions you might have.

REP1: (Unidentified female speaker) (Inaudible) future (inaudible)

GEN. ODIERNO: Yeah. First, I think it's an evolutionary process. And I think we're walking through that evolution. And I continue to see the Iraqi government grow; its capacity is beginning to grow. It's still slow progress, and I think that will take time. But I think over time they will do enough for them to be able to take control of this country on their own.

Specifically with the Sons of Iraq, we work very closely with them. We continue to work extremely closely with them to make sure that the Sons of Iraq are able to be part of either the security forces or get other jobs. And in fact I was told last night that Prime Minister Maliki has, as of yesterday, signed several documents making sure that in fact they get integrated into the security forces or other employment found for the Sons of Iraq. So it's very encouraging to me as we move forward. That is something that we'll continue to work very closely with the government of Iraq on.

REP2: (Speaks in Arabic.)

INT: (Blocked by reporter.) Thank you very much.

What are the things, you know, and if that worries you the most now in the Multi-National forces. Thank you very much.

GEN. ODIERNO: Yeah, thank you.

I think a couple things. First, I think as our -- as the United States and Iraq specifically continue to work the Status of Forces Agreement that were being worked between our two countries, I think that's extremely

important document as we come towards 31 December and the end of the U.N. Security Council resolution. So I'm hoping that that will be able to be resolved here. And I think that will have -- Again, that's part of the evolutionary process as we move forward.

The second piece is the importance of the provincial elections that are slated to occur here by the end of the year. I think those are extremely important. It's important that we get the law passed inside of the Iraqi government of representatives and we're able to implement that election. I think it's extremely important for the people of Iraq.

And finally I would just say we have to constantly make sure that those groups that are, that are not for freedom, that are not for liberty, that are not for success of the Government of Iraq, we have to make sure that working with the Iraqi Security Forces we do not allow them to, to grow and continue to cause instability inside of Iraq.

REP3: (Unidentified male reporter) (Inaudible) in fact (inaudible) challenge that to maintain the fragile stability that has happened (inaudible) to do there?

GEN. ODIERNO: Well, again, I think as we move forward it is about -- You know, I think, you know, we are in a fragile state now. What I want to do is build it to a more stable -- stable -- state. And I think we're in the process of doing it.

It just takes some time and it's slow. But I would just say I am encouraged with the continued growth of not only the Iraqi Security Forces, the national police, but also we're starting to see signs of some other of the governmental capacities begin to grow, which I think is extremely important.

So yes, that's part of what we have to do is maintain the stability so the government can continue to grow.

REP4: (Speaks in Arabic.)

INT: (Blocked by reporter.)

GEN. ODIERNO: When you use the microphone, it cancels out the guy trying to translate.

Just go ahead and ask your question.

REP4: (Speaks in Arabic)

INT: I can't hear. I can't hear nothing. I can't hear nothing.

UNKN SPKR: (Inaudible.)

GEN. ODIERNO: Yeah. Well, first off, we have done an assessment, and we believe that the withdrawal of these forces, they have been replaced adequately by Iraqi Security Forces and where were Coalition Forces, Iraqis are now able to take more and more responsibility.

So we think that's a first step in the Iraqis taking more and more control of their own security responsibilities

REP5: When will you do your next assessment, recommend deploying (inaudible) deployment (inaudible) will that be in the context of the SOFA agreement or (inaudible).

GEN. ODIERNO: Yeah, I mean that's a great question. And we have not set a time line for an assessment. But there are obviously several factors. One is the, the new SOFA agreement that will occur. What the impact of that is, as well as, as we get on, a new administration in the United States, clearly that will impact that as well. So I -- What I want to do here for at least the next three months, through the end of the year, is continue, really, to get a -- continue to conduct assessments, continue to see where we're at, consult with the government of Iraq and then make some recommendations.

REP6: Yeah. Based on what you've seen and (inaudible) the Iraqi government has (inaudible). How confident are you? Do you believe in the Iraqi Security Forces (inaudible)?

GEN. ODIERNO: Well, yeah. I would just say, you know, I think we'll see what the agreement says. But I still think it's, it's -- 2011 is the date we're looking towards; I think it has to the capacity that they're able to build. And again, it goes to the enablers and all the things that they would need in order to protect themselves both from external threats, but also to deal with some of the internal -- And again, I'm cautious in making any, any judgments at this time.

So again, we'll do assessments with the Government of Iraq as we move forward, and we will make a determination, and then I'll offer recommendations both in line of what I think is best for the Government of Iraq as well as what's best for the security of the United States.

REP7: (Inaudible.)

GEN. ODIERNO: Yeah. Unclear yet; we're still working through that. You know, clearly they are building their air forces; they are building their naval forces. But they are lagging behind, clearly, the army and the police. The

modernization programs, we're working very closely with them now, but there's still work that has to be done.

So in order to put a time line on it is difficult. But what I would tell you is we are working those issues.

REP8: (Inaudible.) -- the work (inaudible) have done (inaudible). What do you think is the best-case scenario (inaudible)?

GEN. ODIERNO: Well, I mean, I would just say I think -- Again, what I would like to see is a continued improvement in the security on the ground, a continued improvement in the capacity of the Government of Iraq to deliver services to the people in order to -- and then -- in order to continue to grow as a government serving the people. I would like to see successful provincial elections where provincial elections are held, and I think that's something the people are looking forward to and they think are necessary. And then next year we'd move into the national elections.

And so I think those are kind of the milestones that we're looking through right now.

In terms of, you know, I'm not going to get into too many negative scenarios, but the bottom line is it's about resolving some of the issues we

still have. Article 140 is one, and we want to see those resolved. And we want to, you know, continue to work those issues, and we want to see them worked in a peaceful way. What changed in 2007 and 2008 is we solved problems through diplomatic means, through conversation, through discussion. And we don't want to see that changed. And I -- there's nothing to say that that will. But it's important that those negotiations occur, and political discussions occur within the Government of Iraq, within the different groups within Iraq. I think that's extremely important.

REP9: This is Mike Todd (ph) from BBC. What would you say the differences were between you and General Petraeus, the way you conduct your job (inaudible)?

GEN. ODIERNO: Well, I mean I think, you know, of course, every commander's different; nobody's exactly the same. But I think philosophically we're, we're fairly close; I mean, I think philosophically we understand what, what is very important, and that is, first, we've got to protect, protect the population. We want the Iraqi Security Forces to take over the ability to protect the population. We want to make sure that, that al Qaida is not able to -- although they're still very dangerous, they're not able to regenerate. We want to make sure that, that militias -- The Iraqis have done tremendous work in reducing the influence of militias. We want to make sure that does not return. So -- I mean, those things do not change.

Again, I think the time is changing a little bit. You know, we're seeing Iraqis -- Iraq is becoming a more sovereign nation. Iraq is going to take on more of the responsibility. And it's -- it's my job to make sure that we're able to do that in a very smooth way where we don't fall back.

And so I think it's not so much that we view things differently; I think the environment has changed and will continue to adjust and change over the next several months as, again, this, this work in Iraq continues to evolve.

REP10: (Inaudible.)

GEN. ODIERNO: Well, I think some time I -- What I hope to see is some time here over the next, you know, year or beyond, we see a change where it is an adjustment from a military lead to a political/diplomatic/economic lead strategy. And that would coincide with a reduction of U.S. presence, Coalition presence here and Iraqi Security Forces taking on more of the presence. And again, I think that's part of the evolutionary sec- -- progress that we, we hope to have here in Iraq.

REP11: This is the last question, sorry General. (Inaudible) General, how do your priorities differ from the last time you were here (inaudible) security (inaudible)?

GEN. ODIERNO: Yeah. Well, again, I mean -- when I got here in December of '06 as the Corps Commander, you know, the Iraqi civilian death toll was spiraling out of control and there was clearly sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shia. And the problem was how are we going to stop that.

So in 2007 in the begin- -- and 2008, beginning of 2008 when I was the Corps Commander, our focus was on protecting the population, providing security so the rest of the government could grow and build capacity.

So what we want to do now is we want to maintain that security. We want to continue to have the Iraqis take over more and more responsibility for that security as we continue to build the capacity inside the country so they'll be able to stand on their own as soon as possible.

Thank you very much. It is -- It is good to be back here in Iraq. I look forward to seeing you many times in the future. So thank you.

(Recording stops.)