

**ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

**GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS, COMMANDER MULTI-NATIONAL FORCE-IRAQ**

**DATE:**

**4 SEPTEMBER 2008**

**TRANSCRIBED BY:**

**SOS INTERNATIONAL, LTD.**

**PARTICIPANTS:**

**GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS**

**REPORTER:**

**REPORTERS 1-11**

**REP1 = REPORTER 1**

**PH = PHONETIC**

GEN. PETRAEUS:

Well, again, As-Salamu 'Alaykum, masa' al-kheir, good afternoon to all of you, and shukran jaziilan for joining us for today's roundtable.

As I approach the end of my third tour here in Iraq, I'm pleased to provide an update on the significant progress that Iraqi and Coalition Forces and leaders have achieved in the last 19 months. Nineteen months ago, as you will recall, as the surge of the U.S. forces began, Iraq was on the verge of a civil war. Ethno-sectarian violence was spinning out of control, and some believed that the situation was irretrievable. Since then we have witnessed dramatic progress. Attacks have fallen from a horrific high of 180 per day in June of 2007, to about 25 per day in recent weeks. Coalition and Iraqi forces have achieved significant improvements in the security situation. Having said that, much work remains to be done. We are still concerned about al Qaida in Iraq, which is largely on the run and losing its sanctuaries, but which remains lethal and dangerous. And though criminal militias and special groups have been marginalized, they too still present a threat to stability and security in Iraq.

Despite these challenges, though, the progress has been heartening. Normalcy is returning to Iraq. This progress has been achieved even as Coalition Forces have drawn down. As you know, we have withdrawn without replacement five U.S. Army brigade combat teams of about 3,500 soldiers each, two marine battalions of about 1200 marines, and a marine expeditionary unit of about 2200 marines. In

addition, the Georgian brigade and the Australian battle group have redeployed recently, and the Polish contingent is set to do so shortly as well. In addition, in the past nine months or so, we have reduced our holding of Iraqi detainees by about 6,500.

Now, a major factor behind the improvements in security, even as Coalition Forces have drawn down, has been the growth of the Iraqi Security Forces. Whereas the U.S. surge was around 30,000 soldiers, the Iraqi surge was 135,000 and is still counting, still increasing. The Iraqi Security Forces have grown in capability as well as in size, and they are increasingly leading in major operations.

The improvement in the security situation has allowed significant improvements in other areas as well. It has given political leadership the breathing space to move forward on a number of economic, political and diplomatic initiatives, although in each of these areas, again, clearly there is more work to be done. As the Iraqi Security Forces continue to grow, it is progress in other areas that will help solidify the important gains of the past year.

And now I'd be happy to take your questions. Yeah, right here.

REP1: (Speaking in Arabic.)

GEN. PETRAEUS: I'm sorry. Wait one second.

INT: He needs to speak up.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Okay. Go ahead

REP1: (Speaking in Arabic.)

INT: Sir, you need to give your evaluation to the situation of Iraq to President George Bush at the end of this month; how do you describe the current situation in Iraq as far as going to advise to decrease the number of the U.S. forces?

Also, could you give your estimation about the -- what the SOFA looks like and what's going to depend on this agreement?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, first of all, on the current situation, let me just say that again as I mentioned in my opening statement, it is much improved. Again, we've gone from a situation in, say, December of 2006 where there were 50 to 55 dead bodies every 24 hours, just from sectarian violence in Baghdad, to a situation in which there are very few, if any at all, again, dead bodies in Baghdad from sectarian violence on a daily basis. The number of attacks, as I mentioned, has gone down from 180 per day at the height in June of 2007, to about 25 per day in recent weeks.

So the situation has been improved. And that improvement has been sustained despite the reductions of Coalition Forces that I mentioned which have been substantial. The five army brigade combat teams was one quarter of our ground maneuver brigade combat teams. I have already been conducting the assessment and discussing the recommendations for future reductions. There will be future reductions, the exact size of those is still to be determined, and the timing of those reductions as well. But that dialogue has been ongoing with my chain of command, the acting Central Command commander, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense, and I think there may be a decision in a week or two or so, depending on how the situation evolves.

With respect to the SOFA, as you probably know, the lead U.S. negotiators returned to the United States about a week ago. They took with them a handful of issues on which there has not yet been mutually agreed language, and we're hopeful that they can achieve language, achieve a resolution to those issues that, that were still outstanding when they went back to the United States. Hopefully in the next week or so they'll return and can resolve the handful of remaining issues with the Iraqi negotiators and then eventually with Iraq's senior leaders. Yeah.

REP2:

(Speaking in Arabic.)

INT:

Ahmed Fatha (ph) from Radio Sawa. We congratulate you for your leadership in Iraq while you were here until now -- from when you arrived until now. As far as your new -- you're now having your new -- being put in your new position. I hope that you will also continue to care about Iraq while you're in your new job.

My question is about Anbar. I know Anbar, Anbar was transferred very, very recently and it was a center for al Qaida. We -- There is a lot of fear that AQI will return to this province after it's been turned over to the Iraqi Security Forces. Do you have any of these fears, or are you very comfortable with, with the transfer? Thank you.

GEN. PETRAEUS:

Well, first of all, shukran jaziilan for your comments, but let me just point out that the, the achievements of the past year and a half have been completely a team effort. This has always been about team work and a joint effort between Iraqi and Coalition Forces, between Coalition military and Coalition diplomats and Iraqi leaders, between forces at the district and province level working with local officials and all the way up. So this has very much been a result of everyone contributing military forces, police forces, the citizens who had the courage to stand up and to reject al Qaida and other extremists, and also to, to say "no more" to militias and the special groups and the problems that they were causing in the streets of their neighborhoods.

So this is, this progress, this -- Your comments, I accept only on behalf of everyone who has contributed and, again, want to be sure that everyone does understand that it has been a very comprehensive effort requiring the sacrifice, courage, and determination of everyone in Iraq, including the Shab al-Iraqi.

And I will indeed always care about Iraq and the Iraqis. As I have said before, Iraq and the Iraqis will be on my mind and in my heart long after I leave Iraq for my new position, in which I will still be responsible for Iraq, but now will also take on responsibility for Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Levant and the Gulf states and so forth. So we will add, as we say, a few more rocks to the rucksack that I am privileged to carry.

With respect to Anbar Province, there are concerns about Anbar Province. We know that al Qaida is going to try to come back -- is trying to come back. You know of the attack in Karma -- in Garma -- a couple of months ago in which a number of sheiks and some Coalition leaders were killed. But the level of violence in Anbar is very dramatically reduced. It used to be the most violent province in Iraq, or among the most violent, and of course now it is among the most peaceful, with typically, only a couple of attacks a day, if any.

But again, al Qaida will try to come back. It had roots, very significant roots in Fallujah, in Ramadi and other cities in the

Euphrates River Valley in the past. It was on the route that was used by foreign fighters to come in to Iraq from Syria. We used to talk about it by al Qa'im and Hussaiba, we used to talk about the Euphrates River Valley as being a dagger pointed at the heart of Baghdad because it was the route along which, again, these foreign fighters traveled to come to Iraq's capital, and in some cases, tragically, to blow themselves and innocent Iraqi civilians up.

So again, we need to be very careful about Anbar Province, but we participated in the provincial Iraqi control ceremony a few days ago with confidence because of the significant growth in capability and capacity of the Shurta (ph) and the Jaish al-Iraqi in Anbar Province, which is particularly noteworthy because several of the brigades that are normally based in Anbar Province are actually serving elsewhere in Iraq. In fact, it was those brigades that deployed to Basrah and helped to do a very good job there. They subsequently operated in Maysan Province and more recently have operated in Baghdad and in Diyala Province.

Additionally, we have reduced our forces in Anbar Province from 14 maneuver battalions to six maneuver battalions. And there's the chance of perhaps an additional reduction over the course of the next months. And again, that's not something that we would do if we did not have a degree of confidence, again, that Iraqi forces can continue to maintain the security situation that exists there. We do, of course,

need help from the political leaders in Anbar, and we would ask -- we all know that this is an election year in Iraq as well as in the United States, and we hope that the various candidates for office there can compete with one another politically in a way that certainly never evolves into a security challenge or into violence.

Yeah.

REP3: (Speaking in Arabic.)

INT: Hussein Ali Dawad (ph). He's from the Haya (ph) newspaper.

The security situation in Iraq has improved and everybody testifies to this. And I'm sure, sir, that you would agree that the Awakening forces had a very big role in this improvement. But we have seen there's been a revenge, there's been a revenge campaign against either, either government or nongovernment forces going against them. This is a project that has not been completed. Does the American army have a plan to contain this issue before they're done here? And also, is there a fear that if this is not resolved, this issue is not -- if this issue is not resolved, these Awakening members will probably turn into insurgents and go against the government again. Is there a solution before the U.S. withdraws?

GEN. PETRAEUS:

Well, I think, again, all of us, and I would include Iraqi leaders very much in this, recognize the contribution that was made by the Safwa, by the political awakening that also produced the Abna al-Iraq, the Sons of Iraq, what we used to call the Concerned Local Citizens, that have helped to keep areas clear of al Qaida, of extremists, of militia and special groups once those areas have been cleared. And I think that everyone recognizes that it is far better for Iraq to have these individuals be part of the solution in Iraq, rather than to return to being part of the problem. Because again, we should be honest. Some of these were resistance, insurgents, criminals, what have you. But the way you resolve situations like that which existed in Iraq is by reconciling with as many as you can and then isolating the irreconcilables, identifying the true extremists and enemies, and irreconcilables who, in the end, then, there is no alternative but to kill, capture or run them off.

So it was a positive factor that individuals who, again, perhaps used to shoot at us or at Iraqi Security Forces, decided to reject al Qaida and extremism, and to participate in the New Iraq, to contribute to the New Iraq, and again, as I said, rather than continuing to be part of the security problem in Iraq.

Iraq's leaders do recognize this, despite what one occasionally hears from some individuals -- I have just met with Prime Minister Maliki just before coming here, and I mentioned that I was going to come and

meet with each of you and that I wanted to be able to take to you an assurance from him that I've received before, a commitment that he is going to do all that he can to look after them, to honor them, to transition some of them to the Iraqi Security Forces -- a number of them have been transitioned -- to provide other jobs for some of the others, to provide job training for those that have none, literacy programs in some cases, and grants or loans for those that want to start businesses and so forth. And all of these programs actually, these initiatives, do in fact exist in very small numbers throughout Iraq, and the Coalition Forces, the Koadata Sadiq (ph), are working with MOLSA, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and other ministries to pro- -- to try to provide, to develop alternatives for the Abna al-Iraq that can, again, recognize their contribution to the improvements in the security situation. And again, as I said, I had that commitment most recently just an hour ago from Sayed Rais Al Izera (ph), so.

Yup. Right there

REP4: As-Salamu 'alaykum. (Speaking in Arabic.)

INT: Peace be upon you.

GEN. PETRAEUS 'Alaykum e-salam.

INT: He's from the (inaudible) News Agency.

News has been contradicting from Iraqi sources about the results of the discussions for the long-term security agreements. People are -- Some people are saying that it's -- it's moving forward; some said they moved back, and some said it's back to the first square, zero.

I would like to know exactly what are the problem issues between the discussions -- or the negotiators, number of forces or, or are there any issues that actually touched or infringe upon Iraqi sovereignty?

GEN. PETRAEUS:

Well, first of all, I can assure you that there will not be a SOFA that infringes on Iraqi sovereignty. Frankly, a number of us, of course, have actually applauded the increased manifestations, representations, of Iraqi sovereignty. And at times, senior Iraqi leaders have undertaken difficult decisions, not in all cases decisions that we might have recommended, but still it is Iraqi leaders taking difficult decisions, and that should be welcome. At times there have been Iraqi decisions that result in reduced activities of Coalition Forces or what have you. That's what we have wanted to do. That should be -- So when you see discussions, for example, about, say, Coalition Forces removing combat forces from cities, which is one of the points of discussion, it's really quite a sign of progress that Iraqi leaders should be asking for that. Because 18 months ago, when, again, there were 55 dead bodies every 24 hours in Baghdad streets, everybody wanted Coalition Forces in the streets of Iraqi cities. The fact is actually that

we are actually already out of the cities in probably 13 or so of Iraq's provinces. There are some provinces, at least one province I know of, in which we have no forces whatsoever, Muthanna Province. There are others, southern provinces, in which we have only a transition team, an advisor team, provincial reconstruction team, USAID elements, reconstruction governance support, perhaps some advisors, and so forth. And then there are certainly, say, four or perhaps five -- they would be Baghdad, Diyala, Sala ad Din, Ninawa, and perhaps Ta'mim or At-Tim (ph), in which there are still Coalition Forces that are actively engaged in combat operations, albeit in very much in partnership in all cases and in many cases following Iraqi forces who are in the lead. But again, that's one of the topics, certainly. And that will, I think that's very, very -- that certainly can be resolved.

The, the issue that has been challenging, of course, is is the issue of jurisdiction over Coalition Forces in their various forms. Again, I think there can be a formula reached that will be mutually agreeable on that. But I will defer on that, frankly, to the diplomats and to the lawyers and hide behind the fact that I am a soldier and not a diplomat in this case. But again, I think it's really quite a sign of progress that Iraqi leaders can be envisioning the situations that are starting to take shape in the SOFA -- or have really been -- taken shape in the SOFA -- and that they reflect, again, quite a significant improvement in the security situation and also in the development and the capability and capacity of the government of Iraq and its ministries. You know,

people occasionally say to me, Well, but they haven't taken advantage of the security progress. Well, look at the laws. Iraq had a pretty good year with laws. Yes, there are still some very difficult issues out there, without question. But Iraq on one single day passed a budget law which distributes the oil revenue equitably to all Iraqis, an amnesty bill, and a provincial powers law -- just in one day. Name any other -- Name any other Coalition country that had that kind of significant legislation passed in one day, a single day, and I'll buy a glass of chai for that person. But again, also they passed a pensions law, the accountability and justice law, a flag law, the flag flies -- So again, there's really been quite a bit of progress. The Sunni contingent has returned to government and been approved by the Council of Representatives. Other ministries that were empty have been filled. Does there need to be more progress? Absolutely. And all Iraqi leaders recognize that. And there are very difficult issues out there, certainly, the internally disputed boundaries issues, Article 140, Kirkuk and so forth, provincial elections law. Although there is absolute commitment by Iraq's senior leaders as you have heard, that there will be commitments -- there will be elections no later than 22 December because the terms of the provincial councils run out at the end of the year, there have been to be elections. And even if, again, they have to use an amended former law.

So again, I see Iraqi leaders that are having good arguments at times, good discussions. This is politics. It's siyasat, it's -- and it is healthy

to see that kind of debate as long as, of course, it doesn't ever erupt into, into some form of violence or a challenge to the security situation. So occasionally it's important that, you know, people step back for a bit on some of the very difficult issues; that's been the case on the provincial elections law. We'll see as the Council of Representatives returns, how Iraqi leaders are able to address these, again, admittedly difficult issues, and there are a number of them. But it's a new democracy. It is a new country in an ancient land. And it has been heartening, actually, to see the development over the course of the last year. I don't know if all of you even know, but there's not only been the groundbreaking for a new hotel in the International Zone, but the license for a hotel outside the Green Zone, for a shopping center outside the Green Zone, for a commerce center. I'm told there's discussions for a, an amusement park, a large amusement park, a Disneyworld kind of amusement park but with an Arabic theme, I'm sure, Iraqi-themed, somewhere south of Baghdad. There's a new airport in Najaf that has been opened. There is substantial investment that has gone on. The Serafiyah Bridge was rebuilt by Iraqis, Iraqi design, construction, and oversight. Again, is there more to be done? Absolutely. But it has been very heartening for someone who has been here since the beginning, since late February -- or late March of 2003, to see what has been accomplished over the course of the last year in particular in terms of governance, economics, and diplomacy as well.

Who's next? Yeah. Right there. Did you ask already?

REP5: No.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Okay. Go ahead

REP5: (Speaking in Arabic.)

INT: From the paper of el Mada (ph). Do you still suffer from the Iranian influence or interference on the borders of Iran/Iraq borders? The -- A lot of media is saying that there is a large operation for the joint forces in Shatt el-Arab. Thank you.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, let me start by saying that I think that everyone would agree that it would be desirable for Iraq to establish a constructive relationship with all of its neighbors, and that includes its neighbor to the east, Iran. Iraq already has a very strong commercial relationship with Iran, it imports quite a few goods and services, gets some electricity, some fuel products. And it gets a lot of religious tourists for Najaf and Karbala, and for those who haven't seen Najaf and Karbala lately, they are booming. They are -- the investment, because of religious tourism, is enormous. That's why the airfield was established in Najaf.

So again, it would be -- it's very much desirable for there to be this constructive relationship. But as one of your senior ministers observed during the visit of the Iranian president, Iraq welcomes its Iranian religious tourists, but not Iranian improvised explosive devices, rockets, and individuals trained in Iran who then cause problems on the streets of Iraq and in the past were responsible for some horrific violence. I think right now, frankly, there's a wait-and-see attitude. Iraq's most senior leaders expressed their concerns to Iran's most senior leaders following the resolution of the militia violence, displayed to them many examples of Iranian weapons and Iranian-provided weaponry, and also of the training and funding and directing of so-called special groups and militia members. That just clicked, by the way (an aside). Okay. And the -- there were assurances, there were promises made by Iran's most senior leaders, that that activity would stop. And I think everyone has had a wait-and-see attitude since then to see if the special group leaders will return. It has been -- I think you can only describe as positive that the militia are being transformed into a social services organization, returning to the roots of that movement, in a sense honoring the original spirit of the Martyr Sadr, which was a focus on the poor and most downtrodden in Iraqi society.

So again, I think what needs to be seen is actions and whether there is restraint and, and, and growth in legitimate, in the legitimate

relationship, or if that is undermined by more lethal activity that resumes and would be very disturbing and disappointing.

Yes

REP6: (Speaking in Arabic.)

INT: Ali Asiv (ph) from the Hurrah channel. Sir, history is going to register for you a success in Iraq during this phase for decreasing sectarian violence and your participation in this.

I have two questions. One has to do with the security, the secure, the concrete barriers that you had used in Baghdad -- I'm not saying in Diyala and Mosul. As far as the SOFA, sir, the Iraqi side is not happy because they don't want to take the immunity off the soldiers, U.S. soldiers. As they said, this actually is against the Iraqi sovereignty, and that you cannot sign anything that will affect Iraq's sovereignty. This is -- This is contradictory.

Also the Prime Minister has said that the American force will be pulled out of Iraq in 2011. Do you agree to this timetable or do you have a different opinion? Thank you.

GEN. PETRAEUS: What, what did you say about concrete barriers that you --

INT: Oh, he said he --

GEN. PETRAEUS: -- that you did not see them in Mosul?

REP6: (Very faint.) Right.

INT: I think he said "did not see them." I didn't hear that.

REP6: (Very faint.) (Inaudible) in Baghdad.

INT: They put them in Baghdad; he doesn't see them in Mosul, in Diyala.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Oh, no, they're in Mosul. Annamoslawi (ph). They are in Mosul. Now, ani Iraqi, ana Baghdadi (ph), but --

REP6: The districts?

GEN. PETRAEUS: Oh, no, there's great use of barriers in Mosul as well. There's, there's pretty substantial use up there. It's still continuing very much. The operation in Mosul really began only intensively about probably four months or so ago, four or five months ago. And the level of violence in Mosul has in fact been reduced by about a half. But it is still at an unacceptable level. And as we have seen tragically, horrifically, al Qaida and extremists still demonstrate a willingness to carry out barbaric suicide attacks that target Iraqi civilians, to try to, to spark a

resumption of ethno-sectarian violence, and also to intimidate Iraqi Security Forces and Iraqi civilians. But there has been employment of concrete barriers -- not quite to the same level, certainly, because the situation is different in those areas. The problem in Baghdad literally was that there were fault lines across which the militia and al Qaida were fighting, and literally evicting, displacing -- sometimes killing -- families and pushing them out. And both sides going against the other. And so the use of the barriers allowed the ability to control the population into certain neighborhoods. And I think that you'll find actually that after some early emotion, many Baghdadis like their concrete barriers. You know, in the United States we call these areas "gated communities." Now, we don't use concrete, it's a little more attractive, they're fences -- but people pay enormous amounts of money in the United States to live in a community that has a security guard outside it, and a fence around it because it just increases their sense of, of security, I guess. It's usually in all the wealthy neighborhoods, by the way. Not where I live, but again, the rich people. Baghdadis seem to like living like rich Americans in some respects. I was in -- walking around in Daura the other day, and the wall there had helped to provide, again, a significant degree of control over access into that neighborhood, which used to have quite a substantial al Qaida presence in it. And the same is certainly true of a number of other areas, like in Ghazaliyah, Ameriyah, Adamiyah, a number in the Rashid district and elsewhere -- and in lower Sadr City during the height of the militia violence. So -- But there is

employment of barriers again, just not to the same level. We just don't have the same level of forces there either. And I think over time that there will be a requirement for some additional forces in Mosul because it is clear that that is a location that al Qaida is, is very much resisting being completely thrown out of, and so they're, they're desperately trying to retain some foothold, if you will, or at least some locations there; also because of the sheer amount of money that they are able to generate by extorting funds from the cement business, the cell phone business, the real estate business, the financial business, and then a variety of different activities that are all in some way or other connected to the northern oil industry.

With respect to the issue of legal jurisdiction, again, my hope, obviously, is that there can be mutually agreeable language between the government of Iraq and the government of the United States. That's what, again, the U.S. negotiators are trying to develop in Washington, and I think they're going to return here shortly. So we'll see how that goes along and see what the diplomats can come up with in that regard.

Yeah.

REP7:

(Speaking in Arabic.)

INT:

(Inaudible) from the Watan Kuwaiti, Watan Newspaper. My question is very specific: There is a, an issue or topic with the arming of the Iraqi -- the Iraqi forces with their equipment and the -- as far as this training and providing equipment to do with the American army's withdrawing. If you're saying that the American army's going to withdraw in 2011, do you think the training and the weaponing (sic) of the Iraqi force is going to be enough at this time?

The next question is al Qaida and their renewed or creative ways of having new methods, especially using female suicide bombers, and they're using this some small areas. How can the regular forces go after such, like, unregular methods of, of terrorist activity?

GEN. PETRAEUS:

First of all, with respect to the weaponry issue, increasingly, Iraqi forces have been, being "up-gunned," if you will, to use our term. They've been increasingly getting heavier weaponry, more armored vehicles and so forth. Just one small example is that they will shortly receive the, the 2,000th up-armored humvee. You know the humvees that we have with all the armor on them and the heavy machine gun, they will have received 2,000 of those just in about the last six months or so. And these are refurbished humvees that we have transferred to the Iraqi Security Forces. That's in addition to the mechanized division they now have, the wheeled armored vehicle, armored security vehicle brigade and so forth and so on. So gradually they have been introducing -- there are mortars coming into their system

now, and they are looking now at more modern tanks, attack helicopters. They are up to about 80 or so aircraft now, and again and climbing higher, and beginning again to look at more substantial, more capable fixed-wing aircraft. They already have three C-130s as an example. They want, I think six more.

So again, that process is all moving along. It is a process that will take, not months, but years; but that's how, how long it typically takes, again, to, in a sense, modernize a large, what is a -- quite a substantial army already at this point. And we do see, again, the Iraqi army increasingly in the lead. We assess, for example, that there are over 110 Iraqi army combat battalions -- just combat battalions, in the army alone, not including now, the Iraqi National Police nor the Emergency Response Unit. But just the Iraqi army, over 110 army combat battalions that are in the lead, on the ground, that are actually leading our forces instead of in partnership or us leading them. Increasingly in, especially in again the provinces that have gone to Iraqi control, the detention operations are almost exclusively, really, carried out by Iraqi forces, even though there's still a U.N. Security Council provision that we could use, but in almost all cases, the operations are carried out by Iraqi forces with arrest warrants. So we have -- they've already made that transition in many of Iraq's provinces to a more legal -- legalistic basis for detention than the imminent security threat basis that is still used in some provinces where the extremist threat

remains, provided by the -- that -- being provided by the U.N. Security Council resolution.

With respect to the female suicide bomber challenge: That is a significant one. There's no question about it. And the only way to reduce that is by taking a very comprehensive approach. You must work on the network; you must work on the reasons that women might be brainwashed into allowing someone to strap explosives to her body and then go out and blow herself up. So it's about the, the individuals that work on their mind; it's about the organizers, these vicious leaders of al Qaida. You know, al Qaida in Iraq, we think that it's brand, it's -- As you talk about an organization, its brand is discredited completely because it has become associated with three labels: A label of indiscriminate violence, a label of oppressive practices, and a label of extremist ideology. And as the Iraqi people came to see al Qaida for what it really was, and that it was not some kind of heroic resistance to enable them to express their disappointment at how things had evolved since 2003, as that was clearer and clearer and clearer, particularly, of course in the Sunni Arab community of Iraq, that al Qaida has been rejected. And we think, again, has a very damaged brand. A discredited brand. The attempt to reinvent themselves as the Islamic State of Iraq hasn't fooled anyone. It's just al Qaida in a new label. And frankly, as you all have seen reported, there are discussions that we have received intelligence on that seem to indicate an awareness by Iraq's senior -- or by al Qaida's senior leadership, that

Iraq is not a hospitable place for al Qaida and that perhaps some of the resources that were going to be devoted to al Qaida would be better used, sent elsewhere.

With respect, again, to female suicide bombers, Iraqi leaders have taken steps as well. They have recruited women for the police in a number of provinces so that they can search women coming through checkpoints. This did work quite effectively in the recent Karbala celebration. And I think that was a very good example of how much Iraqi Security Forces have evolved. The Karbala operation, the security operation for the most recent religious celebration in Karbala was carried out by over 40,000 Iraqi Security Forces members, and it included women searching at checkpoints, a very, very elaborate, multiple rings of security operation and plan, numerous watch towers, cameras -- again, different technical devices and so forth. And with a very few exceptions, it was carried out very, very successfully, as you know. So again, it takes a very comprehensive approach to try and to reduce the capability and eventually eliminate the capability of these networks, of these organizers, these extremist leaders to, to brainwash a woman into doing what some of them have done; and then also to take away the explosives, and this is why it's been very important to reduce the number of weapons caches that are out there and so forth.

In fact, I might -- I probably should show you a few --

Show all the slides.

Let me just show you a couple of slides that indicate the progress in Iraq. And of course I apologize because we go from left to right on our slides rather than from right to left. But this is January of 2004 and this is August 2008. And what this shows is the level of security incidents. It's all -- all kinds of incidents; it includes indirect fire, rockets, mortars; direct fire; improvised explosive devices, and attacks against infrastructure. And as you can see, in the wake of the Samarra Mosque bombing right here in February 2006, the level of violence escalated horrifically. As the sectarian violence spiraled out of control, of course the decision was made to bring in additional U.S. forces and to dramatically increase the size of the Iraqi Security Forces. The level went up even higher as we fought al Qaida and went into its sanctuaries and safe havens, in places like Ramadi and Baquba and Daura, Amariyah, Ghazaliyah, Mansour, Adhamiya, Arab Jabour, Madain, Salman Pak and so forth, the Triangle of Death and the "fiyahs," Latafiyah, Lutifiya, Yusufiyah and so forth. And over time we started driving down the level of violence as we took away the safe havens from al Qaida. There was a little bit of an increase during Ramadan, as there always was -- This yellow box is Ramadan, same thing here, same thing here, same thing here. We're hoping not this year -- touch wood -- the militia violence in Karbala led to a ceasefire as you'll recall, because the reputation of the militia was seriously damaged by that violence in August of 2007, and that

resulted in another reduction. And then gradually the level came down as we went into other areas in which al Qaida was located in the southern belts, the throat of Baghdad, and then in other areas north of Baghdad, in Mosul, started the operation up there. Then there was the militia violence associated with the operations in Basrah and Sadr City, and then Maysan Province. A little bit of an increase during the Diyala operation, and then most recently, as you can see, levels of incidents for about two months now that -- or three months, that have been the lowest since early 2004. So again, a very significant reduction from the period that was the height of the sectarian violence.

Next slide.

Now, our primary mission, our focus, has been to secure the population. And so therefore we tried to measure civilian deaths. This top number here is all Iraqi data plus our data; this is just our confirmed reports from our soldiers only, and then this again includes the Iraqi data as well. And as you can see, a very, very dramatic reduction in violent civilian deaths. That's what these are, not natural deaths, but violent civilian death, to a level that still needs to go down farther, but in, in many respects is, per capita, similar to that in, in a number of other areas in the world.

Next.

Still too high for Iraq. I want to point out here, this is losses of life of Iraqi Security Forces. These are Coalition -- actually U.S. losses right here, and as you can see, the point here is that Iraqi losses have been many times U.S. losses. So it is absolutely unfair to say that Iraqi forces have been doing anything but fighting and dying for their country. Because they have been fighting and dying at a rate that is multiple times that of U.S. forces. As you can see right here, it's as much as six or eight times the losses of the U.S. forces. And Iraqis should know that they're sons and in some cases their daughters, in the case of the women of Iraq, the female police, are out there fighting for their country.

Next.

Now, particularly important has been the reduction in ethno-sectarian violence, especially the sectarian component of that violence; in other words, Sunni on Shia, Shia on Sunni. And if you look at -- These are maps of Baghdad city, right here, this is December of 2006, April 2007, September 2007, and July 2008. And then this shows the loss of life due to ethno-sectarian violence in all of Iraq, the top line, and then in Baghdad, the bottom line. And as you can see, Baghdad was the bulk of the loss of life due to sectarian violence. And what you can see is that in Baghdad in particular, the reduction is absolutely stunning. And that it is virtually less than, you know, the fingers on two hands in any given month now compared with that period what I

talked about in the winter of 2006, early 2007, when there were over 50 dead bodies every 24 hours in Baghdad just due to sectarian violence. Just absolutely horrific. So a dramatic reduction. I know you know that, but it is very significant.

And now, by the way, people are moving back to their homes in Baghdad. I got the latest data yesterday from our commanders, and as you know, we are, throughout the city, we are still in 77 additional locations in Baghdad that we were not in back at the start of the surge. Seventy-seven additional joint security stations, combat outposts and patrol bases. And they report and their Iraqi counterparts report, that there have been 50,000 families who have returned to their homes in Baghdad since December last year. That is, frankly, much more than I thought. I did not realize. I'd heard small numbers from different locations, but we've never added them all up, and added them up from December through August, and that is 50,000 families. Now, if you assume that a family is five family members, let's say, obviously that's 250,000 people that have returned to their homes. And in many cases it is Sunni or Shia returning to mixed neighbor- -- or formerly mixed neighborhoods. And that is very significant. And their neighbors want them back rather than the squatters who moved into those houses in most cases.

This is what I was going to show to begin with. This is weapons caches. And what this shows is from January 2004 to August 2008,

the number of weapons caches found each week, so each of these lines is one week -- and you can see that when we started moving into neighborhoods -- because remember, it was not just the additional forces at all that helped to achieve the additional security, it was the employment of those forces, and the focus on security of the population where -- and we explicitly, I instructed our soldiers that the only way to secure people is to live with them. You cannot secure the population of Amariyah from Camp Victory. You can't secure Daura from a large forward operating base on the edge of the city. You can only secure Daura in Daura. And the same is true throughout the city. And so as we began moving into neighborhoods in February of 2007, almost immediately the number of weapons caches went up because the citizens now reported to us where the weapons were in their neighborhoods; they wanted them out of their neighborhoods. They want the explosives to stop blowing up their houses. And then as we did each operation, you can see, for example, this was Ramadi, these were operations in -- I'm sorry. This is Ramadi right here, major operation, and then also operations in Anbar. There's operation in Baquba in here, and then various Baghdad neighborhoods. Again, the Arab Jabour and the southern belts of Baghdad. This was the operations in Basrah, Maysan and Sadr City during which enormous numbers of caches were turned up. And as you can see, in just 2008 so far -- this is just through August, the end of August -- we have found more weapons caches in 2008 already than we found all of last year; and we've found more in 2008 already than we found in all of

2005 and 2006 put together. Many more. And I think we may find, during the rest of this year, more than we found in all of the first three years in Iraq. So taking these weapons out of neighborhoods, out of the streets, out of the farm -- farmland and so forth, is very, very important indeed.

Yeah. Right here

REP8: (Speaking in Arabic.)

INT: Hadi Hassan (ph). He's from Aswat al-Iraq. My question is about the Ashraf camp that is Mujahdi Khalq's home, I guess. They're now transferring the security, the security situation from the American forces to the Iraqi forces. They're saying that they are being protected by the international law, also by -- there's a Law 1948, I think. These forces are -- What did the American forces do about transferring the security? They don't have any fear that this opera- -- that they -- transferring these forces is going to be harmful to these people or they're going to be harmed?

GEN. PETRAEUS: As you may know, the residents of Camp Ashraf, the Mujahedin-e Khalq, are in a legal status that is called "Protected Persons Status" by international law. And U.S. forces still are responsible for the security of them because of that status. We have, however, begun the process of transition of security to Iraqi Security Forces, who are now joining

us, they are jointly helping to secure Camp Ashraf. We were required by international law to request from the governor of Iraq assurances that the Mujahedin-e Khalq would continue to receive security and would be protected. We have recently received those assurances, and therefore began the process of, of planning the transition from Coalition Security Force security to security by Iraqi Security Forces. There will be additional steps required, again, to meet the requirements of international law. We have taken international organizations up there and also your Ministry of Human Rights and, I think, most recently that you heard the Prime Minister spokesman, Ali al-Dabbagh yesterday, I believe, or the day before, state that they will in fact be secured after the transition of that security to Iraqi Security Forces.

I'm sorry. Have you asked a question yet?

REP9: Yes.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Then she should get a question. Thank you. Sorry

REP10: (Speaking in Arabic.)

INT: Hota Ziyadi (ph), al-Malaf Press. First, I congratulate you for you new job. I would like you to thank everybody who works here in the CPIC for helping us with all of -- especially in coordination of media.

My question is about Ramadi. John Kelly in the west of Iraq and who had transferred the security, said if you continue the rebuilding in Anbar it's going to beat al Qaida. The -- We know that the American, Americans have given some very large projects, and where are these, where are these projects, where is that money?

Number two, what is the -- I mean, what are the American forces' stand as far as between the Islamic Party in Ramadi and all the Awakenings of Ramadi and the tension between them, what is your stand on that? Thank you.

GEN. PETRAEUS:

Well, first of all, I'll be sure to pass on your thanks to the members of the CPIC and we're very proud of, of what they do, and we would like to believe that we do practice the, what we talk about, which is the encouragement of a free press and tough questions like the one you've asked me about the Iraqi Islamic Party and the Safwa.

First of all, with respect to the rebuilding; interestingly, I received an update today from the commander of the Corps of Engineers element in Iraq, the Gulf Regional Division, and he is going to come in and brief you, in fact, on a number of their recent projects. I can tell you, for example, that ongoing this year alone, there are \$3 billion -- there's \$3 billion worth of projects that were either started, ongoing, or completed. So there is very, very significant construction going on. I

would point out that just in the Jamila area of Baghdad alone, I think we're up to six -- 60 or \$70 million in projects just since April, and now we've focused there because of the damage done by the fighting. But that gives you a sense of what has gone on. We even track swimming pools. I can tell you, in fact received an update today on Baghdad's swimming pools, and I congratulate the Ministry of -- I think it was Tourism that opened up the beach swimming pool on the other, other side of the river just down from Abu Nawas Street. We track water treatment plants, we track electrical production, we track oil production. And it's noteworthy that Iraq oil -- oil production in Iraq in the second quarter of this year was the highest, including pre-liberation, and so again, reflected progress in that arena. Although again, clearly there's much, much work to be done, especially when it comes to Karabah.

Now, with respect to Anbar Province, General Kelly is exactly right, that Anbar has reached a point where money has become the most important ammunition. And so it is vitally important that the reconstruction funding by the Iraqi government -- and they did provide additional funding, as you'll recall, an additional -- well over a hundred million dollars last year, and they just -- there was additional funding for Anbar in the \$22 billion supplemental budget that is another one of Iraq's legislative accomplishments just before they, the Council of Representatives, went into their shortened recess.

But I will have the Gulf Regional Division commander come in and brief you, and he can lay out the big, the big projects and actually can get into any detail that you want as well on a variety of others. But if you've walked through the city of Ramadi, I mean, just the very street that you're walking on, the museum, the provincial council, the museum, the women's center, the market refurbishment, schools -- again, it's just across the board in Ramadi that there has been funding for projects from the United States, but also, frankly, funding from the government of Iraq as well, in a fair amount. But again, we do very much believe that this is the time for rebuilding and revitalization and jobs that can persuade individuals that they don't need to raise money by crime or other means.

With respect to the, the good examples of democratic -- democracy in action in Anbar Province, it is our hope that all of the different political parties in Anbar can have a spirited series of debates and discussions, and that the areas in which they agree and don't agree can be clarified by these spirited debates similar to the debates that are ongoing in my own country, because it's an election year there too. And some of you may have seen speeches connected with the Democratic or Republican party conventions. And -- But it is also our hope that each will retain mutual respect for the other during the political process; and that once the election is done, then leaders are determined that all can then join together and work for the good of the Anbaris.

And I think that's just the last one I'll have to take. Right here.

REP11: (Speaking in Arabic.)

INT: Hidar Majid (ph) from al-Hurriya Radio. What do you think about the Sadr's -- Sadr's decision to freeze the army again? And this freezing is just like a temporary solution, like if you give someone an anesthetic, when they have the right conditions, they're going to start going back to their old self.

GEN. PETRAEUS: Well, we certainly welcome the continuation of the ceasefire, which our understanding is that it will be of infinite duration now, that it will not, not end. And the example of that, of course, is that the militia movement is being, in the process of being transformed into a social services organization. And as I mentioned earlier, I don't know how you can see that as anything but an encouraging and positive development. The, the people of Iraq, particularly the Baghdadis, the Basrawis and others, once the threat of al Qaida was reduced, came to see the militia as a mafia-like element. Again, organizations on their streets that were extorting shopkeepers for money in the Jamila Market, by the way, among others. Black market sales of oil that raised the price of fuel for Baghdadis. Kidnapped for ransom. Assassinated three -- two southern governors and three police chiefs. And again, were the cause of violence at one of the holiest of religious

celebrations in Karbala. And the reputation was, as you well know, very significantly damaged, of a movement that traces its roots to the spirit of the Martyr Sadr, who, as I mentioned earlier, and as you well know, focused on service to the poor and to the least advantaged of Iraqis.

So again, returning to that direction for a militia that had become rejected by the Iraqi people, again, is certainly a positive sign. It does remain to be seen what happens with the so-called special groups, or what used to be called the special groups, and whether organizations like Katab, Hizballah, or some of the others that may be emerging, will carry out violence in Iraq. But the Iraqi Security Forces are -- and their intelligence services are very focused on identifying the return of, of any groups like this and of their leaders and will bring them to justice if they resume violent activity as they were accustomed to carry out in the past. I don't think any Iraqi wants to see extrajudicial organizations armed the way the special groups were before, and under the direction of outside influences undertaking violent actions the way they did before.

And so, again, I think it's a positive development to see what is happening with the former militia, and we hope that that will, that will in truth turn into what it's designed to become.

Well, with that, let me just say shukran jaziilan to each of you. Each of you has also been part of the progress of the last 19 months because you have reported on it, you have had the courage to report, to sometimes write stories that were not welcomed by Coalition or Iraqi leaders, but that's the duty, the obligation actually, not just the job, but an actual responsibility of the press in a free country. We know, obviously, that certain of the press organizations have perhaps in a perspective of one or the other, but again, if you look at a newsstand in your, peculiarly the street that was rebuilt after it was blown up in fact, in Baghdad on the other side of the river, you can find all different viewpoints about Iraq and Iraqi politics and the other topics, and I think that that is a sign of enormous progress in itself as well. And happily, there are not as many headlines about the horrific attacks, although there will be more, and not -- there will not be a time in the near future where there will not not occasionally be, unfortunately, we fear, some of the sensational attacks associated with al Qaida in the past.

So thank you all very much. Shukran jaziilan.

[END]