

PRESS CONFERENCE

MAJOR GENERAL QASSIM ATTA, SPOKESMAN, OPERATION FARDH AL-QANOON; BRIGADIER GENERAL DAVID PERKINS, DIRECTOR FOR STRATEGIC EFFECTS, CJ9, MULTINATIONAL FORCE-IRAQ

DATE:

20 DECEMBER 2008

TRANSCRIBED BY:

SOS INTERNATIONAL

PARTICIPANTS:

MGEN QASSIM ATTA, BG DAVID PERKINS AND REPORTERS 1-8

(PH) = PHONETIC

INT = INTERPRETER

REPX = REPORTER 1-8

MGEN ATTA: (Speaks in Arabic.)

INT: (Joined in progress after apparent technical difficulty.) ...as to the increase of the Iraqi forces capabilities.

And second, the increase of the awareness of the Iraqi people and their cooperation with security forces, that actually help achieving a lot of successes and victories against the terrorist groups and the outlaws and return to civility to all areas in Baghdad.

Third, we killed a lot of leaders of those terrorist groups and arrest thousands of them and defused a lot IEDs, VBEDs and seize munitions and weapons and rockets and factories and confiscate a lot of vehicles that has no documentations and has no -- it has a fake plates. And I know at the conference we can't talk about all the details, but about the things that we achieved in 2008.

Number 4 is reopened bridges and roads that was closed because of security situation or there was -- the ones that was damaged or sabotaged and one of it is to open the Sarafiyah Bridge in Essalam (ph.) and Rasul (ph.) Bridge -- bridges -- and they were implemented by the people in Baghdad; and also the major roads and the -- that you see in front of you on our slides in the various

areas of Baghdad and Khark and Rusafa. And we also opened the entrances to Sadr City, and there were 14 major entrances. And we also working on getting more streets open in the upcoming year, insha'allah.

And Number 5 is the reopening of chancellories, the embassies and foreign and Arabic missions in Baghdad after providing security, full security to them by Ministry of Interior with coordination with the Baghdad Operation Command. And also in addition to having a lot of kings, presidents, ambassadors, ministers, coming to Baghdad from other countries during this year.

Also the production of -- the decree, the Prime Minister's decree that related to return of the displaced families to their homes and the, the evacuate the houses that was occupied by others; and the number of families that are returned to their families (sic) starting from the Fardh al-Qanoon plan in 14th of February of 2007, and so far to 19th of January -- of December, 23,000 of the displaced families has returned.

Number 7 is decree number -- Prime Minister's decree 118 that was in 2008 that by moving -- or receiving the Sons of Iraq files and return it to the Iraqi government and be under the control of

the Iraqi government, we received 51,135 volunteers, or Sons of Iraq, and we started paying them salaries by the Iraqi government continuously. And there was a mechanism put in place by the BOC and the Reconciliation Committee, and this mechanism has proven, and those plans have proven great success, and we didn't have any problems as far as this issue.

Number 8, the success of the security plans that was put by the Iraqi -- by Baghdad Operations Command and so many religious events and national events. The Imam al-Khadim ceremony, also the Shabani visit, also the plan that was put during Ramadan and -- month, and the feast after Ramadan, also the Hajj and also the plan that was put during al-Adha feast, and I think everyone has -- all the media has covered those celebrations and we've seen a lot of -- thousands of people coming and visiting -- Iraqi people visiting the shrines and the religious areas. And also the recreation parks that was put by the Iraqi Amanat, Baghdad Amanat and the BOC as well. As a result of the security improvements and going back to normalcy, the year, during the year of 2008, so the year of 2009 is going to have great transitions as far as security, political, economical and Iraqi security. Baghdad Command has put a lot of plans in 2009.

The first of January is -- 2009 is going to implement the agreement, the security agreement, and that's going to start by turning the security -- the control of the IZ to the Iraqi Frontier Coalition Forces to the Iraqi -- or the Multinational Force to the Iraqi government in a gradual process according to mechanisms that was put or agreed upon by both sides, American and Iraqi sides, and this ensures or provides -- providing full security to the International Zone and to avoid any violations, security violations in the future.

And the other point is to do the provincial elections in January 31st, 2009, and the other point is to -- the withdrawal of the foreign forces from the inside of the cities to the outskirts of the cities in June of 2009, and that's according to what's been said during -- the agreements, an agreement, the security agreement, and also put -- doing the or implementing the referendum, public referendum on July of 2009 on the withdrawal of the Coalition Forces, and also doing the census, or implementing the census in various areas of entire Iraq and also doing the elections for the parliament. I think these are very important cases, and we have put plans by the supervision of the Prime Minister, the chief and command -- the Commander-in-Chief and hopefully we're going to achieve a lot of success and victories as far as implementing those plans. And of

course this is going to depend on the cooperation of the Iraqi people with the Iraqi Security Forces to repair -- to prepare the right atmosphere to achieve those accomplishments.

The year of 2009 is going to witness a lot more coordination between Baghdad Amanat and the BOC and also the traffic police to reopen all the closed roads and streets and to also lift or remove all the concrete barriers or security barriers, and these are positive signs that indicate -- or indicators that the life is going back to normalcy and the security is improvement in Baghdad and other provinces.

Throughout what we have mentioned, the achievements, brief achievements that we just mentioned, 2008 is considered -- the year of 2008 is considered one of the best years that we've had so far after the fall of the former regime in 2003; as far as security-wise, economical-wise and political-wise, this year witnessed reduction of terrorist actions, more than 86 percent of reduction in terrorist actions. Also the increase of the Iraqi Security Forces capabilities that we have put 10 activities for Iraqi Security Forces against one activity to the Iraqi -- to the terrorist groups. So this is a great achievement.

Finally we want to commend the great efforts that the Iraqi Security Forces has done so far in our MOI/MOD and national police and national forces in addition to the great efforts that was done by the services and the services departments and the great coordination between the governments, institutes -- and various governments' institutes and of course the coordination with the Multinational Force in addition to the support of the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief and the commander of the armed forces that have helped us to reach to those good results. And God help us, and thank you for listening, and now I defer to General Perkins to give his updates or his brief from the Multinational Force. Thank you very much.

BG PERKINS:

Thank you, General. As-Salamu 'Alaykum, and good afternoon. On behalf of Multinational Force-Iraq, I'd like to thank you for being with us here today. As General Qassim said, we've had a very tremendously eventful year during 2008. And we have much to be thankful for as we celebrate during our holiday season. I'm glad to join with you, General Qassim, today and discuss what we have to look to forward to into 2009 as well.

The improved security conditions throughout the country have enabled so many good things for the people of Iraq, most

importantly, a return to normal, daily activities that allows for growth, hope, and opportunity for the future. This improvement has led to the growth of Iraqi institutions and the democratic processes for the Government of Iraq. One year ago the country experienced an average of nearly 180 attacks a day; last week that number was down to an average of ten a day. This is a dramatic improvement of safety throughout the country. Murder rates are also now, for the first time, below pre-war levels. The rates are at .9 per 100,000 people in November of this year, and that is lower than many countries throughout the world.

Another significant achievement this year is the passing and ratification of the Strategic Framework Agreement and the Security Agreement. The strategic partnership of our two nations has led to a truly historic movement -- moment -- for the Iraqi people and the Government of Iraq and have enabled the successes that we've just discussed. These agreements signal Iraq's emergence from United Nations Security Council oversight and a return to Iraq's rightful place within the international community. The process of the agreement's negotiation and the spirited public debate that followed are a testament to the promise of Iraq's democracy and the perseverance of the Iraqi people. This agreement respects the sovereignty of both nations and establishes

a legal framework for our continued partnership, a framework which enables us to continue our work together in order to achieve a secure, stable, and prosperous nation for the people of Iraq, a goal for which so many Iraqis and Coalition nations have sacrificed.

There will be changes in how we plan, coordinate and carry out tasks; however, our mission goals and commitment to the Iraqi people remain unchanged. We will now focus on the implementation of the agreement and remain committed to supporting the Iraqi government and security forces in promoting a safe and secure environment, effective governance and delivery of essential services, economic development and the Rule of Law.

Because of the improved security and progress at the political and legislative levels, Coalition Forces have begun and will continue to draw down in accordance with the security agreement. As of September 2008, there were 25 Coalition countries contributing to the efforts here in Iraq. In October, five Coalition partners concluded their missions in Iraq. In November, three more countries followed suit, with 11 additional countries departing in September, totaling 19 Coalition Force partners completing their missions here in Iraq. Coalition Force members concluding their

missions include Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia/Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Georgia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Poland, Tonga, and Ukraine.

These nations have accomplished much for the people of Iraq. They have trained and mentored Iraqis in everything from security techniques to literacy and public health. They have served side by side with Iraqi Security Forces to protect the people of Iraq and facilities important to Iraq's future. They have been friends and partners and have served with the utmost professionalism. It has been an honor for all of us to serve with these great Coalition partners. Overall, Coalition Force personnel have declined from 169,000 personnel to approximately 148,000. Beginning in June 2008, by returning 4th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division and 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, the five surge brigades, two marine battalions, and one marine expeditionary unit, and implementing a 15 percent reduction in the Multinational Force-Iraq headquarters staff, we have completed a large amount of the planned withdrawal over this year. Additionally, we were able to redeploy the 3rd Brigade of the 101st Airborne Infantry Division early in November of 2008 as well as canceled the deployment of the 3rd Brigade, 10th Mountain Division and 3rd Brigade, 8th Marine Regiment to

Iraq, thereby reducing the number of brigade combat teams and regimental combat teams to 14.

Since July, 2008, Coalition Forces have already returned more than 30 areas and facilities to the Government of Iraq. Together we have developed and followed a facility return process, inventories and approved property transfer that protect and maximize continued use of the infrastructure investments. Along with these transfers, we have also provided approximately \$3.1 million worth of additional U.S. property to the Government of Iraq.

The Government of Iraq and the United States are finalizing details of joint committees to oversee the implementation of various aspects within the security agreement. The subcommittee on return of facilities and areas is one of the key joint committees which will continue to return Iraqi facilities and areas to the Government of Iraq with the utmost respect to full sovereignty and security. A good example of this is the Haditha Dam which was recently returned to the Ministry of Electricity on the 3rd of December. This is just one example of the equipment and infrastructure improvements transferred to the Government of Iraq while maintaining close cooperation to achieve ongoing Iraqi security.

Additionally, we continue to release detainees from Coalition theater internment facilities and we no longer hold any female detainees. Since the start of 2008, nearly 18,000 detainees have been released to their families and communities throughout Iraq. We will continue to work a controlled program to transfer the remaining detainees with the Government of Iraq at a rate in which their communities can accept them.

Looking forward, the United States is committed to full implementation of the security agreement. Implementation will be transparent and accomplished in the spirit of partnership. The Government of Iraq and the United States are establishing joint committees to ensure the seamless implementation of the agreement's provisions.

Military operations will continue, but will be coordinated and approved by the Iraqi government. There will be visible changes as we implement the provisions of the security agreement. Multinational Force-Iraq headquarters staff has nearly completed moving out of the former Republican Palace in the International Zone. Personnel have moved to Victory Base Complex, with a few elements that work closely with the Government of Iraq on a

daily basis relocating to the new United States embassy. For five years this symbolic building served as a base of operations, first for United States military units, and then as a seat of the United States Government representation in Iraq through the Coalition Provisional Authority, and then as part of the United States embassy. Following decommissioning, this building returns to the control of the Government of Iraq and the Iraqi people.

On the first of January, the International Zone itself transitions to Iraqi control, as the general stated earlier. Under the leadership of the Joint Subcommittee on International Zone Transition, both governments are committed to full cooperation and partnership as Iraq assumes security responsibility, and you can expect follow-on announcements related to this from the Government of Iraq. There will even be considerable change in the skies over Iraq as Iraqi Civil Aviation Authority assumes control over their nation's sovereign air space, a testament to their hard work and their ever-increasing capability.

We have witnessed great change and significant progress throughout our mission in Iraq. With our partners, we will continue to build on these gains. As we enter the next chapter of our strategic partnership, we congratulate the government and the

people of the Iraq for achieving this historic milestone. Within this framework, we now look forward to supporting the Iraqi government, the Independent High Electoral Commission and the Iraqi Security Forces as they prepare for the much-anticipated provincial elections in strengthening the democratic institutions for which so many have sacrificed. The general and I will now be happy to take your questions.

REP1: (Asks question in Arabic.)

INT: Major General, you mentioned that most of the areas are going to be delivered or given to the Iraqi government, even we were in proper detention center and about a hundred of them, of those detainees were delivered or given back to the -- or released. What's going to happen to the detainees? Are they going to be released or given to the control of the Iraqi government?

General Perkins, yesterday there was a raid on the University of Technology by the Coalition Forces. What's the -- What's the reason behind this raid? What -- What does this university contain? Weapons, for instance?

MGEN ATTA:

Thank you, Hossan (ph.). Like everyone has seen, the draft of the agreement, the withdrawal of the foreign forces from Iraq, this agreement contains legal aspects, political aspects, economical aspects and security aspects. And we have formed major committees, joint committees between the American forces and the Multinational Force and the Iraqi side and the embassy to put mechanisms and priorities in place in order to organize the implementation of all the articles mentioned in that agreement. Three days ago we had a meeting, an important meeting, General -- between General Hammond and the -- in order to implement the sides or put mechanisms -- how to implement this legal side of it. If they're an innocent person, we will just release them right away; but of course, according to a joint work between both sides, God willing, we are going to work with -- the work is going -- up ahead of us is going to be very important and, of course, for the Iraqi people and for the Iraqi government. Of course with the presence of great will and the great efforts, we will be able to overcome all obstacles and the hinders (ph.) that we might fight -- that we might face. The work or the mission of the committees is to coordinate the work, and there is a committee now in the Prime Minister's office to put mechanisms in place to receive the IZ, and like I mentioned before, that we have to ensure full protection and security for the area, and of course it has to be

coordination in all the things, the articles that was mentioned in the agreement.

BG PERKINS:

Yes, with regards to the detainees, as we said, this is one of the committees that has been formed and this will be worked closely with the Government of Iraq. Close examination of the evidence and the intelligence available will be examined by both sides and an agreement will be determined as to the disposition. Some, as we have mentioned already, tens of thousands have been released back to the community and back to their families. There will be some, based on the evidence, that will be determined that need to move to Iraqi control, but they still need to be detainee -- detained and then moved through the Iraqi judicial system. So that is one of the areas that there will be a very specific series of processes and screening events that both the Coalition Force and the Iraqi government work through the committee to determine what needs to be done with each individual detainee.

REP2:

Major General Qassim, I have an a question for you in regards to the incident that happened of the killing -- or the murder of the guards in Atafiyah warehouse. We have noticed that Multinational Force, after the fall of the former regime, they had, you know, limited authority in killing (inaudible) have noticed before the

Coalition Forces, or the American forces now, they are -- they kill directly without even making sure are those people al Qaida or -- especially what happened in Atafiyah with the killing of those guards. And as in human rights and as journalists here, we see it's so hard to kill an innocent person, and especially after signing the agreement between the American government and the Iraqi government, we've -- there's another question that we've heard from a trusted source that there is a plan of -- that al Qaida is planning to assassinate Major (sic) Qassim Atta. Can you confirm this news, this information?

MGEN ATTA:

In fact, we agree that -- with you, that one loss of Iraqi innocent civilian is a loss that we cannot -- a big loss, and actually this is something that has been confirmed by the Iraqi government and Iraqi security forces. And mistakes and errors can occur, but the joint work is to actually try to mitigate the level of errors and mistakes, and we have asked -- a few minutes ago I was talking to General Perkins and I had requested details about the Atafiyah incident, and I think three people was killed during that incident. And information is under investigation now, and if there was any problem or evaluation from the Coalition Forces by Multinational Force or Iraqi force, we do not accept that. Our main mission here

is to protect people and not to harass people from both sides. And we have formed a committee to investigate this incident.

The other question, yes, always out there, and I always -- I was faced -- I was actually -- there was so many attempts against me, to assassinate me, from Special Groups, from al Qaida, from criminal gangs. But those kinds of incidents would not actually keep me from doing my job, my media job, and reach to all areas and even if that was in certain areas.

REP3: (Asks question in Arabic.)

INT: (Speaks in Arabic.) General Perkins had mentioned that the air space is going to be given to the Iraqi government; is it the Iraqi aviation system? Is it the Iraqi Security Forces are ready to receive or assume responsibility?

MGEN ATTA: (Speaks in Arabic.) The Minister of -- spokes- -- MOD spokesman, MOI spokesman, they would give the report of the stages of what the Iraqi Air Force is working at this timetable that has been put according to Article 28 and 20 -- 14, 30 and No. 29. All those dates that was put on -- studied actually on a good way and was put for -- to actually make sure and ensure that the

capabilities of the Iraqi forces or the (inaudible) forces of MOI is already completed. Hopefully our security forces, and I'm confident that they will be able to resume responsibilities, not only in the International Zone or the air space, but in everywhere and we -- our forces have received responsibility in 13 provinces and even in Baghdad. And our forces has proven in those areas that we assumed responsibility that they have the capability and they can keep things under control in those areas, and thank God we didn't have any security incidents in those areas, and our forces will be able to make sure or assume responsibility in the time -- according to the timetable, and that's on land, on air and maritime as well. And we have Air Force; we have the other forces and the all going to receive, assume responsibility according to the dates that was put on the agreement.

REP4: As Salamu 'Alaykum. (Asks question in Arabic.)

INT: Major General, yesterday our Iraqi government put certain procedures to the convoys of the, of the officials, and they gave them, in a sense, certain instructions and ordered not to violate rules and -- against Iraqi people. What's the BOC doing?

MGEN ATTA: (Speaking in Arabic.)

INT: The BOC -- Our security forces are going to implement the instructions of the Prime Minister, and that's related to all the points that was announced. And we always say that our forces -- that our forces, they need to follow our rules and -- instructions regardless who they are. And the Iraqi -- The security forces and the BOC, they are going to start implementing those rules, those laws and instructions, and they will arrest anyone who violates the rules.

REP5: Andrea Stone with USA Today. Question for both, but General Perkins, can you talk about -- we know a lot about the January 1st, it'll be big changes, especially when it comes to private security companies; there's been a lot of attention to that. But can you talk about how the world sort of changes in other ways? I mean, you talked about giving over the palace on January 1st. But from -- as from a military point of view and also for other civilian Americans who are working, who are not security, how will this affect their life, their everyday goings-on? And also I'd like the other general to talk about that from the Iraqi perspective.

BG PERKINS: I'll address it first, and then General Qassim. The biggest difference really becomes in where the authority lies and who

gives the permission to go ahead and conduct operations. So as I said, security operations will continue; combat operations will continue. But they must all be approved by the Government of Iraq. What you're going to -- What you'll continue to see are very few, if any, unilateral operations on the part of the Coalition, the United States. They'll be joint operations done with the approval of the Iraqi government, with Iraqi Security Forces and highly coordinated. So that's a -- From a procedural point of view, that's a fairly dramatic change. Now, understand that 13 of 18 provinces are already under provincial Iraqi control, so we have been doing this gradually already. So we know how to go through these processes; we know how to conduct coordination. It's now we're just taking it to a national level. So there'll be a large amount of coordination, again, ahead of time and approval required with the Iraqi government to conduct combat operations. Things such as the air space control that we were just talking about, if today you were to go to the Baghdad International Airport, you would see Coalition air controllers standing side by side with Iraqi air controllers. The difference is, of course, starting 1 January, the authority for that rests with the Iraqi government. So they make any big decisions that have to be made, and again, what we do as the Coalition, are facilitate those decisions with our Iraqi counterparts.

I think you'll start to see, as General Qassim mentioned here, again, starting 1 January, the control and the responsibility for security of the International Zone now resides with the Government of Iraq. So they will be the ultimate decisionmaker when it comes to things such as checkpoints and the T-walls and all that. Of course it will be done in very close coordination with the Coalition Forces who, we are here already, but again, they have the ultimate responsibility for it. So what you're going to see is at the very highest levels, that the far-reaching decisions, the policy issues, things like that, now rest with the Government of Iraq. We become supportive in that; we become an enabling force in that. And you're going to see a -- what you're also going to see is a continual transition of things; you'll see more and more detainees released; you'll see more and more things that -- where you had Coalition solely doing there, you'll see Coalition/Iraqi, and then eventually you'll see just Iraqi. You'll see more and more of our bases where we operate in and other areas and facilities will probably transition initially to joint areas where we have Coalition and Iraqi, and then as we pull back out of the cities, as we continue to decrease our forces, it will then become Iraqi-only. So I think you're going to continue to see this transition that has been ongoing for a year, but it will be accelerated. General.

MGEN ATTA: (Speaks in Arabic.)

INT: I want to add one point, a specific point, in addition to what General Perkins has said, that the agreement has 30 articles in it, and this needs time and this is the time that's been, the time frame that would put about three years in according to the agreement. I think the stages or the steps that we have put in the agreement is actually preparing according to priorities and preparing and coordination. And first is to receive responsibility of the IZ , and then that would be followed by steps as far -- you know, legis- -- legal steps and the return the Republican Palace and -- Two days ago I visited General Perkins in his office at the palace, at the public palace, and I saw that a lot of Multinational Force staff moving their things and their offices to the new embassy and we are prepare -- they are preparing to give back the palace to the Iraqi government. And those are all indicated -- indicators and we are going to go on and announce all the steps that we -- that's happening so far.

Now, both sides are working and it's highly coordinated and on the high-profile level and on the lower levels too, so we're not have any problems when we try to apply the articles of the agreement.

BG PERKINS:

Just one thing to clarify: The United States is very committed to living up to the letter of the law with the security agreement as well as the intent. And we completely understand the intent is to maintain the sovereignty and the primacy of the Government of Iraq here. And so as the general said, we literally are in daily meetings; he and I have been in a couple of meetings. And we want to make this very deliberate. We want it -- We are going to maintain all the timelines as outlined in the security agreement, but we don't want to rush to failure. So this is a very complicated process. Things like exchange of control of air space, exchange of running certain critical checkpoints. You want to make sure you have that right. So we are going to sit down with our Iraqi counterparts, plan in detail, conduct rehearsals, and it will be a very deliberate process. But it really will be continual. No day will be like the day before it. Every day something will be different. In fact, as the general just said, he and I were in my office the other day, it was full of boxes. This morning I came to work in the Republican Palace, did all my morning in-briefings and did all my e-mail and all that, came to this press conference, and when I leave this press conference, I will not go back to the palace. I will go to the new embassy compound. So this morning

was my last morning in the palace. And every day you're going to see something like that, something will be different.

REP6: (Asks question in Arabic.)

INT: My question is to General Qassim. The officers and -- that was arrested and the number of those officers and the reasons behind the arrests, and if they're still under arrest or not. I wish if you could clarify and explain to us. Thank you very much.

MGEN ATTA: (Speaks in Arabic.) I think that journalists have the right to discuss or address this issue to get some breaking news in order to give that to the public, opinion. And seeing that this information has been leaked out, that there would be some sort of military coup or something from the officers of the Ministry of Interior. And we have announced from the Prime Minister and through the spokesman of the MOI that when you are talking about security events or security things, you need to watch the officials and what they say. What happened is there were some information and investigation -- investigative information that number of officers in the Ministry of Interior that were arrested according to some warrant orders -- warrant orders. And the investigation was done according to the law. And then the investigative judge, then he

decided to release them because there was not enough evidence against them. Yesterday the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief, he assured that there was no coup or, if a civilian coup or a military coup, and there was no chance to think about something like that because most of our security -- or now all security forces are far away from thinking of things like that.

Our main duties and our mission here is to return to stability and security for -- to Iraq, and our duties and our forces in MOI/MOD are working to provide security and protection to the constitution and the democratic process, and they stay neutral from any political entity, and they would no way to go back to think about military coups or any kind of coups. And the constitution has specified the duties and the mission of the Iraqi Security Forces, and they've signed papers and applications to work according to the constitution and the mechanisms of the constitution.

What I hope from you and from the rest of your friends here, colleagues here, is to give or convey this idea across to the Iraqi people, and we are living in a democratic society and there is no way that we can have both a democracy and coups. We are working according to the law, according to the authority and the democratic process. And I think you have seen for yourselves the,

that the elections we had in 2005 and that was according to the constitution too. And hopefully this elections this year will be also even better than the elections in 2005.

And this is the truth, with all its details, and whatever the media has blown out of proportion is not correct. Thank you very much.

REP7:

I would appreciate comment from both the generals about the security preparations for the upcoming elections that General Qassim just mentioned. A couple of areas would be are there areas, geographical areas of specific high concern, and also how visible the U.S. forces intend to make themselves on election day and in the run-up to the election?

BG PERKINS:

I can tell you that this is one of our primary focus areas, especially in the upcoming new year. It is, as we said, a great move forward in the democratic process here in Iraq. It brings elections down to the local level, which is where people feel the greatest ownership of it. This will be an election with open lists, so people will have a lot of choices and ability to exercise their democratic freedom.

We are working very closely with a number of agencies to ensure that the elections are conducted in a peaceful manner and that the

results are accepted throughout the country. In fact, on Friday we had a very large meeting with General Odierno, Ambassador Crocker, the deputy chairman of the Independent High Election Commission here in Iraq, the -- Staffan de Mistura, UNAMI SRSG, as well as General Ayden (ph.) from the Ministry of Interior who's the chairman of the Iraq Election Security Committee, and have gone over in detail what are the requirements. And the requirements are not only security; it is outreach, voter education. As I said, this is the first time we are using an open list, so it's educating the voters so they understand how the process is going to go forth; educating political parties so they know how to set up a party, they know how to register, they know how to organize themselves, and, of course, extensive coordination with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense, to secure, again, not only polling centers, but to secure places where election material is stored, to secure movement of election material, to secure election officials. All of these things are a key part in making sure the election goes forward. So this has been in progress for many months now, and it will continue into the election and beyond the election. We are also very interested in making sure that any post-election activities, again, are in the -- are conducted under the Rule of Law, they are in the spirit of democracy. So there really is no area involved with running this

election, again, whether it's the registration, the polling, moving materials, outreach, that the Coalition is not very much involved, again, not only with the Government of Iraq, but with the United Nations as well as other NGO's -- international observers that are coming to observe the election, observers from Iraq, all of which are being trained to be observers. So it's a very complicated process that is getting a lot of attention and a lot of effort and a lot of coordination and rehearsals.

General, any other comments?

MGEN ATTA:

No. Shukran jazilan. (Speaks in Arabic.)

INT:

Thank you very much. In fact, the BOC has put a plan in coordination with the IHEC and with coordination with the MOI/MOD officials, and the plan is an Iraqi plan and there would be coordination between the Multinational Force and to interfere when there is a need to support and provide support. But you'll see all the forces near the polling sites and the areas. You would see it's an Iraqi plan and Iraqi forces. And we have joint coordination and direct coordination with the Multinational Force. We'll take the last question.

REP8: (Asks question in Arabic.)

INT: If you allow me, Major General Qassim Atta, there are 51,000 support forces. Until when these forces are going to stay working, and what they're going to be doing after, after they stop doing their work as a support person? As you know, they've done a lot of work and they've helped the government.

And my other question is to General Perkins. When the Iraqi soldiers are going to be ready and prepared and equal -- equivalent to the American soldiers? And as you know, that you are supervising the logistic side and the training side.

MGEN ATTA: The Sons of Iraq and transitioning them to the Iraqi forces, this is we still -- the work is continuous, continuous on those things that have been put four priorities in place as far as work. The first priority is to transition all the, the files from the Multinational Force to the control of the Iraqi government and, thank God, this is the major case and file, and it's been achieved with no problems. And like I mentioned in my brief earlier. And the second stage is to select who that are capable or that are eligible to join the Iraqi Security Forces and MOI and MOD that ones that falls under the rules and regulations. Though, and the ones that doesn't fall under

the -- their rules and regulations of the Ministry of Interior/Ministry of Defense, and of course a focus on the education, their education level. We try to send them to the ministries or departments in the government. And the first one -- or stage is the ones that has no, that can't find -- they don't have any skills, we can let them or put them in training courses and vocational training. And there are some of them that can't read and write, so the government would start -- would give them salaries for all of them until they find a job, and that's going to be for all of them. And you've seen so far the accurate implementation to the Prime Minister's decree as far as the Sons of Iraq, and the Sons of Iraq are receiving their salaries from the Iraqi government in Baghdad under the supervision of the BOC and the accountant units are working on that, in each unit. And the first stage has achieved a great success as far as transitioning their files. And we had no problems. Maybe some of -- a few numbers are still under, under auditing, are -- they still being -- But we do have information, accurate information, for what we have under Iraqi control and what we have -- was still under the Coalition control. The number, a few numbers, I believe, like hundreds of them, are still -- we're still working on their cases. And thank you very much --

REP9: (Interrupts Major General Qassim Atta.) (Asks question in Arabic.)

INT: The reason behind the, the raid for the -- on the University of Technology. General Perkins, you haven't answered this question. What was the reason behind that raid on the University of Technology? What's the reason? It was at 11 a.m. -- p.m. Is it allowed to the American forces to go and raid an -- a university campus, or college campus?

BG PERKINS: Yeah, we've seen the original, the first news reports on that, and we'll get you all the details on that specific incident.

With regards to the last question, the transitioning to the Iraqi Security Forces. As I've said, we've been transitioning a number of them already: 13 of 18 provinces have already transitioned to Iraqi Security Forces in the lead -- and of note with regard to the Safwa and the Sons of Iraq, we transitioned, as you said, over 50,000 of them in October and November at the same time that we had been reducing Coalition Forces here. So in fact last month of October was a month where we've had the greatest amount of responsibility transferred to the Iraqi Security Forces both, and the number of provinces as well as half of the Sons of Iraq have been transferred to the Iraqi Security Forces.

So I think it's noteworthy that in the month where we've had the most transition was also the month where we've had the least amount of attacks. So we think that validates the model. We know how to work very closely with our Iraqi partners. We know how to work through in a very deliberate manner. And again, the track record is as we continue to hand off responsibility to them, the number of attacks continue to go down. So we will continue that model as we go into the new year. So again, thank you very much.

[END]