

1 April 2008

AO: deg

## **Full Transcript**

**Dr. Ali al-Dabbagh, Spokesman, Government of Iraq**

**Major General Lua [ph] Aziz, Spokesman, Iraqi Security Forces**

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**SUBJECT:** *Press Conference.*

**LOCATION:** *March 31, 2008, Iraq*

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PARTICIPANTS:  
Dr. Ali al-Dabbagh  
Major General Lua[ph] Aziz

REPORTERS:  
Alexandra Zavis from The Los Angeles Times  
Abigail Housliner[ph] from Time Magazine  
Erica Goode from The New York Times  
Unidentified reporters from Al-Mada Newspaper, The Associated Press, Japanese News Agency – Kyoto, Al-Watan Newspaper, and Radio Sowa.

REPORTERS 1-16  
\*REP1 = REPORTER 1  
\*INT = INTERPRETER  
DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Good evening everyone. As we have announced yesterday that the delegation—that the Iraqi government welcomes the decision by Muqtada al-Sadr to—and asks the Iraqis to respect the law and also to support the security forces and the security efforts conducted by the Iraqi security forces to establish stability in all Iraq and to enforce law. And that's why so everyone who surrenders his weapon and gives in his weapon to the Iraqi security forces in all the provinces will be pardoned from questioning and prosecution. As for the humanitarian situation, there is a great effort done by the GOI to send the food and drugs to the places in Basra and Baghdad. And we have named two people to coordinate those humanitarian issues. And the Iraqi government welcomes the efforts of the United Nation[s] and the Red Crescent and Red Cross and the other humanitarian organizations to support these efforts as well. The minister of

1 April 2008

AO: deg

health also started to equip all the hospitals, and especially those in Shoala and Sadr City, equip them with ambulances and medicine. There is also a concentrated effort by the Ministry of Electricity and Oil to increase the electricity production and as well to resume work of the Basra refinery. As for the summit, the Arab summit, the conference, the Iraqi delegation headed by Dr.—Vice President—Deputy President Adil Abdul Mahdi said that he supports the decisions because the Iraqi delegation also took part in forming the final statement. But there were some reservations by the Iraqi delegation because there was no consultation made with the Iraqi delegation regarding the final statement because it doesn't meet the needs of the Iraqi government—the slightest needs of the Iraqi government because there was no indication to the threats that Iraq is facing and also the responsibilities of the Iraqi or the Arab countries towards Iraq. And we will continue our relations with the Arab countries. And we ask the Arab countries to adopt some practical procedures to activate those decisions of the Arab summit. And we are pleased today to have Major General Lua[ph] Aziz who will give you a briefing regarding the security situation in Iraq in general.

MAJ GEN AZIZ:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

I will give a briefing and it will be a summary. Let's start by the commanding operation of the 4th—of the 8th Division or in provinces like in Kut, Hillah, Karbala, Najaf [and] Diwaniyah; and all those provinces are under the responsibility of the 8th Division. Regarding Kut, at the beginning of the operation there was a presence of the enemy and the armed members. The commander of the 8th Division, who is one of the finest officers in the Ministry of Defense, he moved his headquarter to Kut and enhanced that province and that city with four companies. And he also led a clear operation or a clearing operation in Kut City from the presence of the armed men. The situation now in all the areas is calm and is controlled completely by the troops of the 8th Division. There was an operation yesterday, yesterday night, in Al-Hashimiyah county that was based on intelligence reports and intel. There was some presence for armed men and so there were some troops moved and captured 25 armed men. And also they found weapon cache including different kinds of weapons. At Karbala the situation is calm and stable. The commanding operation in Karbala also headed a—also headed troops and with help from the citizens and would like to say that the citizens of Karbala, they showed us the places of those armed men. And in this operation the unit managed to capture 98 armed men; and the strange thing, two of them were Egyptians. Everything in Diwaniyah is calm. Najaf also the situation is calm. And we haven't seen any incidents ever since the operation started on the 25th until now. The 10th Division that is controlling the three provinces, that's Maysan, Nasiriyah, and Muthanna. [In] Al Muthanna province, ever since the operation started on [the] 25th until this morning, we haven't witnessed any kind of—any incidents. The security forces control that province in a good way. Nasiriyah—in Nasiriyah, the situation was calm but it was kind of cautious. The security forces were deployed and they closed the entries of the province and that's why it was able to control the situation. The presence of the armed men was in Amarah

1 April 2008

AO: deg

and Maysan. Also the commander of the 10th Division in Amarah and he sent a battalion as well at the beginning of this month. And he gave instructions to them to move and the battalion moved and he himself led the brigade and the battalion. And the recent area that was cleared actually was yesterday after midnight: the city of Shatrah. There was the commander of the brigade who was heading the brigade and they went to Al Rafaye[ph] and Al Shatrah area and they cleared all those three areas. In Basra, the 14th Division and the other units and troops in this province. The recent situation in Basra – that was yesterday – it was calm. Our troops managed to clear certain areas in Basra, Najubya[ph], Al Machel[ph], Al Ashar Wazuber[ph] and Garmat Ali and other places as well. Starting from today, we will work on clearing the other places from the wanted individuals and criminals and those who are still carrying weapons. Yesterday we apprehended 21 armed men and we wounded another six. Also the friendly forces and the coalition forces provided air support in Basra after there was a full deployment of a company. Thank you.

REP1:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

Question from Al-Mada Newspaper to Ali Dabbagh. You ask—you said no one will be prosecuted if he surrenders his weapon. And the general amnesty law says that anyone who will be apprehended will not be included. And also your efforts in releasing the spokesman—civilian spokesman for Operation Fardh Al-Qanoon, Dassin[ph] Shekli[ph]. Your efforts in releasing the civilian spokesman, Dassin[ph] Al Shekli[ph].

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Regarding handing over the weapon has nothing to do with the general amnesty law. The General Judicial or the Higher Judicial Council released over 13,000 detainees including those who had been detained and the Sadr Trend asked to release them. And they are included by the general amnesty law. The Iraqi court and the Iraqi judicial system will also look into the cases of those detainees including those who—that the Sadr Trend demanded their release. Of course handing over weapon and putting down weapon was a decision made by prime minister. He said, “Anyone who hands over his weapon will not be pursued and prosecuted.” And this has nothing to do with the general amnesty law. As for Dassin[ph] Al Shekli[ph], we hope that there will be a humanitarian initiative by those who kidnapped him because he’s an employee and he serves the Iraqi government and he’s a patriotic person and we hope the—and his family also wanted and asked for his release.

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1 April 2008

AO: deg

REP2:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

Question from The Associated Press. Some of the media mentioned that there are some negotiations with the Sadr Trend inside Iran. What is the role—was there a role for the Iranian government? Second question to the major general. Could you give us a timetable for the operations and when will the operations end in Basra?

MAJ GEN AZIZ:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

The negotiations—the Iraqi government was not part of the negotiations but there were some efforts and we thanked those efforts. In a press conference we thanked members in the Parliament and also some political figures and tribe leaders who also exerted some effort to save the bloodshed. There was an effort by—done by some political blocks in the Parliament and this resulted in this decision by Muqtada al-Sadr which we appreciate and value because it signifies that there is a responsibility that Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr enjoys. As for your question regarding the timetable for the operations in Basra, this operation has been—there were so many reports regarding this operation. And the presence of the armed men made this operation look much bigger than it is. The thing that I'd like to say is that the operation is a really simple one. Basra, as Dr. Ali Dabbagh said in several press conferences, is a very important province in Iraq and there are some groups who are controlling several places and area[s]. And there are some crimes that are being done like there are kidnapping [and] assassinations going on and also there are some individuals and wanted individuals that should be apprehended and prosecuted. This operation aims at apprehending those criminals and wanted individuals. And unfortunately, the presence of the armed men in such a way gave this operation a different meaning. And thankfully, the statement made by Muqtada al-Sadr calmed the situation as well. And also removing the curfew also enhanced things. The operation now is simple. There are certain areas in Basra and we will continue the search operation. And this happens in any country and I think it's a normal thing. When you have criminals in a certain area and when they are located in a certain place, this area could be sieged[sic] or cordoned so the houses will be searched. That's why I think the operation will be simple. And the timing will be also very soon.

REP2:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

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1 April 2008

AO: deg

You didn't give us details about the situation in Basra—in Baghdad, especially those that are still witnessing curfew because there was bombings and explosions in one of the areas. And the next stage after the operations and after the armed members were eliminated, what is the next stage and how will the dialog go on with the Sadr Trend to eliminate such situations in the future?

MAJ GEN AZIZ:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

The curfew now is on the vehicles and that is to ensure that the citizens will not be threatened. We do feel and we do know that there are some certain people who want to make use of Muqtada al-Sadr and his groups in such situation so that they can target the civilians in different places. Sadr City has a great and a huge populacity[sic]. It is highly populated and there are some intelligence reports saying that there are al-Qaeda members who are moving and trying to target residential areas. And that's why the security forces took these precautions to protect the Iraqi citizens. The Sadr Trend is a very good component—an essential component in the political process because they were part in establishing this government and the dialog is still on with them and with all the political blocks. And I think that this plan will enhance the chances of dialog with them because this was a step in the right path taken by the Sadr Trend.

REP3:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

Yesterday the decision made by Muqtada al-Sadr came behind guarantees prevented—provided by the Government of Iraq. Could you tell us about those guarantees that you presented to the Sadr Trend? And the other question is to the major general. Today there was an operation in Al Mahmudiyah area. This morning there was a raid and during the raid a huge number of the people were arrested and even one of the—those who work in Al Hura TV was arrested. How would you describe such an operation under the calm situation that you are asking for?

DR ALI:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

1 April 2008

AO: deg

The guarantees for the Sadr Trend and for all Iraqis say that the Iraqi government has law and everyone should abide by the law. Regarding the general amnesty, and as I have said, we have—we are releasing a huge number of detainees. Regarding the investigation of those who have committed crime, there is also a commitment—as the statement says that there is cooperation so that those who committed crimes will be presented to court and prosecuted. And we will resort to the law. That's why—so all the detentions will not target only—will not target a certain trend, but will target only the criminals. And this is what the Iraqi government is doing and what it's committed to do. As for Al Mahmudiyah and the troops and the units that are working there, this city and those units is part of the commanding operation in Baghdad. And as you know, the operations in Baghdad is not connected with the—is connected with Prime Minister Maliki's office directly. But it's possible that I could answer this question. The unit that is present in Mahmudiyah is the 4th Brigade from the 6th Division and it's one of the finest units and formations in the Iraqi Army. And its commander is a well-known person and he's a good officer. As for the raid that's being done from one area to another, this is really calculated. I have seen the operations in Baghdad and when you conduct a raid, you have to do that based on some intelligence reports and those intelligence reports have been reviewed several times and it has been presented to several commanders so that they can approve it. But if one of the Al Hura employees were arrested, so I think this could be a mistake and it could happen—such things could happen. And this person, if he has not committed any crime, I'm quite sure that this person will be released as soon as possible. It doesn't mean that the detentions or the raids are random as you have described them or as some said. We don't have any random raids and search operations because the units and the Army, instead of endangering themselves by going out, they should—they sometimes stay in the bases so that they can train themselves. Just going out and conducting raid operation—random raids is something not possible because all the raid operations are based on intelligence reports. But sometimes mistakes could happen. I hope you give us the name so that we can follow up.

REP4:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

What is the mechanism of handing over the weapons and the locations of taking those weapons and is there an amount of money in exchange for those weapons?

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

I think there are some instructions. Major General Abdul-Karim Khalaf announced it and it was on the Iraqi TV. And there are some instructions and mechanisms for that.

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1 April 2008

AO: deg

REP5:

Japanese News Agency – Kyoto. So may I have [the] total number of death and injured from the beginning of the operation until as of today in this operation. Thank you.

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Actually, regarding this question, it has been presented and it has been asked previously. And to answer it, let just the operation over and end, then we will give you some briefing as well about the numbers of the operations and also the casualties. And the casualties are from both sides because both sides are Iraqis; whether those are from that or from both sides, there are casualties.

REP6:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

How would you or how would the government handle those and deal with those who will not hand over their weapon? And second question is to the major general. Do you think the Basra operations delayed the operations in Mosul—that are being done now in Mosul?

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr said that he is not committed to those who will not abide by his statement so I think that the rule of law and also the enforcement of law says that there should be any kind of weapon—an illegal weapon by the citizen and this is what the Iraqi government is trying to do. And we're—our effort is to collect all

the illegal weapons from everyone.

MAJ GEN AZIZ:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

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1 April 2008

AO: deg

INT:

Regarding your question about the operations in Mosul, as you know, the commanding operation in Mosul is a young one and it has been established recently. And the preparations are continuous ever since it has been announced or has been established and until now. The preparations are ongoing so that the commanding operation will be also established in a full way. We're still sending reinforcements that Major General Riyadh asked for. And hopefully the operation in Mosul will be conducted in the timing that is set to it and it has nothing to do with the operation in Basra.

REP7:

Alexandra Zavis from The Los Angeles Times. It sounds like the situation may be getting more stable in large parts of the south. But I was wondering to what extent it seems to you that Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr's declaration is being respected in Basra at the moment and in Baghdad. Also, if you could be a little more specific about how much longer you expect the operation in Basra to continue – days, weeks, months [laughs]? And when does the prime minister plan to return to Baghdad?

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

I will take the first part of the question. Then the major general will answer the other part. I think that the decision and the call made by Muqtada al-Sadr—Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr are for those who follow up and abide by his statement. Anyone who use his weapon and raise weapon will be an outlaw. And anyone who targets the institutes of the government will be—he will be violating the law and also violating the statement made by Muqtada al-Sadr. That's why the government is or will enforce the law on everyone. And this is what the government will do.

MAJ GEN AZIZ:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Regarding your question about the timetable of the operation and how long it will take in the southern provinces, actually before Muqtada al-Sadr made his statement, we expected that operation would take longer. But now I can't give you an exact timing for the operation to end. There are some certain areas in Basra that we will start because today the whole reinforcements arrived and we will start a search operation. And after those areas are being searched, the operation will be over. And hopefully the operation will be short and limited.

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1 April 2008

AO: deg

REP8:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

Question from Al-Watan Newspaper. You've said that there is a coordination to send the food and drugs and medicine to Basra. There are so many citizens that are suffering from the curfew and say that the checkpoints refuse to let the medicine and the food inside those cities because the checkpoints say—those who run the checkpoints say that those could be some hidden IEDs in those medicine and food.

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Well, the curfew has been removed since Saturday. And the people in Basra are moving. Do you mean in Baghdad or Basra? You are talking about Baghdad?

REP8:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

No. Basra.

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

In Baghdad, the curfew was removed and there were some convoys from the Ministry of Health carrying medicine and food and there were ambulances as well went to Sadr City. And of course we are have to take—be careful because yesterday medicine also was

provided and sent to Sadr City.

REP9:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

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1 April 2008

AO: deg

INT:

Question from Radio Sowa. I have two questions. First, Dr. Ali, after one day of the initiative, how would you—there were some rocket attacks and Katyusha attacks against the Green Zone or targeting the Green Zone. And you've mentioned that the curfew in Sadr City and Shoala came after there were some reports that al-Qaeda may target the residential areas in those places. Could you give us some details about this?

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Well, I can't give you details because those are security information. The bombings that target Baghdad, those are being done by criminal groups that try to kill the Iraqis and this has nothing to do with the Sadr Trend. And those people are criminals and outlaws and the government is pursuing them. And some of them have been captured. And we also eliminated and killed so many of them. And the work is ongoing to pursue them. This is a criminal and a terrorist act and the government will pursue them.

REP10:

Hi. Abigail Housliner. Time Magazine. My question is if all these people are criminals who are continuing to fight, and this is what you were saying last week as well, then how does this renewed ceasefire with Sadr have—with Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr have any significance whatsoever? If—I believe last week you were still saying that these were not Sadr's followers who were fighting but rather criminals. And if that's still the case, as you say, that those who are carrying arms are still criminals, then what's the point, I guess, of this ceasefire? And how is it going to make any difference? Also, again, you mentioned some progress you are making in Basra as far as areas that you are now controlling. We heard from some sources in Basra that there was a retreat of the Mahdi Army. I wanted to know if there was any truth to that.

DR ALI:

Any?

REP10:

Any truth to that, any retreat; any—if there was any evidence that the Mahdi Army down there is running out of supplies. That's what we heard. Thank you.

DR ALI:

1 April 2008

AO: deg

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

We think that the decision made by Muqtada—Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr will isolate those criminal groups that tried to abuse and also break the law. And also they tried to abuse the Sadr Trend and the figure of the Sadr Trend. So after this statement, anyone who will carry weapon and anyone who will not or will continue to fight is a—will be considered as an outlaw. So anyone who will carry a weapon will be an outlaw. This initiative will also have a good contribution in stabilizing the situation. And we cannot deny that there were some groups that went to the streets because they thought the government is facing the Sadr Trend. And it's not true because we are not facing or where they—with any political trend, especially the Sadr Trend. Because the Sadr Trend is not facing the government. That's why we think that this statement will contribute in a good way in reducing the tension and also to stabilize the situation.

REP11:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

Question to Ali Dabbagh. Dr. Ali, yesterday Sayyed Muqtada al-Sadr announced that—despite the statement, we have heard some explosions in Sadr City and there were some armed aspects in areas near Ur[ph] neighborhood. This is the first question. The second one; Biladi TV and Haifa TV in Al Karada area, they were targeted by the security forces and those are well-known TVs and TV stations and they work on stabilizing the situation especially while, on the other hand, we had other TV stations that tried to deteriorate the situation. So why is this happening and why did this happen?

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Biladi TV is not different from all the TV stations. They all work in a good way and we don't distinguish between those who work or criticize the government or those who don't. Let me just clarify a few things. We don't—the government does not distinguish between the media. We all treat everyone on an equal footing. But I would like to give me some—probably you could give me some details so that we can investigate this and so that we can see the motives behind targeting the TV stations because this is a thing that the government does not accept of course. Those who have not complied, this is the responsibility of the Sadr Trend so that they can influence those followers, so that they can send message to all the followers and tell them that the rule of law is a duty to everyone and so that everyone should contribute in stopping the

1 April 2008

AO: deg

bloodshed—the Iraqi bloodshed. And this responsibility is a shared one with the Sadr Trend and the other political blocks so that they will take their part in helping the government and the security forces in enforcing the law and also isolating the criminal groups that target and attack the Iraqi citizen. And those groups still try to break the law and this is a terrorist act. And we consider it as a terrorist act because it threatens the Iraqi people. Prime Minister Maliki recently instructed all the security services to respect the TV stations and the media in a good way and that's in general. And we make this—we generalize this to all the security units and the services. But I would like to say one thing: there are some journalists, especially when there is an event that shouldn't be photographed, when an IED explodes targeting civilians, let's say, and when we have some remains and taking footage of those things are actually inappropriate. There are some journalists [who] enjoy taking such photographs. And the other thing is that protecting the journalists because we've seen this so many times when an IED goes off, another car bomb goes off after that. That's why we have to pretend, oh, prevent the journalists from going to the first place so that we can protect them. So some of the journalists, they just go on to the explosion site. So the officer will prevent him to protect his own life. So those things I hope you just keep them in mind.

REP12:

Erica Goode, New York Times, for Dr. Ali Dabbagh. You mentioned that there were some parts of the statement issued by Muqtada al-Sadr that you—that the government did not necessarily know about or agree with and I wondered if you could talk a little bit more about that. And also, for the major, we have heard some things this morning that in the southern provinces, because of the arrests—some arrests that are going on, that there are some people in Mr. Sadr's group who are saying that this is a violation of the agreement that was reached yesterday. Could you comment on both

these things? Thank you. Shukran.

DR ALI:

The first one—what? Could you repeat the first one?

REP12:

Yes. The first one is you said earlier in the press conference that there were some parts of the statement that Mr. Sadr released yesterday that you had not seen or that the government had not seen, as I understood it. Maybe I misunderstood what you were saying. And I wondered if there are some parts—if there is an agreement about all parts of the statement or if there are some parts that are still under discussion. Thank you.

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

1 April 2008

AO: deg

INT:

The statement made by Muqtada al-Sadr was a statement made by all those in the Sadr Trend and all those who think that they will try to defend a cause. This was a call was made to the Sadr Trend and there are some articles to the government but the government does not disagree with this. I think that there is a—no; I did not say anything like this. I think there was a misunderstanding. Regarding the second question, I've said in my briefing that the security forces in Basra cleared part of the areas in Basra and there are other parts [that] will be cleared. So, of course, we have the warrant for the arrests for all the wanted individuals and criminals so when the security forces find those people, they will be detained. But detaining members of the Sadr Trend, there are some criminals in all the parts like—parties like in the Sadr Trend and the Islamic Party. So the question is will there be any criminals in the Sadr Trend? There could be some criminals in the Sadr Trend. And there were some arrest warrants and if they are found, they will be arrested.

REP13:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

There are some media reports saying that the agreement made by the political blocks and the Sadr Trend included or stated that Prime Minister Maliki should go back to Baghdad within three days. Is that true? And do you know about this? The second question to the major general. There was a complaint made by people in Sadr City and in Eastern Baghdad like in Fathaliyah[ph], Meshdal[ph], Oubaidi, [and] Kamaliya neighborhoods. And they say that the security or the American forces are not taking seriously to save their places from the armed groups that controlled the area for the past few days. So how would you respond to this? And also, I think Dr. al-Dabbagh and the media or classifying all the media in one category is not true—is not a good one because there are some of those who target the government and target civilians.

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

I didn't say that—I'm not saying about the bad ones but the good ones – those who are Iraqis or not because those who convey the truth and who are professional in conveying the truth. As for the bad medias, we have seen some reports and some journalists in the media try to make use of this violence. And this is for the Iraqis in general. And the Iraqis can distinguish, of course, the good and the bad media because those media try to make advantage of the violence. Prime Minister Maliki, it's up to him to decide where to go and when to go. I don't think—this is

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1 April 2008

AO: deg

nonsense and there is—it's not true. He's the one who decides where to go and when to go. And this question has been asked about [when] the operation will end: when Prime Minister Maliki decides that this operation achieved its goals. So there are some crimes and some criminal groups that harm the Iraqi civilians there. And you know that Basra recently and how the situation was bad in Basra. So there is a mission in Basra and Prime Minister Maliki will decide when his work, his mission is done so that he could assign someone else instead and go back to Baghdad.

MAJ GEN AZIZ:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

As for areas in—near Sadr City that you mentioned, starting from today, there will be operations by the Iraqi Army and police with the Multi-National Forces to clear those places. So there will be clear operations—clearing operations and they started—they have started since this morning.

REP14:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

With the events in Basra, and took some—let me—let's say that what has been done in the Arab conference and the final statement for the Arab conference denied.... What is the response by the Iraqi government regarding the final statement of the—made in the Arab conference in a way that saves the—because the final statement was not fair?

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

Dr. Adil Abdul-Mahdi said this but I would like to say it again. We are—have an Arabic nationality. We are part of the Arabic nationality and the Arabic homeland. But the final statement—it's not the Damascus announcement and statement was frustrating. And there were some statements made by leaders, the Arab leaders, and even the general Secretary, Amr Moussa, and his statements regarding Iraq and we feel sorry for this and for such statement addressing such a country because he contributed or Iraq has contributed in several places as Dr. Abdul-Mahdi said. Iraq contributed in the Arab homeland several times and we hope those

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1 April 2008

AO: deg

remarks that [were] made will be taken into consideration because those leaders hurt us through their statements. So this will not affect us because we are part of the Arab homeland and we cannot ignore this.

REP15:

We've heard you emphasize from the start that the operation in Basra doesn't target any specific group and yet the reports that we get from here of the...

DR ALI:

If you could raise your voice. I can't...

REP15:

Sorry. We have heard you emphasize from the start, including today, that the operation in Basra doesn't target any specific group. And yet the reports that we get of the clashes all seem to be concentrated in areas that are controlled by Jaish al-Mahdi. Have the government forces gone into the port, for example, or other areas that are controlled by other groups? Or will you be pursuing individuals belonging to other groups, are they on your list as well?

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

We think that no group should control any place in Basra. And it's not—and no group has right to control any place. It's the government and the government constitutes—according to the constitution, no one should share the government in establishing the law. That's why the government, when it targets any group that tries to violate the law or breaks the law, they target them because they tried to break the law regardless of their political background. If people understood that we targeted a certain area or certain people because there were some wanted individuals in those areas and, of course, the operations extended to other places to include Basra. The operations will not be—will not [be] over unless Basra is stable so that the Iraqi citizen could live a normal life without any threats.

REP16:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

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1 April 2008

AO: deg

There were some arrest warrants in several provinces and there were some clashes in several provinces. What is the strategy after the things—events in Basra? Do you have any concerns regarding an operation in another province? And do you think those armed groups will do the same thing in another province? Do you have a new strategy?

DR ALI:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

The strategy is to pursue all those who violate or break the law. This is what happened in Basra and this is also what happened in Mosul. So all those who commit crimes or terrorists will also be prosecuted—will be pursued. The security forces will not ask those people about their backgrounds. If anyone breaks the law, [he] will be pursued. Being part of any political group or any political trend will not give you an amnesty to break the law. Regardless of your background, if you break the law constitutionally, you will be pursued. Shukran. Thank you very much

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)

**For more of the latest information on Operation Iraqi Freedom, click on the “Iraq Communication Desk” tab on the “Joint Communicator” website at the URL below:**

<https://jcom.osd.mil/Pages/Default.aspx>

**To request an account to access the website, please contact Jeffrey Hamman at 757-203-7685. Access is currently limited to DoD offices.**