

4 April 2008

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Full Transcript

Maj. Gen. Lynch, Commander, Multi-National Division – Center

SUBJECT: *Press Conference*

LOCATION: *April 3, 2008, Iraq*

TRANSCRIBED BY:
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Charles Levinson from USA Today
Tina Susman from The Los Angeles Times
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Unidentified reporters from Huriyah TV and Al-Zaman Newspaper.

REPORTERS 1-11
*REP1 = REPORTER 1
*INT = INTERPRETER

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

As-Salāmu `Alaykum and hello. My name is Major General Lynch. I command the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division. But here in Iraq, I command Multi-National Division – Center and I've been in command here in Iraq for the last 13 months. And our area of operation are the southern belts of Baghdad and Mahmudiyah qaddah and the Mada'in qaddah. And then the southern provinces of Karbala, Najaf, Babil, and Wasit. And what I want to do today is give you an overview of operations in my area. Talk about what's happened over the last 13 months. Talk about specifically what happened in the last week. And then give you my assessment of the ramifications of the increased number of attacks last week. As I say, we've been here now for 13 months – and all of you have the slides that you can refer to or give you some more details. In the last 13 months, working with the Iraqi security forces, we've done 10 major, named operations. You can see those across the top. They gave us the ability to take the fight to the enemy. And in the last 13 months, we've killed or captured about 5,000 of the insurgency. The

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surge forces gave us the forces that we need to take the fight to the enemy. The attacks went from 25 a day to less than 2 a day in the months of January, February, and in early March. And then on about the 25th of March we had an increase in attacks, specifically by the Shi'a extremist element and I want to talk you through that. Marked progress. The first element of that progress was the surge forces gave us the opportunity to take the fight to the enemy. The second piece, and you'll see that in the tri-fold that you have, was that we changed our procedures. We focused on securing the population. And as a result of that, we needed to live with the population so we have built 57 patrol bases. And those 57 patrol bases, 25 of which are occupied by the Iraqi security forces as well, were with the population. So in general terms, 75% of my soldiers live with the population. Those patrol bases went to places that the enemy owned. We did these major operations and as a result of every operation, we now own the terrain and we could build the patrol base to help us secure the population. And what we have found is the local population, as a result of seeing the patrol base, come forward and they ask two questions. The first question is, "Are you staying?" And when the local population's convinced that we're going to stay, the next question is, "How can we help?" And as a result of that second question, what we have now in Multi-National Division – Center is almost 36,000 Concerned Local Citizens, the Sons of Iraq, who are securing their respective areas. We've always defined sustainable security as locals under positive control, securing their population. And that is what has happened across our area. Fifty-seven separate patrol bases, 36,000 Concerned Local Citizens and Sons of Iraq. What had happened over the last 13 months is the conversation had changed. Early, with major attacks taking place, I'd find myself on patrol bases planning major operations, kinetic operations. What happened about the fall timeframe, based on the things I just talked about, the conversation changed. And after the first of the year, I was able to publish a new order that focused on capacity building. Now when I go to patrol bases, like today I went to one of my patrol bases, I immediately leave the patrol base and go visit with the population and talk to the people. Today it was in the Jezurdiyala[ph] area. Yesterday it was in Musayyib. And the conversation now has changed. It's no longer about security, it's about jobs. It's about capacity. It's about the economy. It's about local governance. And that's exactly where we were all the up until the 25th of March. Now you can see in your graphics and you can see on this chart, there was a major spike of attacks coincidental with the operations in Basra and Baghdad. We've always said that inside of Iraq there are three types of enemy: Sunni extremists, Shi'a extremists, and then marked Iranian influence. And we've been fighting those three types of enemy as long as we've been here. We've had great effect against the Sunni extremists primarily because of the things that I talked to you about already. We truly have the Sunni extremists either killed or captured or have left our area or have gone to ground. So we've got pretty good fidelity on what's left with the Sunni extremist population.

The other set of the population were the Shi'a extremists. These are not members of the conventional Jaish al-Mahdi. We do not declare Jaish al-Mahdi as our enemy. Our enemy are Shi'a extremists – criminals, thugs who are hurting the people of Iraq for their own interests. In my area, we were always convinced that there were about 600 Shi'a extremists divided into 10 special groups. And we had good visibility on where those groups were. And in concert with the Iraqi security forces, we were taking the fight to the Shi'a extremists. What happened as a result of the operations in Basra and Baghdad, even in my area, the Shi'a extremists became more

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active. Now I'll show you exactly what happened. You can see that there are major Shi'a population centers across my area of operation and they are reflected on your graphic with these squares. What we had were attacks in those Shi'a population areas generated by Shi'a extremists. And they started about the 25th of March. Those attacks took place out here in Wasit province, in Al Kut, in Numaniyah, and Aziziyah. And as you can see, in Al Kut, for example, in that window between the 25th and the 30th of March, there were 13 attacks. No specific fatalities to the Iraqi security forces but many, many wounded. But there have been no attacks or disruptions since the 30th of March. In that period of time, 25 to 30 March, in MND-C's area, we experienced about 78 attacks all across the area. And the high on any one day was 28 attacks. Over the last four days now, we have reverted to the normal level of attacks. Yesterday we had one attack. The day before we had no attacks. When I left my headquarters today, there were no attacks across our entire operating environment which, again, is Mahmudiyah qaddah, Mada'in qaddah, Karbala, Najaf, Babil, and Wasit province. But in that period of time, 25 to 30 March, there were, indeed, attacks and a lot of those attacks took place in Wasit province in Al Kut. You can see three attacks in Numaniyah. You can see an attack on a police station in Aziziyah. In addition to that, we saw other areas in our operating environment that experienced attacks. One harassing attack in Iskandariyah; harassing attacks in Mahmudiyah. Many of these attacks were RPG, rocket-propelled grenade attacks, and small-arms fire. You see in some areas, in addition to attacks, for example, in Mahdiyah, there were, indeed, demonstrations. So in Suwayrah there was a peaceful demonstration; two small, peaceful demonstrations. There was a peaceful demonstration of 250 people in Jezurdiyala[ph]. There was a peaceful demonstration of 1,000 participants in Nahrawan on the 27th of March. So in addition to an experience[sic] in attacks, what we saw was in some areas, demonstrations in support of the Government of Iraq. In the southern provinces that are in my operating area that have been reverted to provincial Iraqi control where the governors in those provinces and the Government of Iraq have the security responsibility, there were, indeed, attacks in Karbala – three attacks. And there was, indeed, a mortar attack in Najaf. So when the period of increased attacks finished, the numbers of casualties that we experienced in our area were—one of my soldiers was killed. Five more wounded. Seventeen members of the Iraqi security force were killed. Eighty-two more wounded. And then five civilians were killed and thirteen wounded. So that is, indeed, what happened in the Multi-National Division – Center area during that period, 15 to 20 March. Now what I saw was I saw a tactical and an operational opportunity. Remember, three types of enemy: Sunni extremist, Shi'a extremist, and marked Iranian influence. And when the attacks increased, what happened is the Shi'a extremists in my area that we were having problems finding, came out of their holes. And as a result of them coming forward to conduct attacks against the Iraqi security forces, the Iraqi people, and the coalition forces, we could then take the fight to them. And if you look closely on the left-hand side, you'll get a sense of the effect we had on the Shi'a extremist population. As I said, all along we assessed to be about 10 special groups of Shi'a extremists in our area that were equipped with munitions, many of which [were] supplied by Iran. But we knew where they were. All told, we thought there were about 600 Shi'a extremists and the operations that we did during that period of time as a result of the violence—the increase in the violence, had this kind of effect on the enemy. We describe specific leaders of the cells, the indirect fire cells and the IED cells, as

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high-value individuals; division, brigade, and battalion. And over the course of that six-day period of time, we could take down four of those high-value individuals. Operations with the Iraqi security forces allowed us to kill 69 of the Shi'a extremists and wound 5 more and detain 537 who we believe were somehow affiliated with those Shi'a extremists. Of those 537, about 230 are still in detention – either Iraqi security force detention or in coalition detention. The enemy needed his leaders to conduct operations. We took some of those away. The enemy needed his led, his soldiers, if you will, and many of those are now currently detained. And he also needed ammunition. What happened over that six-day period of time, the local citizens came forward and showed us where the enemy was storing their ammunition and these weapons caches. And as you can see, we picked up 18 weapons caches that had a direct tie to Shi'a extremists. And if you look at your graphic, you'll see the dates and the locations where we picked up those weapons caches. For example, in the vicinity of Mahmudiyah, significant weapons caches. On one cache was 106 AK-47s, small weapons, 9 sniper rifles. You can see that on the 28th of March, a large cache that included 18 complete explosively-formed penetrators. These explosively-formed penetrators are killing my soldiers, killing the Iraqi security force soldiers, killing innocent Iraqi civilians, and are traced back to Iran. So to be able to take 18 complete EFPs off the street, 29 EFP cylinders, and many copper cones and their back plates significantly reduce the enemy's access to these explosively-formed penetrators. And that wasn't the only cache where we found EFPs, if you will. I want to give you a sense of what those caches looked like and give you a flavor of the amount of the munitions so let's show the pictures, please. Okay, this will scroll through the caches that we found. You can see rockets. You can see EFPs—that's an explosively-formed penetrator already rigged to be placed against one of our soldiers. You can see Katyusha rockets there – supplied, again, by Iran. You can see large numbers of mortar rounds, indirect fire capability for the enemy. A lot of small-arms ammunition we were able to take off the battlefield. That's an EFP cone in the back of that truck that General Abdul Amir[ph] is looking at. There is a suicide vest that we were able to take off the streets, loaded with ball bearings. There's another suicide vest. Large amounts of homemade explosives. That's a bag of homemade explosives. Many rounds, ammunitions, detonating cord. You can see that is a Katyusha rocket, an Iranian rocket, that's rigged—that's on a rail and is rigged to explode—to launch. You can see the numbers of AK-47s I described about in that large cache. You can see more rockets on rails in the back. More mortar rounds. Many of these found by our Iraqi security force colleagues, turned in by the local nationals. More mortar rounds. More rockets. And you see all those EFP there: EFP cones, EFP base plates. Okay. Let's get that chart back up. No, the other one there. Thanks. So what we experienced in my area, Multi-National Division – Center area, is we experienced a tactical and an operational opportunity to take the fight to the Shi'a extremists. That population of the enemy against the people of Iraq. So those weapons caches that we took away precluded him to have the ability of placing that large number of EFPs, those AK-47s, those homemade explosives, those things I described. In addition to that, there were IEDs that were emplaced – designed to target my soldiers, Iraqi security force soldiers, or innocent civilians – that we were able to find and clear before they detonated. Now we take this personal. As I described to you, Sunni extremists, Shi'a extremists, marked Iranian influence. Last night I attended a memorial service for one of my soldiers; he was killed by an explosively-formed penetrator. Tonight I do the same thing.

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These Iranian munitions, placed in the hands of the Shi'a extremists, are causing devastating affects on Iraqi security forces, on the coalition forces, and your innocent Iraqi people. And that just has to stop. By being able to take this many individuals off the street, detain them for tactical questioning, and then keep some in detention significantly degrades the Shi'a extremists' capability to perform operations in our area. So, yeah, there was a spike in violence; no doubt. We went from 2 attacks to 28 attacks; no doubt. During that five-day period of time, 78 attacks; no doubt. But what that enabled us to do is to take the fight to the Shi'a extremist. He came out of his hole. We were able to kill or capture 537 of them, take down a lot of the high-value individuals, and take away an amazing amount of munitions off the battlefield. So it was, indeed, a tactical and operational opportunity that we seized. Now we, as defined as an amazingly capable Iraqi security force in our area—in my area and my coalition soldiers who supported their operations. The majority of the operations against the Shi'a extremists in Multi-National Division – Center were led by the Iraqi security forces, not by the coalition forces. And what we provided is we provided specific support. We provided Medevac support for wounded soldiers and local nationals. We provided air weapons team support. My combat aviation brigade worked with the Iraqi security forces and my soldiers provided air weapons coverage for operations against the Shi'a extremists that resulted in 23 enemy killed. And on 10 occasions, where the Iraqi security forces or my soldiers were in contact with the enemy, provided troops and contact support. Down near Rial[ph] Hillah, there was a period of time where the Hillah area was experiencing indirect fire. So we repositioned our assets to be able to do counter-mortar operations. We repositioned a radar system. We repositioned additional mortars to be able to take the fight to the enemy down there. The U.S. Air Force, again, in support of the Iraqi security forces and my forces, flew 39 sorties, flew a large amount of ISR missions, and conducted 7 show-of-force missions. When, in an area like Karbala or Najaf, the security forces ask for help, a lot of the time they are asking for air weapons coverage or show-of-force by the U.S. Air Force and that's what happened out in Wasit province on two occasions. And as you can see, armed over-watch missions and a large amount of ISR coverage as well. So you can drop that and give me the first slide back up, please. The first graphic, please. Do you got that handy?

UNIDENTIFIED:

Sir, we had to take...

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Okay. That's fine. Just this one. I just need the one. Remarkable progress. Thirteen months: Mahmudiyah qaddah, Mada'in qaddah, Karbala, Najaf, Wasit, and Babil province. Twenty-five attacks a day to less than two attacks a day. A spike in violence over about a six-day period of time based on Shi'a extremists. We took the fight back to the enemy; killed or captured many of the enemy. And now operations are back to where they used to be with, like I say, less than two attacks on a daily basis. Many days with no attacks. And now the conversation is back to where it was. Yesterday I walked the streets of Musayyib. Musayyib is 60% Shi'a, 40% Sunni. I walked through the streets of Musayyib; the markets were full. Everybody was going about their own business. Same today in Jezurdiyala[ph]. So we're back to where we were. We took a lot of the

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enemy away as a result of the attacks and now we'll continue the mission. And with that, I'm— I'll be glad to take any questions you might have. Please.

REP1:

Two questions, please, General. James Bays from Al Jazeera English.

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Just give them to me one at a time if you would.

REP1:

Yup. First question is you talk about this huge spike of activity and then completely back to where you were before. Doesn't that just show the power of Muqtada al-Sadr that when he issues the order, everything stops?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Well, it shows three things. You know one is we were glad that Muqtada al-Sadr issued an order and the conventional Jaish al-Mahdi forces laid down their arms. We were happy about that. That had an affect and we're happy about that. The second thing that happened in my area is we took a lot of the enemy away. You can't do attacks if you are detained or killed. And we took a lot of their munitions away. So it's a combination of those three things.

REP1:

Second question. You say you took the enemy away and your figures show that you detained 537 but you then went on to say that you only have 230 still in custody so you just released the others? If they were so dangerous, why have they been released?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

As we do in all our operations, you do some initial detentions. You do some initial questioning; some tactical interrogation. And if it looks like he's not a threat, then you release him back into the area. And that's what happened in those cases. That's our normal procedure. Please. Let me get hooked up here.

REP2:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

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I have one question. Do you think that truce will make the government and Jaish al-Mahdi to stop their confrontation as the situation in Basra may it reflect on Baghdad and especially with the demonstration on the 9th of April? The second question. The MND forces role just to the support the Iraqi security forces or participate in the intelligence also?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

No. To answer your second question first, our role is to do both the things you describe. Work with the Iraqi security forces, provide them the support that they need, and work to gather intelligence and share that intelligence. So a perfect example is today. Today I go to Jezurdiyala[ph] and I meet with Colonel Ahmad who is the commander of the national police brigade in that area. What happened as a result of the Shi'a extremists' attacks were people in Jezurdiyala[ph], who didn't want the attacks, they called in an amazing amount of human intelligence. And he received that intelligence and he has shared that intelligence with us. Same way as we get information and intelligence, we share with him. So it's a cooperative effort. We do this together. And I'll need your first question again, please. Just give me them one at a time if you would.

REP2:

[Repeats question in Arabic.]

INT:

Do you think the truce between government and Jaish al-Mahdi will make another confrontation between Jaish al-Mahdi and the government, especially with the critical situation in Basra? And Muqtada al-Sadr calls upon his followers to demonstrate on the 9th of April.

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Yeah. What I see in my area, from a larger perspective first, is I saw that there was this window of opportunity that was created by the operations over the last 13 months. And I saw the Government of Iraq walk through that window of opportunity. They took the fight to the enemy. That's what heads of states do. That's what security forces do is they take the fight to the enemy. And that's what happened down there. Now that there has been an agreement between the Government of Iraq and Muqtada al-Sadr, the amount of attacks have, indeed, decreased. How long it stays there, I'm not sure. But as I say, in my area I continue to have visibility on where the Shi'a extremists are – the criminals and the thugs – and will continue to take the fight to them. Please.

REP3:

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Major General, I'm Ernesto Aldonia[ph] with The Washington Post. At the universe of these 10 Shi'ite extremist groups that you describe, how many would you say take their cues from Muqtada al-Sadr? How many are influenced by his orders?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

That's a question I get all the time and it's almost impossible to answer. I mean there are, indeed—there is, indeed, some level of influence, I believe, in my area by Muqtada al-Sadr, specifically with Jaish al-Mahdi and the conventional forces. Having said that, these Shi'a extremist special groups – who I believe are doing things in their own interests – they are criminals, they are thugs, they are doing things against the people of Iraq for their own interests. I can't tell you how many of those have any influence by Muqtada al-Sadr. But I do know in my area there is about 10 of those groups and we'll continue to take operations against them. Please.

REP4:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

Hassem[ph] Massari[ph] from Al Ain News Agency. You refer to the criminals as for the Multi-National Forces they are Shi'ite extremists and Jaish al-Mahdi. Do you have some evidence to the engagement of the Iranian side in Basra? And if you have such evidence, you can tell us about? And what your response about Muqtada al-Sadr's statement lately?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Shukran jaziilan. The evidence that I have in my area, I showed you on the TV; and it is the Iranian munitions that are in my area that are killing my soldiers, Iraqi security forces, and innocent civilians. Those explosively-formed penetrators are directly traceable back to Iran. Those Katyusha rockets are directly traceable back to Iran. That's the evidence I have that there is Iranian influence on Shi'a extremists in my area. There are also indications that maybe these Shi'a extremists have been trained by Iran or trained by Iraqi surrogates who have been to Iran to receive training and then came forward to train the Shi'a extremists. That is, indeed, happening in my area. No doubt about that. That's what I can tell you. Was there another question?

REP4:

[Repeats question in Arabic.]

INT:

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The second question. What's your opinion about the conditions of Muqtada al-Sadr in his latest statement for the truce?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Yeah. We welcome that because it's been a stabilizing influence. When Muqtada al-Sadr first had a ceasefire agreement, we saw a reduction in attacks. When he renewed that ceasefire agreement, we saw another reduction in attacks. And now that he's made a statement to call for peace, that's very powerful. And we hope that that continues. But as I said with the other question, he doesn't control all the Shi'a extremists inside of Iraq and there are certain areas that he just doesn't control and those places we've got to continue to take the fight to them because they are still fighting us.

Please.

REP5:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

Huriyah TV. As a military man, what Iraq has been witnessed give al-Qaeda in Iraq an opportunity because Multi-National Force engaged with the Mahdi Army and to give the al-Qaeda in Iraq opportunity to prepare itself in Iraq?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Now, I think you're exactly right; I think that's exactly what we have now. See, as I said, what I saw from my vantage on the 24th of March was the Government of Iraq saying, "Hey. We can't tolerate Shi'a extremists, criminals, and thugs controlling places like Basra. So we've got to take the fight to the enemy." That's exactly what we think should happen and I think they took advantage of the window of opportunity that was opened by the surge forces. I see that in my area all the time. See, I've got competent, capable Iraqi security forces that are taking the fight to the enemy all the time and I'm most impressed with them on a daily basis. Today I was with the 3rd Brigade of the 1st National Police Division and they are, indeed, very effective men taking the fight to the enemy; taking advantage of this window of opportunity that has been created. Any other questions? Please.

REP6:

Bryan from AFP. General, of the 237 that you still have in custody, how many of these do you estimate actually were in Iran for training? Secondly, do you have an idea of the Iranian involvement in negotiating the truce?

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MAJ GEN LYNCH:

To answer your second question, no; I have no visibility on that. The first question. There are, indeed, people that have been detained who have confirmed that they were either trained in Iran or trained by Iraqi surrogates who were trained by Iran and came back in the area. I couldn't tell you, of the 237 that we currently have detained, how many of those are directly involved in that. But the point is, significant Iranian influence on Shi'a extremists in my area by providing munitions and by, indeed, conducting some training. Anything else? Please.

REP7:

Hi. Charles Levinson. USA Today.

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Hi, Charles.

REP7:

How are you? Are you talking to any of the Sadr leaders at the provincial letters—provincial level? I mean do you have contacts with these people? Are you trying—I mean is there communication or negotiations or anything of the sort with these guys?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Yeah. We talk to everybody in our operating environment.

REP7:

But are they talking to you?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

They are—some are talking to us as well. See, it's all about—in my mind, it's all about reconciliation. Remember, you don't reconcile with your enemies—you don't reconcile with your friends, you reconcile with the enemies. So it's aggressive outreach on everybody that we can talk to to try to ensure we can have security and stability in Iraq. Okay. Well, I appreciate—oh.

REP8:

[Unintelligible]

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

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I thought—Tina. How you doing?

REP8:

Tina Susman from The LA Times. In terms of reconciliation in general, you know you say you can't reconcile with your friends, but would you say that there's been, on the Government of Iraq level, reconciliation with—solid reconciliation with anybody at this point? How satisfied are you with the process of government reconciliation?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Sure. Nothing ever happens as quickly as you'd like. All of us would like to see all this reconciliation happen overnight. As a result of that, everybody stops shooting and everybody works toward a prosperous Iraq. So it doesn't happen as quickly as you'd like. The reconciliation that I see, Tina, on a daily basis, I find to be most encouraging. Today, in Jezurdiyala, I met with two Sons of Iraq leaders. One was Sunni and the other was Shi'a and they were working together to secure their area. And in their respective groups, they had a combination of Sunni members and Shi'a members as well. I no longer see, at the level that I deal with, people identifying themselves as Sunni or Shi'a. I see them identifying themselves as Iraqi. Now we do, indeed, work with the ministries and the government to facilitate reconciliation. We deal with those agencies on a daily basis and I'm seeing some progress. So, for example, out in Jurf al Sukr on the Euphrates River – which was, indeed, a den of al-Qaeda about 13 months ago – now is, indeed, a secure and stable environment. And as you walk down the streets of Jurf al Sukr, you are walking on paved roads that were paid for by the Babil government, the Shi'a government, for this Sunni area. And when you see the police in Jurf al Sukr, these policemen used to be Sons of Iraq but the Government of Iraq said, "Okay. Let's make them Iraqi police." Sent them off to the appropriate academies, and then brought them back to be legitimate police in the city of Jurf al Sukr. So to get to your specific question, I see progress. It's not happened nearly as quick as we like, but it is, indeed, progress in the right direction. Please.

REP9:

Abigail Housliner[ph]. Time Magazine. If you are practicing this aggressive outreach to anyone you said, if there is this significant Iranian influence in the south, then presumably that aggressive outreach – for something to really make a difference – you would have to talk to Iran. Do you feel that that's limiting you significantly? Do you think that's going to limit your progress if Iran is playing such a huge role and you can't negotiate with them and reach out to them in the same way that you are reaching out to people on the local level?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Yeah.

REP9:

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How do you see that?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

I'm convinced that there are people reaching out to the Government of Iran. I'm convinced of that. And these are people from the Government of Iraq who ought to be legitimately negotiating with their neighbors. Remember, we've always said that the end state in Iraq is an Iraq that is at peace with its neighbors, is an ally in the war on terror, that has a representative government that respects the rights of all Iraqis, has a security force that can maintain domestic order and deny Iraq as a safe haven for terrorists. So the negotiations with neighboring countries ought to be happening by the Government of Iraq; and I believe that is, indeed, happening. I do know that there are overtures on the part of Iran that try to be helpful. But I can just tell you at my level, at my level, I'm still seeing Iranian munitions. At my level, I'm still attending memorial services for my soldiers who were killed by Iranian munitions. So all that has to stop.

REP9:

Would you like to see the U.S. reach out – U.S. forces – in the way that you have worked with the Awakening Groups?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Well, I believe it's important to have a dialog, an open dialog with all the actors to see what we can do to facilitate moving towards that end state in Iraq that I just described. Okay? Please.

REP10:

[Asks question in Arabic.]

INT:

The last question. What do you consider...?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Okay.

REP10:

[Continues speaking in Arabic.]

INT:

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What do the Multi-National Forces consider the fighters of Jaish al-Mahdi? What do you title them?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Yeah. See, I don't—in my area, I don't title Jaish al-Mahdi as the enemy. I don't. I title Shi'a extremists and criminals and thugs as the enemy. And that's who we're fighting in conjunction with the Iraqi security forces. That's who we are fighting; not Jaish al-Mahdi. Okay. I have time for one more question. Please.

REP11:

[Speaks in Arabic.]

INT:

From Al Zaman Newspaper. You have mentioned there is armed groups for Shi'a. Who support these groups inside Iraq? Who support and facilitate their activities inside Iraq?

MAJ GEN LYNCH:

Yeah. That's a great question. See, when you fight an enemy, you've got to fight the individuals, you've got to fight his source of supply, you've got to take away his munitions. So they're not getting everything that they're getting from Iran; I acknowledge that. Somewhere inside of Iraq, either extremist groups working with other extremist groups and resupplying each other, transferring money for whatever. But just know that we're targeting that as well. You don't just target the cell and the leaders of the cell, but you also target their sources of munitions and money and we'll work through that. Okay, folks, as always, I appreciate your time, taking the time to come see me today. What I leave you with is what I started: great progress. See, you've got a choice in life. You can either accentuate the positive or you can accentuate the negative. What happened is great progress during a five-day period of time, an increase attacks by Shi'a extremists that gave us the opportunity to take the fight to the Shi'a extremists. We've taken a lot of them off the battlefield and now operations have resumed so the conversation again is about jobs, services, and the people of Iraq. Shukran jaziilan. Ma'salama. Thank you very much. Take care.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)

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From the Iraq Communication Desk (icd@osd.mil / 703-697-7323 / DSN 312-227-7323)

4 April 2008

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