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**Presenter: Iraqi Interior Minister Falah al-Naqib**

**Thursday, February 3, 2005 10:02 a.m. EST**

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## Special Defense Department Briefing

(Via Videoconference From Iraq)

Moderator: Bryan Whitman

MR. WHITMAN: Mr. Naqib, can you hear me?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: Yes, I can hear you.

MR. WHITMAN: This is Bryan Whitman at the Pentagon. Thank you for joining us today. And, ladies and gentlemen here in the Pentagon, good morning and welcome. Today, we do have Iraqi Minister of Interior Falah al Naqib. He joins us from Baghdad, and he's been kind enough to offer some of his time, and give us some perspectives of the historic events that has occurred in Iraq over the last couple of days, and particularly address some of the Iraqi security forces, and what they are doing, and how they are developing.

I believe he has a few comments he would like to make, Mr. Minister, and then we'll open it up for some questions.

MINISTER AL NAQIB: Yes. First of all, I would like to thank the United States for helping Iraq and the Iraqis in getting rid of the regime, the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein, and then helping the Iraqis to build its own democratic state. So, I think most of the Iraqi people appreciate that very much.

First of all, I must say that in just two years, Iraq has gone from a total dictatorship to the first-ever democratic vote in this country. On January 30th, 2005, the Iraqis proved skeptics wrong. They stood up to terrorism, and showed the world what's in the heart of the Iraqi citizens. Despite desperate attempts by terrorists to destroy Iraq's future, by intimidation and other cowardly terrorist acts, the Iraqis voted against terror and for democracy.

The Iraqi police stood firm, and they stayed at their posts and terrorists tested their resolve. The MOI security forces responded, thwarting attacks, and captured terrorists, some defended their country's future on the expense of their life.

I must say that the police constable Abdul Amir Mohammed Kadhim was one of those officers who made the ultimate sacrifice. Abdul Amir identified a suspicious man, who was rigged with an explosive belt. He

chased him, and tackled the man, the terrorist detonated his belt, killing himself and the police constable, Abdul Amir. Abdul Amir's acts of heroism of the scores of people standing in the line to vote.

Desperate terrorist events even took the life of an innocent child who had done nothing wrong. This child was fitted with an explosive vest and remotely detonated on the child. The child was instantly killed, and were several bystanders. Other Iraqi police showed up for work made polling centers -- (inaudible) -- secure for the voters, and protected Iraqi people from would-be assassins.

Today we look forward to the future of the new Iraqi emerge. The new Iraq will continue to be strong, have a (inaudible). Iraq will be steadfast and intolerant of those terrorists who seek to destroy this great nation.

I wish to thank all of you who helped make this election a success. May god bless you all, and may god bless Iraq. I will now take some of your questions. The last point I would like to mention that I would like to thank the multinational forces for the support they give us, and really without the multinational forces we could not have done that by ourselves alone. Maybe we would be able to do that in a much more better way next election, hopefully.

Thank you.

MR. WHITMAN: Thank you, Mr. Minister. We'll start with some questions.

Q: Mr. Minister, Charlie Aldinger with Reuters. Have recent U.S. military and Iraqi security raids, are you depleting, or weakening the Zarqawi support network? Are more of his senior supporters being arrested, and is it making him less effective, or is he just as effective as before, and are you close to capturing him?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: I must say that since August last year, we started to build the special forces to deal with those terrorists. In two months the forces have been able to do a lot of jobs. I must say that the last six weeks our Iraqi and Ministry of Interior security forces, the special forces, have been able to do a great job. We have arrested more than 350 terrorists in just three weeks, the last three weeks before the election. So I must say, part of the success of the election are the operations we have been able to do in the last six weeks. We have weakened them very much, and we are continuing to weaken them, and hopefully in a very short period of time nobody will hear about Zarqawi or his group. Thank you.

Q: And the possible capture of Zarqawi, have you been close to capturing him recently? Are there any incidents where you possibly came close to arresting him recently?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: Well, actually, that very much depends on the intelligence information. We are following him, I must say that. I think we missed him twice or three times, but hopefully next time we will be able to capture him.

MR. WHITMAN: Yes, Bob.

Q: This is Bob Burns with Associated Press. I'd like to follow up on just your last comment there. You said you missed him a couple of times. By that do you mean that you had information about his precise location, and arrived too late, or was there some sort of operation mounted against him?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: No. Actually, it's highly dependent on the intelligence information. I think we arrived a bit late. That was just maybe we missed him by one hour.

MR. WHITMAN: We didn't quite hear your answer, Mr. Minister. You were talking about the fact that you believe that you may have arrived a little late in these incidences, and then you said something after that.

MINISTER AL NAQIB: I said we missed by about one hour, maybe. Something like that. You know, he's not staying in one place. He's moving from one area to another. So we will get him, very soon hopefully.

Q: When did these incidences occur when you missed him, was it very recently?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: That was about two weeks ago.

Q: That was my question.

MR. WHITMAN: Go ahead, Bob.

Q: One last thing on that, where or what location roughly, or precisely?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: Well, I think I'll just keep it for the time being. Once we will be able hopefully capture him, we'll release all the information.

Q: Okay. Thanks.

Q: Mr. Minister, Donna Miles, American Forces Press Service. Can you tell me with the recent increase in the last couple of days of violence following the elections, what measures are you taking to step up security?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: Well, I think in the last couple of days after the election the situation wasn't so bad, we expected worse than that. They're planning, they think once we finish the elections our security forces will be relaxed, and things will be much easier for them to do that. But, actually we continue attacking their bases. We have arrested a number of them in the last couple of days after the election, and we are continuing to do that. But, also, I expect they are planning for something. We might see about some bad days in the next couple of weeks.

Q: Mr. Minister, Al Pesam from Voice of America. We all know that there's no timetable for the withdrawal of forces, that it will be condition based. Can you tell us in general terms, sir, what sort of a timeframe are you talking about, some draw down of foreign forces, perhaps, within six months or a year, a significant reduction within a year or two years, can you give us some broad strokes on that?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: I have been talking about that for a couple of days. According to our plans, the Ministry of Interior's plans, in coordination with our friends of the multinational forces, I think we will be able to have a strong security, Iraqi security, a strong Ministry of Interior in Iraq, that can control the security situation in Iraq in 18 months, and of course, controlling the borders. Talking about the withdrawal of the multinational forces, that will be maybe a political question, actually. But from my perspective, and my predictions that we, as a the Ministry of Interior, if we will continue at the same speed we have been doing for the last four months, I think we will be able to have a good control over our internal security by the Iraqi forces.

Q: To take us back briefly -- this is Bob Burns from AP, take you back briefly to your reference to having missed Zarqawi, one other question we had was, were you referring to an Iraqi operation, or was this a joint U. S.-Iraqi effort?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: Actually, in general we have most of our operations coordinated with the multinational forces. Some of the small operations, security operations have been held by the Iraqi forces, with the knowledge of the multinational forces. We started already some of operations by ourselves, and we have a good number of operations done by the Iraqi forces.

Q: These occasions where you missed Zarqawi, was that a joint operation, or was that an Iraqi operation, security operation?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: I said I would like to speak about that once we capture Zarqawi, hopefully it will be very soon.

Q: Donna Miles again. Mr. Minister, you said within 18 months you expect the Iraqi security to be at the point where they can self-sustain. What measure will you use to determine that they are, in fact, ready to do that?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: I couldn't understand the last bit of your question, please?

MR. WHITMAN: I think if I may paraphrase, what are the measurements that you will use to determine if in 18 months your forces are able to be independent?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: First of all, we have to have a good control over our borders. And we already redesigned our border forces. We started already in just one month actually, and we're doing very well. I think we will need some time until we have secured borders, maybe 12 months. For the internal security, there are two parts of it, fighting terrorists. First of all, we have to have a good intelligence organization to bring information. Then we have to have a good strong force to deal with those terrorists, which we already started these forces on. Also we started our intelligence organization. Then we will be able to get rid of all the terrorist organizations in this country.

The other part is the regular police force. We are also redesigning our police forces to modernize our police forces that they can deal with this situation. Other administration things -- communications, passports, traffic police -- also we are working on it. And in my estimate, based on the studies we have, how much we have done, how long time we need to do and how much money we need to spend on this, so that was actually our estimate based on the studies we have already.

MR. WHITMAN: Go ahead.

Q: Al Pesam from VOA. We've heard about the plan to put thousands of the American officers and enlisted men into training roles with your army and police. We've also heard references to the need to build the skills and train the people in the interior ministry and the defense ministry so that they can supervise the military and the police. What sort of training is needed on the civilian side of the management of your armed forces?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: Well, actually, we have been working a very good training program lately. We have developed our training programs. There is the basic training and the professional training. We have quite a number of people who already have done their basic training. We have to start professional training. We already started, actually, some of the professional training.

Also there is training as well in some of the operations, which has been done by the Iraqi forces, the coordination with the multinational forces, which it is also a part of the training programs, hopefully. And I must say that we have a very good coordination with General Casey, which he's supporting all, and we have a very high level of coordination in many of the operations on security.

And also I have to mention that General Petraeus has been doing very well in equipping and training our forces. And I must thank my senior adviser, Mr. Steve Castille, which he made it very easy for us, especially in terms of coordination between the ministry of interior and the multinational forces. And that's a great help for us; and, of course, many other friends and generals who's there who have been working with us very well.

Q: Training on the civilian side, in the ministries. What is the plan for that?

MINISTER AL NAQIB: You mean the regular police, the civilian side?

Q: I mean the people in the ministries who will be responsible for managing the army and the police.

MINISTER AL NAQIB: Yes, we have been doing very well, especially in the special training courses. We are looking for a modern ministry of interior using the latest technology and management and administrations. We have been doing very well in this sector. And I think we are in a stage to redesign the ministry of interior according to the situation we are in.

There are many people who have been trained for management, computers and other skills, and especially the telecommunications, which is vital and very important for us.

MR. WHITMAN: Well, Mr. Minister, we want to be respectful of your time, and we do appreciate you taking the time this morning to give us an update on the security forces. And we'd just like to once again congratulate you on the historic events of the last couple of days and wish you the best as you go forward with the ministry of interior. Thank you very much.

MINISTER AL NAQIB: Thank you very much indeed. Thank you.

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