

partnership between U.S. and Iraqi forces, that U.S. troops might be acting against the Mahdi Army?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Maliki has said publicly that this is about the rule of law, and that this is about bringing the rule of law to all groups who act outside the law -- whether Sunni, Shia. And everybody knows, and he has said explicitly, that the militias have to be dealt with, because they are operating outside the law. He said very clearly that that includes the Shia militia. And I think everybody in that -- without going into details of presidential conversations -- everybody understands that the Mahdi Army and Sadr have to be dealt with.

What was your third part of your question?

Q And do you envision the partnership between U.S. and Iraqi forces leading U.S. troops to be up against --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He has said that the commander will be free to go after those who act outside the law wherever they are in Baghdad. Maliki has made that very clear. That would include Sadr City.

Obviously, the whole premise of this, as I've described, is Iraqis in the front and we in support. And that model applies everywhere in the city, including Sadr City. Obviously, the details of where you start, how you do it, what's the order of the neighborhoods, how do you deal with an issue of Sadr City, that's something our commanders, Iraqi and U.S., are going to have to work out.

Q But could it theoretically envision or include U.S. troops being --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let's not do hypotheticals. I can't be any more clear. We've got an operational concept, it's going to apply through the whole city --

Q But in principle, it could.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- we're going to have to see how it goes.

Q But in principle, it could.

Q In Amman, the President was very clear that Prime Minister Maliki was the man for the job in Iraq. Is the President going --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me just say one other thing -- I'm trying to -- on Robin's question. One of the things you've heard from Maliki is he feels it's very important that Iraqis be in the lead, particularly on the issue of militias. And so I think when you see that issue, that's going to be one area in particular where the Iraqis are going to want to be in the lead, with us in support.

I'm sorry.