

and I'd like to summarize some of those and do it by province before taking your questions.

Iraqi security forces and coalition force operations in the most northern province of Ninewa, a place which many of you know is about the size of the state of Maryland, continue.

Since Operation Umm al-Rabiain or Mother of Two Springs started on the 15th of May, we've seen a sharp decline, not only in attacks but in foreign fighters traversing the western Ninewa deserts. And we have captured or killed dozens of mid- and high-level AQI operatives in the province and in the city of Mosul itself. With the Iraqi army, we've also disrupted the flow of foreign terrorists from Syria, as I said, through that western Jazirah Desert.

I visited Mosul yesterday and walked the streets of that city with my good friend Lieutenant General Riyadh, who is the Ninewa Operations Command commander, real good friend of mine, as well as Governor Kashmula. It is still a city recovering from years of harsh combat, but the population is feeling more secure every day. We talked to many of the people on the streets on both sides of the city, and they are becoming increasingly concerned not so much about security but about infrastructure repair and their number one topic of jobs.

While security is improved, we are still involved in a tough fight against hardcore al Qaeda and other extremists in this city and this province. They've resorted to using car bombs. In fact, al Qaeda has called it -- the fight for Mosul -- the battle of the car bomb. And they have been seen to randomly kill innocent -- (inaudible). They are also using murder and intimidation to an increasing degree in Mosul, because those are crimes that can be done quite simply without being detected. So with our Iraqi friends, we are going after the cells that conduct all three of those types of operations with a vengeance.

In the south of our area, since we last talked to you, we are now supporting another operation, an Iraqi security force-led operation called Operation Basha'er al-Khair in Diyala province, which is an area the size of the state of New Jersey. I know many of you have covered past operations like Arrowhead Ripper in Baqubah back in -- last summer, or Operation Iron Harvest, which we conducted in January and February of this year. So you may be asking yourself why the Iraqis are conducting another operation in that particular province.

Well, I'll tell you why. The cities of Diyala and the large cities throughout the northern provinces are increasingly more secure because of Iraqis turning against al Qaeda and other extremists. The Iraqi police and army are becoming more capable. The extremists are being pushed into the rural areas because of this. They're active, so -- AQI is active, that is, so to secure the people of Iraq, we must continue to pursue the enemy -- and that's, in fact, the name of our operation, Iron Pursuit -- and we must capture or kill the hard-core terrorists that are residing now out in the hinterlands.

An example of what we're facing in the rural areas -- I just want to give you a couple vignettes from the last few days. Last week, both Iraqi army and U.S. military units entered several rural towns where al Qaeda had intimidated farmers for the past few years. These are places where security forces had not been. There were beheadings -- we knew about those -- and murders and criminal behaviors in these towns in rural Diyala.

In the span of three days, U.S. and Iraqi troopers found 57 IEDs along a 1-kilometer stretch of road.

One of our units -- one of our cavalry units found 25 house-borne bombs. Those are houses rigged for explosions, where the roof will fall in on anyone that enters. But yesterday we found a schoolhouse that had been rigged with numerous explosive devices, which could have killed soldiers or, worse, young children. Now, luckily, Iraq is out for their summer vacation in terms of their schools, but we were significantly lucky to find this house before it exploded, and we in fact detonated it.

Many of you have reported on the female suicide vests that have occurred in Diyala. We, in fact, had another one today in Baqubah. And over the last few weeks we've captured several cell members -- we think