

appreciate that. I think they want a better way of life. They have hope for a better way of life. And so the types of activities that these leaders bring to the neighborhoods and the provinces I don't think will be as welcomed as they were in the past. And so if they do try to come back in, we will do everything within our power to pursue them and hopefully interdict their ability to do the same types of things they were doing before.

Q Thank you. General, it's Thom Shanker from The New York Times. Thank you for your time this morning.

A few moments ago, in your discussion about the variables that will affect troop levels, you mentioned elections. As the Iraqi government appears unable to schedule provincial and national elections, will that prevent you from recommending troop reductions? I ask because, as you are no doubt aware, all of your predecessors at MNC-I have found ways to boost troops levels around the time of elections.

GEN. AUSTIN: While certainly the ability to help the Iraq security forces maintain an environment that will provide for safe and secure elections is one of the pieces that will enter into the calculus of figuring out what our troop strength should be going into late fall -- that along with the threat that will exist and the capability of the Iraqi security forces and of course, again, our coalition footprint -- but certainly that is one of the things that we'll have to consider as we go into late fall.

Q Hi, general. This is Courtney Kube from NBC News.

When you answered Tom Bowman's question earlier, about transitioning Anbar to provincial Iraqi control, you said that the agreement wasn't yet finalized; there were still details to work out. Several weeks ago, we were told that it was a dust storm that was the delay in this PIC transition.

What's the reality here? Was the agreement never really finalized?

GEN. AUSTIN: At that point, it was, I think. But since then, they've gone in to work out some more details that they would have liked to have seen worked out. And that was, in fact, what delayed the ceremony at that point in time. It was a dust storm. And so again as the provincial government and the government of Iraq work things out, they will announce the scheduling of the ceremony. And I'll leave that to them to announce.

Q (Off mike.) changed since then? What's still not agreed upon?

GEN. AUSTIN: Well, you know, I'm not involved in that dialogue, between the provincial government and the Iraqi government. And so I'm really not the best person to outline, for you, the details that they may be finalizing.

Q Sir, Gordon Lubold at the Christian Science Monitor.

I just wondered if we could go back to the Sons of Iraq real quick. Do you expect a U.S. role in the meaningful jobs program you talked about? I mean, is it where -- would there be kind of a jobs Sons of Iraq program that the U.S. would play a role in?

GEN. AUSTIN: You know, we do have a role as we speak. We are trying to help the people that helped us. And so as we -- as opportunities are created in the communities, because of things that may be ongoing, in terms of reconstruction and that sort of business, we try to help vector some of the Sons of Iraq into those jobs that are emerging and so -- to make sure that we've got a good marriage of, you know, jobs that need filling and folks with the right qualifications to go into those jobs. But our leadership throughout the countryside is really on a daily basis helping those folks that have helped us to find jobs.

MR. WHITMAN: General, we have just about two minutes left. And before we close it, I wanted to turn it