



AMERICAN FORCES PRESS SERVICE
NEWS ARTICLES

Sadr City Residents Grow Tired of Criminal Activity in Their Midst

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, May 7, 2008 – The people of Sadr City are cooperating with Iraqi forces, but clearing the crowded portion of Baghdad is a painstaking procedure, an Iraqi government spokesman said in Baghdad today.

Tahseen al-Sheikhly and Army Maj. Gen. Kevin Bergner, a coalition spokesman, discussed ongoing operations in Sadr City during a news conference.

“We see some places in Baghdad like Sadr City, suffers from the control of the criminal gangs and make those people suffer,” Sheikhly said through a translator. “The Iraqi government exerted a lot of effort to provide the needs for the people of Sadr City.”

Iraqi security forces and coalition soldiers are working together to bring stability and security to Sadr City, a part of eastern Baghdad with roughly 2.5 million people. The area is almost exclusively Shiite Muslim.

In the current operations in the area, the Iraqi government is going after illegal militias with medium to heavy weapons, indiscriminately launching rockets or against Iraqi security forces and coalition soldiers. The government considers these people criminals, officials in Baghdad said, and is making a concerted effort to drive them out.

“These criminals are using the people of Sadr City as shields,” Sheikhly said. “Government forces are trying to eliminate these gangs without hurting the people.”

In the past few weeks, more than 700 rockets and mortars have been launched into Baghdad neighborhoods. “Iraqi and coalition units are responding appropriately to these teams that position themselves close to public buildings and within residential neighborhoods and thereby endanger innocent civilians,” Bergner said.

The Iraqi people are turning in these criminal gangs and their armories. Iraqi police in Karbala received a tip that led to the discovery of a cache with 20,000 items of ammunition and weapons that included bomb-making materials, mortars, grenades and rifles.

Iraqi police in Sadr City found four rocket launching rails hidden in a hospital. A 122 mm rocket hit a playground and wounded seven people, Sheikhly said.

The people who live in Sadr City are growing impatient, the government spokesman said.

“We care about the safety of the people,” Sheikhly said. “Our troops would be able to crush and eliminate those gangs in a very fast way, but we would like to avoid the human casualties. So we are being patient and trying to be more patient in choosing the operations to deal with those situations.”

The Iraqi government is concerned about neighbors shipping arms and money to the criminal gangs. Recent talks between Iraq and Iran signal the seriousness with which the Iraqi government regards the flow of illegal arms, and the training and funding of extremists in Iraq, Sheikhly said.

“The flow of weapons to extremists is a very serious problem in Iraq,” he said. “We know ... that these extremist groups could not do what they are doing without the support they are receiving from other countries.”

Al-Qaida in Iraq still remains a problem in certain areas, Bergner said. The group killed 31 and wounded 50 more Iraqis in two suicide-bomb attacks in the past week, he noted.

“Al-Qaida in Iraq’s ruthless tactics of sending women to conduct these suicide attacks is another example of the nature of the enemy, its corrupt ideology, and the depths to which they are willing to sink,” he said.

Iraqi and coalition forces are pursuing al-Qaida aggressively, concentrating in areas around Mosul, the Diyala River Valley and other areas, Bergner said.

“They are uncovering terrorist facilities, disrupting their lines of communication, and capturing or killing their leaders,” he said.

Some 50 al-Qaida in Iraq leaders and facilitators have been detained, mostly around Mosul, he added.