

Transcript of AP interview with Iraqi PM

A transcript of an interview Saturday with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi by The Associated Press.

AP: Thank you mister prime minister for having The Associated Press here in Baghdad.

Al-Abadi: Welcome.

AP: I'm going to start off by asking you about the referendum that is upcoming in the Kurdish region in Iraq. It appears the referendum is going to go ahead as planned on Sept. 25 and if it is held, I'm interested in what your response will be.

Al-Abadi: Well our position is that it is unconstitutional, it is illegal, there is nothing that will be taken seriously out of it. It's like taking public opinion but for us it is illegal, it clearly contradicts the constitution. And especially when it's done with a vision that there is a problem within the region itself, the Kurdish region. The parliament hasn't been held for 22 months, so there is a constitutional, legal crisis inside the KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government) and this is a very, very bad move for the Kurdish population, the Iraqi Kurdish population.

AP: But how will you respond to the vote?

Al-Abadi: We are resorting to all legal process we have at our disposal. I think we are submitting to the federal court about the legality, the parliament has ruled this as illegal. The government has ruled this as illegal and unconstitutional and we are within one Iraq. This constitution has been voted on by all Iraqi people including our Kurdish Iraqi population so I think to challenge the constitution in this manner will come to nothing. If you challenge the constitution and if you challenge the borders of Iraq and the borders of the region, then there will not be ... this is a public invitation to the countries in the region to violate Iraqi borders as well would be a very dangerous escalation.

AP: Is the use of force on the table?

Al-Abadi: It will only come into effect and we will only resort to this to protect our population, to protect our Kurdish population and our Arab and Turkmen and other ethnic populations of our own country. If they are threatened by the use of force outside the law, then we will intervene militarily.

AP: Negotiations?

Al-Abadi: I will never close the door to negotiations. Negotiations are always possible. It will make it harder and more difficult. Because there are a lot of outstanding issues, there are disputed areas, there is the oil, there are the borders, there are the ports and other issues which have not been solved for years. This will be very difficult. We

were together in one country and it was tough even then to resolve it. Now if you were to separate (regions), I think to resolve it will be much harder.

AP: Would you ever accept an independent Kurdistan?

Al-Abadi: It's not up to me, there is a constitution. This is not my opinion. I don't have legal authority to accept this referendum. It is a constitutional matter. If they want to go down that road, they should work toward amending the constitution. There are certain ways and very clear (work) toward amending the constitution if they want to go that way. In that case we have to go all the way through parliament and a referendum for all Iraqi people. This is a right for all Iraqi people. This is not a right for the Arabs or the Kurds only. For them to call for only the Kurds to vote in the other areas, including Baghdad, I think this is a hostile move toward the whole Iraqi population.

AP: One of the Kurdish arguments for holding the referendum (that would enable them to declare independence) is that minority groups want to be in a Kurdistan, not in an Iraq. What do you think about this argument and do minority groups like Christians, Yazidis and Turkmen, do they have a future in an Iraqi state?

Al-Abadi: Well I think they have. It depends where they are. There is much more freedom in the rest of Iraq than in the KRG, I don't think you can speak freely in the KRG without being detained, without being kicked out, not allowed to stay. But I think you have to listen to minorities outside the KRG, what they are saying. They want to stay within one Iraq, in Iraq, they don't want to be separated. Yes they want security and they want stability, but the way the KRG is going about it, this is not stability, this is against stability.

AP: In the aftermath of the military victories against the Islamic State group, thousands of men, women and children have been arrested, many of them non-Iraqi, foreign nationals. What is Iraq doing, is Iraq negotiating with their home countries in order to repatriate some?

Al-Abadi: Let me just correct this: they have not been arrested. They have been placed in refugee camps. But the problem is some of these women, some are wives of terrorists, and some have been accused of being terrorists by having explosive vests on them and things like that. So to protect the rest of the refugees, they have been separated from the rest of the refugees.

They are not under arrest at the moment. Of course, children can never be terrorists. So they are investigating at the moment to get information as to what happened, and who they are. Now that we have the number of these families we are in full communication with the countries they belong to (in order) to try and find a way to hand over to them. If they have committed a crime, inside Iraq, I think the adult ones will be judged according to the Iraq law. If we don't have evidence against them then their presence inside Iraq is illegal. So I think this is a matter we have to sort out with the host countries for these citizens.

AP: How many people have been repatriated? How many people have been sent home?

Al-Abadi: I don't have the number at the moment. I think there are small numbers of these families who we have nothing against. There are children. Countries are claiming their custody and it is clear to us, yes, they belong to that country so we don't have a problem handing them over. The number is small...

AP: Fewer than a hundred?

Al-Abadi: Yes, yes, but we are working very hard to accelerate this. It is not in our interest to keep families and children inside our country when their countries are prepared to take them.

AP: I want to ask you about a specific case. Four German women were arrested including a teenager and I'm wondering if there are any updates on their status and situation?

Al-Abadi: Now they are in the hands of the Iraqi judiciary and they are awaiting the opinion of the judiciary and their judgment. I think there's the female teenager, but I'm not sure about the age. It's a question of acting according to the law. But we don't have a problem with children and teenagers, it depends what they have been doing. You know teenagers under certain laws, they are accountable for their actions especially if the act is a criminal activity, killing innocent people.

AP: Could she face the death penalty?

Al-Abadi: I cannot comment on that. This is up to the judiciary.

AP: During the Mosul operation you called on Iraqi refugees in Europe, I think it was specifically Germany but in Europe in general, to return as the city would soon be liberated. But has Iraq taken any steps to facilitate the return of refugees from Europe or to help with their reintegration?

Al-Abadi: Yes, indeed. I think we've entered into very lengthy negotiations with European countries to try to facilitate that. Some of these people they have sold all their belongings. So it is very hard for them to re-establish themselves back in Iraq. So they need some help. I'm not talking about giving away money and donations. I'm talking about establishing some economic forum for them here or an institution. A financial institution to give them very easy loans for a very long period of time for them to establish business here and for them to stay here and rebuild their lives. We are talking about this in detail and some of these steps are very successful at the moment. Some countries have taken such steps. I think it is a reward for them, a reward for Iraq and a reward for the refugees as well.

AP: So it sounds like you are encouraging people to come back to Iraq.

Al-Abadi: Well, yes of course. These are Iraqi people. We don't want to lose our citizens. I'm not going to support forced repatriation into Iraq but I think a lot of Iraqis found it very tough to be in Europe as refugees. They have been promised paradise there, but well, at the end of the day they have seen it. It's not paradise.

AP: I wanted to ask about the foreign nationals who have been caught up in the IS fight. What's the fate of the 39 Indians who were captured in Mosul?

Al-Abadi: They are still under investigation at the moment. I cannot comment any further.

AP: During the Mosul operation there were points where the operation itself was marked by a number of allegations of abuse of civilians by Iraqi security forces. The most well-known of the allegations was against the rapid response division. Has anyone been held accountable for these allegations?

Al-Abadi: Yes, indeed. I have asked for a full investigation and received a report of that investigation. There are some individuals who have been held accountable. However, having said that, not all the information is correct. I think some of it was manipulated but it is very clear in our opinion, even from this media report, this is not a systematic violation. This is violation by individuals inside the security forces and they are held accountable. At the moment we are listening to all reports, to all claims. There is no indication that this is a systematic abuse of human rights or human rights violations.

AP: But, what is the rank of the people being held accountable? My impression is that it is the lower-ranking soldiers, not high-ranking officers, who are bearing the brunt of accountability for these abuses.

Al-Abadi: Well I think both are being held accountable. I think probably the higher ranks for negligence. It is their duty to observe their soldiers and follow up on them. If there is proof that they issued orders or had known and did nothing about it then they are accomplices to these violations. It depends on the military. You have military courts which will rule according to the evidence that is presented to them.

AP: Another Mosul question. Do we know how many civilians lost their lives in the course of the operation to retake the city?

Al-Abadi: Yes we have a number from the hospitals and the ministry. I have three sources: the military, the civil defense, and the ministry of health. The lowest number we have is 970. The highest number we have 1,260.

AP: When you hear those numbers, how does that make you feel? Do you feel that will detract at all from the success of the military operation?

Al-Abadi: One single civilian who lost his life is too much for us. The aim of this operation is to liberate the people from the atrocities of Daesh (Arabic acronym for Islamic State group). But we have to keep in mind that every day when Daesh was ruling there were many civilians who lost their lives. There are many civilians who have been displaced. There were many women sold, mistreated or raped. There are many children who have been mistreated. So at the end of the day, we are facing a terrorist criminal organization. There was nothing in their way. There is no crime they could've committed that they didn't commit during that time.

It is very tough for us. When you are fighting inside the city there is a population, and this organization is holding the population hostage. We tried our utmost to protect the civilians. That's why our security forces paid a very high price. The number of casualties among our security forces was almost more than double the number of casualties among civilians. This is very high in any army. I've spoken to many

military commanders in Europe and the U.S. and they say this is never heard of, that the number of military casualties is higher than the number of civilian casualties.

AP: We just had a very deadly bombing in southern Iraq. With the high numbers of military casualties in the IS fight, does the Iraqi security forces' ability to keep the country safe concern you now that IS is expected to increasingly turn to insurgency-style attacks?

Al-Abadi: We are trying to limit them. I know they are trying very hard to commit atrocities in terms of terrorist attacks against civilians in particular. It is very worrying. It is very worrying for us even if they hit military people, but at the moment, of course, the terrorist attacks, Daesh is attacking civilians rather than attacking the military. They couldn't face our military. But our intelligence has increased. If you look at the past few years, Daesh was trying to concentrate terrorist attacks on Baghdad itself because Baghdad is the capital, highly populated, but they have failed in the last year or so in carrying out any major terrorist attack in Baghdad because of our increased security and intelligence. They are trying to find any opening somewhere to commit these atrocities.

(Referring to yesterday's Nasiriyeh attack, where more than 80 people were killed:) This is a high road, this is a restaurant on a high road which is open to many governorates and apparently they crept in from somewhere on the highway. There numbers weren't great, we have an estimate of between 6 and 8 terrorists attackers who did this. It is just an attack on civilians by machine guns, by car bombs and it happens in Europe, it happens everywhere if terrorists want to resort to this. So if you look carefully, this is now a very narrow outlet for the terrorists. For them to go to that length for such an operation — we are closing in on them at the moment.

If you've noticed, today we started a major military operation in the west of Anbar. We are trying to close the entire border with Syria. We moved to Akashat within a few hours. In the morning our security forces moved about 60-to-70 kilometers, which is very large area to cover in such a short time. We're trying to close all the roads possible for these terrorist cells to move from Syria into Iraq and to commit such terrorist attacks. It's a challenge, not only for Iraq, but for the world. If you look at last year, the number of terrorist attacks by Daesh outside Iraq is much more than the terrorist attacks inside Iraq.

AP: As the threat of IS threats moves outside Iraq, and as the "caliphate" is destroyed in its territorial form, are you opening up new ways of sharing intelligence with your counterparts in Europe and other parts of the West in order to help them combat this threat?

Al-Abadi: This is a must. Our policy is to crush this terrorist organization. This is our priority. Not only in Iraq, in the rest of the world as well. So they can't commit heinous crimes somewhere else. If they are allowed they can come back to the area. We want to crush them. That's why we're helping to arrange to crush them inside Syria and to make sure they never come back. This needs a concerted world effort to do this — all the intelligence (agencies) of the countries that are fighting Daesh and all their capabilities. We must be focused on eliminating Daesh.

This is one of the reasons why this referendum in KRG is against the law. I don't know what happened to the Kurdish leadership to be honest with you, to think they are safe, to think we have crushed Daesh. This is very unacceptable. Daesh is still there in western Kirkuk and they are talking about independence from whom? They will be subject to terrorist attacks. They are weakening all the positions of our forces and other forces that are fighting Daesh. It is very important to stay focused on eliminating this terrorist organization. It is very naïve to think that "Yes we defeated (them) and they will literally disappear." No, this is an ideological terrorist organization. They are going to keep on at it. Our aim is to decrease drastically the number of recruitments to this terrorist organization and to try and deprive it of funds so it will die. I can promise you this organization will die as long as we are focused and we continue with the same results.

AP: Last night you spoke to your Turkish counterpart. I was wondering if you discussed the future of Bashiqa camp. That was something that a year ago had Iraq-Turkish relations at a low point.

Al-Abadi: Yes, I think our (Turkish) counterparts have promised they will solve this very quickly. If you remember, we disagreed on one issue. We agreed that they should pull out, we disagreed (on) when we wanted them to at that time. They said "We'll pull out when Daesh is defeated." We are telling them "Ok, now that in Nineveh Daesh is defeated you met your requirement and you met our requirements." So I think they promised they will evacuate very soon.

But the escalation in KRG is not helping, to be honest with you. This is an escalation. The Turks are very angry about it because they have a large Kurdish population inside Turkey and they feel that their national security is threatened because it is a huge problem for them. And of course the Iranians are on the same line and that's why we are talking to our Kurdish friends in the KRG, the Iraqi Kurds, (telling them) that this is not the time, it is very dangerous. It opens the gate for regional intervention in the KRG. Not in the rest of Iraq, but in the KRG. The KRG is losing the advantages they've achieved over the last years very quickly. The whole thing may disappear.

AP: We've heard that many Turkish citizens who had joined IS were captured or killed during the Mosul operation. Is that something you know about?

Al-Abadi: I'm not sure about that. But I know that about half of the families who are now in refugee camps are families of Daesh fighters of Turkish origin.

AP: So that would be around 500 or so people?

Al-Abadi: 500 or something.

AP: Iraqi elections are coming up and Nouri al-Maliki, your predecessor, is still your toughest political opponent. But as part of the same political party, how do you plan to run for next year's elections?

Al-Abadi: I still haven't fielded any plan for elections next year. I'm still quiet about it because I'm preoccupied with liberating our territory because this year we want to finalize this, to kick out all Daesh from Iraq to secure our border — this is my priority.

My priority is not for me to run in an election. My priority is to achieve this and to make sure that elections are held on time. This is of paramount importance to us I will make sure this happens on time. And that our territory has been liberated from Daesh so all Iraqi citizens can take part in the election.

AP: Would there be a possibility of you splitting from your party in order to run for re-election?

Al-Abadi: It depends who's splitting with what. But my direction is this: I hope, and we are working very hard for this, to depart for Iraq and Iraqi politicians, to depart from blocks which belong to ethnic, or sectarian or religious groups. To reform the whole country we have to run national political blocks which represent the interests of all the Iraqi people. I can see this is the larger demand of the Iraqi citizens. I hope the politicians can meet that demand. That is my goal, this is my aspiration: to see political parties that cut across the board.

AP: Looking back on your first term in office, your successes have been on the battlefield against IS. But when you first got to office, you promised wide, sweeping reforms but have delivered very little on that front. How do you expect to convince the Iraqi people that you have what it takes as a political leader to lead them to a post-IS Iraq?

Al-Abadi: I think we've achieved some of that, which is crucial. I promised that we would fight corruption, but fighting corruption we need certain steps, consultative steps so that you are able to follow up on it. And we have managed now I think by cracking down on corrupt people. At the moment you have seen many are in prisons now. I think the force of the law is now seen by the people and we intend to carry on with this. I don't want the corruption issue to be used against political parties or political opponents. This has happened in the past. We want to move away from this and allow the courts and investigators to look at it very carefully. To fight corruption you need a very detailed investigation. Corrupt people sometimes are smart, some of them are dull, but some of them are very smart. They can hide their corruption tactics. So we have to be very careful in investigating it to the full. It will take time, and it is showing results at the moment.

For the economic performance, we have instituted a lot of economic reforms. The point is, it is not being felt by the people. We had a financial crisis with the collapse of oil prices. But we have been managing it to prevent this financial crisis impacting people directly. So I consider this economic policy a success and a monetary success, and we have been working very hard on it. It is probably not seen directly by many people but I think it's seen by many public figures who are acquainted with the economic and financial crises and they can see there's progress. Iraq's sovereign status has been improved quite noticeably. I remember two years ago we asked for government bonds to be sold on the open market. I think the minimum we got in terms of interest rate was about 11.5 percent. This second time we've done it the interest rate dropped to 6.75 percent, which I think is a huge drop for the government of Iraq working without the support of the financial institutions. The demand we have received is about seven times the amount of the bonds we have requested. This shows an interest and trust in the Iraqi economy. One of the reasons there is this trust is because we have introduced a lot reforms in our economy and in our financial policy.

AP: Two of your most important allies are increasingly opposed to one another: the United States and Iran. Would you say that you have to balance between the interests of the United States and those of Iran as you govern?

Al-Abadi: Well, no. They've always been foes since 2003. The point is that every country has their own interests but there are common interests for all of them: for the United States, for Iran, for Iraq. I'm working on the common interest, I'm not trying to please Iran, and I'm not trying to please the US to be honest with you. But in what we are working on, there is a common interest for everyone. I'm working on this common interest. My job is not to look beyond this. There is a lot of disagreement between the two countries regarding their relationship, bilateral relationship, regarding their policies in the region. I'm not going to go into all their businesses too much. This is not the role of Iraq or the Iraqi government. This is between the two countries themselves. The job is to work for Iraq and there is a huge interest for the United States for a stable Iraq and there is a huge interest for Iran in a stable Iraq. We are working on this common interest, the Iraqi interests, to resolve the issues and we have been so successful so far.

AP: Do their differences make your job harder?

Al-Abadi: Yes. They do. I think at one time I issued a warning: that I don't want to be in a position where I have to micromanage their differences inside Iraq.

AP: Like the mediator.

Al-Abadi: Well, we don't want to do that. The U.S. is a superpower, Iran is regional power and they know their interests very well and they know that Iraq is important for both of them. And we are working alongside that.

AP: Talking about the (current) military operation in western Anbar, how you evaluate it and how long it will take?

Al-Abadi: We announced the operation today at 6:00 a.m. and at about 11:00 a.m. we liberated the highway that leads to Akashat, about 60-to-70 kilometers. This is proof that our forces are capable of moving as we did in Tal Afar, with new plans. That is also proof that we cut off the enemy's head in Nineveh when we liberated it. We didn't allow their leaders, their terrorists, to flee and a large number of terrorists were killed. Daesh has lost its ability to fight. I can tell you what they will do: they will carry out cowardly acts against civilians like the cowardly attack in Thi Qar because they don't have the ability to fight us in the battlefield. We have high intelligence capabilities and we chase them and we have plans. I tell the families of the wounded from Basra, Thi Qar, Muthana and other provinces as well as the victims from Islamic Republic of Iran that we will take revenge from Daesh for this cowardly attack.

AP: Can we say that your government will liberate all the areas under Daesh control this year?

Al-Abadi: This is our ambition and we can achieve that inshallah (God willing). After the Tal Afar operation and the current one, we are able to liberate all our lands this year. Of course our main concern is to secure the Iraqi-Syrian borders. To secure the borders we need to cooperate with the Syrian government, so we asked that the

other side of the border be under the control of the government army. We are cooperating with the Syrian government to secure the borders from their side and, God willing, we will open the borders in the near future so that travelers and goods can move.

AP: Going back to the Kurdish referendum, are there any efforts to ask Kurdish leaders to reverse this decision, and in what direction are things heading?

Al-Abadi: A sincere and brotherly call to the leaders in Kurdistan: the decision of referendum is a dangerous one. I consider it playing with fire. This decision poses the biggest danger to our citizens in Kurdistan. All the gains that the Iraqi Kurds have achieved, which none of the Kurds in neighboring countries achieved, are at risk because when you don't recognize the Iraqi constitution, borders and law and at the same time you ask other countries to recognize you, that's a contradiction. You will open the door wide to other countries to disrespect the Iraqi borders and constitution because you don't respect them. You are encouraging others to intervene in Iraqi internal affairs and this is dangerous. The Kurds and Iraq have suffered from foreign intervention in Iraqi affairs. When these countries intervene the crises inside the region will increase. There is now a real legal and constitutional crisis inside the region over the parliament, which didn't convene for 22 months and met only for the sake of one issue, and the government. There is a problem in the region that we have to solve, there is a problem in the relation between the region and the federal government that we have to solve in a brotherly atmosphere and not a separatist one, which will lead you into a new conflict alongside the previous one and it will make it hard to be solved. We are ready and open the doors of dialogue for everything according to the constitution and Iraq's unity, and that's what we told them. We have a constitution that we have to be committed to, and to Iraq's unity. The Iraqi constitution is clear in two articles, one says that Iraq is united and the second one prevents any legislation or acts that impact its unity even from the regional side. So the constitution is very clear and if they want to change the constitution then they have to take the procedures to amend it. These procedures start from discussing them first at parliament and then hold a referendum for all Iraqis. We are partners in one country. Four example, some in Tal Afar asked to be annexed to the federal government directly rather than Ninevah. I'm sure if we hold a referendum in Tal Afar maybe you will see 100 percent agree with the proposal, but is that referendum legitimate? I'm sure other towns want to do the same. Such referendums are not proper. Even if all citizens vote in favor that doesn't mean they're legitimate. We can put a lot of issues to a referendum and ask people what they want, but your approach is not legitimate, your inquiry to the people is not legitimate. It is not your right to pose such a question, but it is the right of the whole country to pose this question. Yes, we can hold the referendum, but is not you who sets the mechanism. It is a case of a country in which we are all partners so we all have a say in it. I respect the people's ambitions, but the ambition is something and to implement it on the ground regardless of your partners' opinion and interests is something else. It is clear that you want impose (it) by using force, now you want to hold (the referendum) in disputed areas by using weapons and to prevent others by using weapons for it to became a fait accompli. Saddam, a tyrant, tried to impose a fait accompli on Iraqis, did he succeed? No. He tried to eliminate the Kurds, did he succeed? No. He tried to eliminate his rivals and opponents — by executions and deportation — but he didn't succeed. Imposing it will succeed only for a short period of time, but it will lead to grave consequences and the gravest consequences will be

faced by the Kurds. I address the Kurds: this is against your interests. I called on the Kurdish leaders, most of them agree with me, that this is a catastrophe for Kurds, but they say we can't talk in public about it. I told them that the real leader is he who tells his citizens the truth even it is painful.

AP: What will be the government stance on September 26?

Al-Abadi: We respect the will of our citizens whether they are Kurds or Arabs or Turkmen, but will not allow an illegal and unconstitutional procedure done under the threat of weapons to yield results. They did it in 2005 and what happened? Nothing. So, I believe, we should take the negotiations path. This referendum will not lead to anything on the ground.

AP: You are heading to the United States, what are the main issues you will discuss with the U.S. president?

Al-Abadi: The visit is to New York to take part in the United Nations' general assembly. It is an opportunity to meet, during two or three days, with maybe 30 of the world leaders and this is important to us. Iraq needs many things, first we have the stability efforts in the liberated areas, we have a real economic and fiscal problem. We need support not only for the liberated areas but for all of Iraq. We had a lot of martyrs and wounded people. All provinces took part in the fight so the development in Iraq needs support. So all that needs international support. We need the whole world to continue focusing on this. Iraq is a good example for others. We have eliminated terrorism and liberated our lands, so we want to tell the region and the whole world that the situation will be better after the terrorism. So one of the reasons to go to New York is to keep the focus on the Iraq. Thanks to God we have succeeded in that now as many of the leaders visited Iraq and there is even a consensus regarding the referendum in the region. They are against the referendum and with the unity and sovereignty of Iraq.

I also informed the leaders in Kurdistan that this success is for all us and that we all benefit when the country is strong and we all lose when the government is weak. If we disagree, the world will not help us, but if we cooperate all will help us and you saw how all the world helped us during the (IS) fight. If we disagreed at that time the world wouldn't have helped us. The second aim of going to New York is that we are entering a new phase. We are moving toward reconstruction. We are considering a number of reforms in the country as well as continuing the fight against terrorism, the terrorism not only in Iraq but in the whole region. There is a draft law under discussion for about six months with the members of the security council not only to criminalize Daesh but to chase them down everywhere. We want to establish something within the judicial sovereignty in Iraq in cooperation with an international team. We have a lot of evidence against Daesh members: how they entered (Iraq) and from where, their nationalities and their finances, so we need an international investigation based on a Security Council resolution to chase them down. This is a major event that happened to Iraq in which we lost a lot of our citizens, millions of displaced people, devastated infrastructure, it is a catastrophe for us that we can't overcome easily. So, we are seeking such a resolution from the Security Council and God willing it will be submitted in this period. Yesterday, I received the last amendments we asked for and the path is open to submit such legislation to the Security Council. The terrorist attack in Thi Qar is a cowardly one; same as the

others in Paris, London, Germany, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria and Saudi Arabia, in all places terrorism carries out such cowardly acts to kill civilians in order to create conflict. In that area (Thi Qar) there are Shiites and Sunnis, so it wants to give the impression that Sunnis were behind this terrorist act so that there will be a conflict inside Iraq, but they will not succeed. Today our heroic operation in western Anbar in Akashat is a response to this terrorist act and we will chase them down and kill them, God willing.

AP: Some politicians suspect that there is no time to hold the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Al-Abadi: In reality, all the provinces in Iraq will be ready to hold the upcoming elections in time. I'm committed to holding the elections according to the constitution in time, and I say: We will hold the elections in time. The only problem is in the parliament now which is related to the (electoral) commission, to have a new commission, so we have to find a solution for that. I don't want to enter into political wrangling over the commission and I'm afraid that some want such wrangling in order not to have a new commission and there will be no elections. Some state in public that there is a conspiracy, while they may be part of that conspiracy to delay the elections for known reasons. To be honest, many of the politicians do not want the elections to be held in time because they fear losing. To those I say: Brother politicians, adapt to what the people want. Our citizens want change so let's make that change. Our citizens do not want sectarianism and ethnic tension. Some are still relying on sectarianism to win votes which is unacceptable. Based on the constitution, it is not allowed to delay the elections and I'm committed to hold the elections in time. They will be held in time, God willing.

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