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General Keane and Barham Salih.

Gol Deputy Prime Minister

11 July 2008

DPM Residence, International Zone, Baghdad

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Abstract

Security is greatly improved, and it is obvious. The ISF is more confident. We've had success, but there are many frustrations. We need democracy, but democracy threatens deadlock. Be very cautious of things said because of how it plays in the United States; don't let rhetoric betray the effort [and the election] to Obama.

Discussion

I did not know this portion of the International Zone existed. We turned off the main thoroughfare north of the GRD. We went through two Iraqi controlled checkpoints and entered a beautiful, tree-lined roadway with a small canal winding left and right beside and under the roadway. We stopped in front of a large gate, got out, and walked through the gate. We were on the driveway of a large home with a lawn off to the left. Salih's guards stood around in suits. We were shown into the house, which opened immediately into the parlor, a huge room with two-story ceilings. Fifty people could easily stand and sit comfortably in there. We [Keane, Fred (b)(6) Kagan, (b)(6) and myself] sat in chairs on one side of the room and waited. A young man brought us water glasses. I wrote in my notebook that I need to write about the rug and paintings, but I don't remember them now. Salih walked in after a few minutes. There were handshakes and introductions and everyone sat again, Keane and Salih in chairs on one end of the room separated by a small table. They were the focus.

My notes are incomplete and disjointed. The room was big enough that sound did not carry very well. This reflects as clearly as possible everything I understood.

Keane: We provide feedback to the President and to others. I do not publish anything. The Kagans publish, but on a non-attribution basis. We've seen reconstruction funding issues, but it all shows that when you bring down violence, that creates rising expectations.

Salih: We have seen significant security improvements.

Keane: Absolutely.

Salih: The ISF has improving confidence, but everything is fragile and reversible. It is predicated on . . .

1.4b, 1.4d . . . JAM and AQI setbacks, but not over . . . but we've had a change of attitude. The other significant thing is that the PM is taking on JAM . . . if we are overconfident or over reach . . . political act required . . . imperative of an efficient, capable Gol that can deliver is not there yet. . . The

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reconstruction contracts are going to the most loyal, not the most competent, and that is very frustrating . . . Iraq needs democracy, but democracy threatens deadlock. Success is possible . . . we have come a long way . . . it is fragile . . . strategic danger of becoming a monster. For example, look at the Health Ministry. You built it, but someone turned the hospitals into torture centers. Building the ISF, but what if we regret that in five years. USG politics is an issue as well.

Keane: You should be careful about the rhetoric that surrounds a campaign. The rhetoric out of a party in an electoral campaign . . . and Afghanistan . . .

Salih: Be patient with us.

Keane: The three of us are the Gol's greatest allies in the United States. The Gol must look to help us help that effort. When the Prime Minister talks of deadlines, that undermines us.

Salih: I tell you frankly, if I were a US taxpayer, I would question OIF. It is uncomfortable for any country to have foreign troops on its soil. We want democratic independence and regional respect. Others don't see it the same. We live in a tough neighborhood. We need long-term US help, but not everybody agrees. . . . Sistani's role . . . negotiations have been fair . . . Iranian ambassador . . . The USG motive is critical to Iranian views. This is bigger than the Gol.

Kagan: I agree. I think the negotiations are key. The recent declarations have not helped.¹

Salih: If we defined a date to end combat operations, if handled well, that would be helpful.

Kagan: I can see it, but it would take time to repair the resulting political damage.

Salih: A conditionality clause, not an open-ended commitment.

Keane: I understand.

Kagan: If there is a date, that will hurt the effort. It will help Obama. It will be used by a hostile media and hurt us. No date is much better.

Salih: There is no more decisive and helpful thing that could be done than to stabilize Iraq, a democratic Iraq, in this region.

Keane: We agree.

Salih: Kurds and ___ appreciate this . . . but it is about politics . . . whether it is Safa in Basra . . . or whatever.

Keane: Elections. Can we do them? And what about malign influence from Iran?

Salih: There will be malign influence, like Chicago, vote early, and vote often [laughter]. I abhor and reject it, but it is reality. I hope the UN will be very involved, and they will help, I think, by and large will help with the legitimacy of the elections. We expect a vote on the Provincial Elections Law in the Council of Representatives on Sunday or Monday.² Then we'll deal with Kirkuk. The KRG offered three options for settling it, by Article 140, by a census, or by . . .

¹ I believe PM Maliki recently spoke about timelines and used the word "evacuation" in a press conference in one of the Gulf States, which caused quite a stir.

² On Sunday, a government spokesman said Monday (14 July) would be a national holiday. It was the 50th anniversary of the overthrow of the monarchy and the founding of the Republic. Hence, there was no CoR session on Monday. The CoR started discussing the Provincial Elections Law on Tuesday. The apparently made no progress resolving a variety of disputes, one of the biggest ones concerning Kirkuk.

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The meeting broke up, and that is where my notes end. As we were heading out the front door, Keane pulled Salih aside, by an SUV, and they spoke quietly for about three minutes.

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