

USF-I COMMANDER'S WEEKLY ASSESSMENT

Mr. Secretary, Chairman, Jim:

Government formation remains at the forefront of our efforts. Ambassador Jeffrey and I are actively engaged with key Iraqi leaders, encouraging them to move forward and negotiate in the spirit of compromise. We've seen the pace pick up since the end of the holiday period. All parties continue to assess options to achieve their respective desired outcome; however, we are sensing an increased sense of urgency and desire for progress.

Overall violence remained relatively low after the Eid holiday; however, the weekend brought a series of indirect fire attacks targeting the Embassy as well as coordinated VBIED attacks in downtown Baghdad. We are assessing these attacks and will work with the ISF to increase their operational tempo in and around Baghdad.

I believe a successful ISF-led, US-enabled operation in Diyala may have surprised AQI elements looking to exploit perceived weakness due to the US drawdown and government formation delays. The operation also demonstrated the solid partnership between US and Iraqi forces and reinforced our commitment to the security agreement and US policy.

Based on intelligence, our current assessment is that AQI is preparing to shift their focus from targeting the ISF to targeting infrastructure. We are sharing this information with our Iraqi partners, including a discussion with the Prime Minister in which I emphasized the need to work together to integrate the SOI into the infrastructure police to provide additional security.

We continue to make progress equipping the ISF, with the next delivery of M1A1 tanks for the Iraqi Army and the delivery of a US-built Iraqi Navy patrol boat last week. We are working with the Ministries of Defense and Finance to ensure a properly resourced armed forces maintenance budget. We will continue to watch this closely, as this funding, along with ISFF VII, will be critical in enabling the ISF to meet minimum essential capability.

Ambassador Jeffrey and I co-hosted a unique day-long seminar with senior Embassy and USF-I leaders who worked side by side to develop a common vision that will synchronize efforts to achieve our strategic objectives. The event was highly successful and indicative of the strong partnership USF-I shares with the US Embassy-Baghdad.

We continue efforts to build strong government institutions through our rule of law initiatives. One of these initiatives is a cross-ministerial committee working to clear the backlog of detainee cases in order to strengthen the criminal justice system, which is a foundation for the rule of law. This foundation is an important component for maintaining the secure environment necessary for Iraq to become stable and self-reliant.

Political

The government formation process remains dynamic; Ambassador Jeffrey and I continue to apply the pressure necessary to speed up the process. We have seen increased momentum after the holidays, with negotiations between all blocks resuming. All continue to play multiple angles in order to find the best outcome to serve their interests. Regional support of a Maliki premiership may be growing with recent SOL delegation trips to Syria, Turkey and Kuwait. Finally, the Kurds indicate they will work with whichever PM emerges while posturing themselves for key positions that best support their long term interests. General impressions from our recent engagement with key players include:

- Prime Minister Maliki: He is optimistic that we will see movement soon and is clearly feeling the pressure of the Mahdi candidacy. The Ambassador emphasized the need for Maliki to reach out to Allawi and let the negotiating teams work and build trust. He stressed that Iraqiyya is showing more flexibility; therefore, a solution is possible if the PM can also be flexible.
- Vice President Mahdi: He views himself as a serious candidate and a key player in the negotiations; however, he may not have the support he needs to be the PM. He stated that he wants to be part of the solution but if he isn't, he doesn't want to be an obstacle.
- President Talibani: He is not engaged right now but is monitoring ongoing negotiations between Iraqiyya and SOL. We emphasized to him that a significant Sadrist role in the government is a red line for the USG.
- Vice President Hashimi: We conveyed to the VP that Iraqi political leaders must have a sense of urgency and that the Iraqi people will suffer with the continued delay in government formation. We also stressed the importance of a united Iraqiyya's role in a future Iraqi government.

In our meetings, we sensed a greater sense of urgency from the key players. Several Iraqi leaders believed there would be progress soon, including a conversation between Maliki and Allawi that may take place as early as this week. While the leaders expressed optimism on the way ahead, divergent views on the limitations on PM authorities remain a significant obstacle. Our focus remains continued negotiations on devolution of power and assurances; compromise on the Presidency; and setting the conditions for a principals meeting between the three (or four) major players.

Security

While levels of violence were low after the Eid holiday, we saw a spike this weekend with rocket attacks in or near the international zone (IZ) and a series of VBIED attacks in Baghdad. There were 114 security incidents, a significant decrease from the previous week and below the 12-week average of 158. There were no US Forces killed in action and two non-combat related deaths.

Although we assess that AQI has been weakened, they remain a threat, as demonstrated by the coordinated VBIED attacks on 19 September. AQI remains focused on the exploitation of weakness they perceive due to our shrinking footprint and lack of government formation. They also continue their attempts to infiltrate foreign fighters into Iraq.

Intelligence indicates that AQI is preparing to shift from targeting the ISF to their next phase, focused on attacking infrastructure to undermine the Iraqi government. We have pressed PM Maliki to increase the cap on SOI transition to bolster infrastructure police to mitigate the threat of increased attacks and will continue to focus the ISF on this threat.

We assess that a successful ISF-led, US-assisted operation in Diyala may have caused AQI to reevaluate their next move based in part on the unexpected sophistication of USF assistance to ISF. In addition, this operation highlighted the advise and assist role US forces can play in accordance with the Security Agreement and Operation New Dawn guidance.

Shia extremist groups took advantage of bad weather and degraded ISR capability and launched indirect fire attacks on the international zone over the weekend. We will continue to investigate and encourage the ISF to maintain the proper operational tempo to prevent further attacks.

The sustained pressure on extremist networks impacted both AQI and Shia Extremist Groups (SEG) last week. Targeted counterterrorism operations continued against AQI targets in Anbar and Baghdad disrupting the courier network and associates of (b)(6)

(b)(6) Two other operations led to the capture of AQI operational cell members directly responsible for kidnappings, assassinations, and IED attacks. Operations also continued against SEG targets, resulting in the capture of a terrorist suspected of IDF attacks in Baghdad.

The current structure of the GOI's counterterrorism (CT) effort hinders nonsectarian CT operations in both targeting and execution due to the direct command and control line to the Prime Minister. We are working closely with the GOI to encourage structural reform. Resolving this issue in a timely manner is an important component of the devolution of power issue, one of the most contentious in the government formation process.

ISF Development

Major efforts continue in equipment fielding and modernization of ISF equipment.

- Iraqi Army: M1A1 Tanks continue to arrive in theater, with the most recent 12 tanks arriving on 16 September, bringing the total number to 23. USF-I advisors are working closely with Iraq's Ministry of Defense leadership to ensure their forces are prepared to receive new equipment and support these modernization efforts.
- Iraqi Navy: The first of 15 US-built patrol boats arrived in Umm Qasr on 19 September. This capability will allow the IN to conduct maritime security operations in territorial and internal waters as well as maritime infrastructure security tasks on and around oil platforms and ports.

Iraqis need continued development of their logistics systems, which remains a concern. The Minister of Defense's (MOD) current force maintenance budget request of \$455M falls far short of the \$1.5B needed to avoid serious readiness implications. USF-I is working with the MOD and the Minister of Finance to establish a budget that demonstrates a commitment to force sustainment. In addition, I will emphasize to the Prime Minister the long-term negative impact this underfunding would have on Iraq's security. Lack of adequate GOI funding, coupled with shortfalls in ISFF VII, will have a detrimental impact on the ISF's ability to meet minimum essential capability.

Transition

- Ambassador Jeffrey and I co-hosted an unprecedented, day-long Combined Vision Development Seminar, providing a forum for our teams to work together to develop a joint vision and determine our best path forward. This tremendous event will allow us to make great strides in developing unity of effort with our Embassy partners.

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- As we consider our transition over the next 15 months, we are reviewing ISR assets available to USF-I. Adequate ISR is essential to provide the situational awareness for force protection, to continue to defeat violent extremist networks within Iraq, and to assist Iraqi Security Force (ISF) operations. USF-I's allocated ISR falls short of the current assessed requirement. Fewer forces means less situational awareness on the ground, making our ISR capability more critical than ever. Loss of currently allocated ISR increases the risk to mission accomplishment and to joint forces in Iraq.

Current boots on ground is 47,727. We occupy 92 bases, 56 of which are partnered.

Rule of Law

In order to sustain the overall trend of lower levels of violence, we continue to place emphasis on development of strong government institutions and rule of law. Rule of law includes a strong and independent judiciary, civil justice reforms, and integration of the Iraqi criminal justice system.

The USF-I/Embassy team is currently working with the GOI Ministerial Committee for Rule of Law and Detentions, a cross-ministerial group created to address the backlog in detainee cases in the criminal justice system. An expeditious case processing system is a critical component of an effective criminal justice system and a key step in establishing rule of law.

I am looking forward to the visit this week by Undersecretary of Defense Flournoy and DASD Kahl to discuss our current mission and how we see the future. Next week I begin my regional travel with a visit to Turkey, where I will introduce myself to key leaders in order to establish a relationship that will assist Iraq to become a key player in the region.

Very Respectfully,

