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USF-I Weekly Assessment 25 April – 1 May 2011

USF-I COMMANDER'S WEEKLY ASSESSMENT

Mr. Secretary, Chairman, Jim:

There have been few political developments since last week's meeting between KRG President Massoud Barzani, Ayad Allawi, and Adil Abd al-Mahdi. Prime Minister Maliki traveled to South Korea to meet with government officials and business leaders to discuss areas of mutual cooperation, including guaranteed oil exports to Korea in exchange for their investment in Iraqi infrastructure.

The overall security situation is relatively stable; however, the level of attacks targeting U.S. Forces (USF) remains elevated. We attribute this increase to Shia extremist groups reacting to recent Iraqi political discourse on a potential post-2011 U.S. military presence. We continue to aggressively engage the ISF and push them to target these groups. We also remind them that we have taken unilateral action in the past and will do so again, as necessary. We are also concerned about the spate of assassinations targeting GOI and ISF officials recently. Both Sunni and Shia groups are conducting these attacks; some are political in nature while others are intended to harass and intimidate the ISF and to demonstrate the GOI's inability to provide security.

Contrary to media reports, there were no attacks at any Christian worship site on Easter. Prior to the holiday, elements of the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police successfully targeted AQI operatives who were planning a complex vehicle-borne IED (VBIED) attack in Kirkuk on Easter. The operation prevented a potentially high profile attack.

Political

Prime Minister Maliki conducted an official state visit to South Korea this week. The purpose of his trip was to discuss bilateral relations between the two countries and facilitate investment opportunities in Iraq. Talks centered on oil exports to Korea and infrastructure development in Iraq. In addition, Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Sharistani signed an agreement with the Korean Minister of Energy for electrical power generation equipment.

The situation in Bahrain remains a significant issue for Iraqi Shia; however, politicians have been generally muted in expressing their views to avoid further aggravating Iraq's relationship with the Gulf Cooperation Council. As mentioned in last week's report, the tension likely led to the delay of the Arab League Summit. The Arab League called for an 8 May meeting (one week earlier than previously announced) to discuss rescheduling the event. Recent reports indicate it will likely be rescheduled for March 2012.

Muqtada al-Sadr remains in Iraq. He is engaging with service ministers in an attempt to publicly demonstrate the Sadrist Trend's dedication to improving essential services. We assess he is also here to tamp down rhetoric on the immediate reconstitution of the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia, which was instigated by remarks delivered by a Sadr representative during the 9 April demonstration in Sadr City. Despite Sadr's efforts, we assess that some JAM elements are attempting to reactivate to conduct attacks

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against USF and will also target GOI and ISF officials who make public statements against the Sadrist Trend. Iraqis have expressed apprehension about a JAM resurgence based on memories of the violence that occurred prior to its defeat in 2008.

The situation at Camp Ashraf is tense, but stable. There has been no further action by the ISF; however, some outstanding issues remain. Although directed by Prime Minister Maliki, there has been little movement by the GOI to complete an investigation of the events on 8 April. United Nations, U.S. Embassy, and USF-I representatives have pressed GOI officials on the matter. I will raise the issue with the Prime Minister again this week. Meanwhile, the Embassy is leading an effort to work with the MeK, GOI, EU, and UN to devise an interim relocation agreement pending a longer-term solution. UN Special Representative of the Secretary General Ad Melkert is attempting to secure GOI permission to bring Ashraf leadership to Baghdad this week to press them to permit individual registration of Ashraf residents with UNHCR, which would be a prelude to resettlement in other countries.

Security

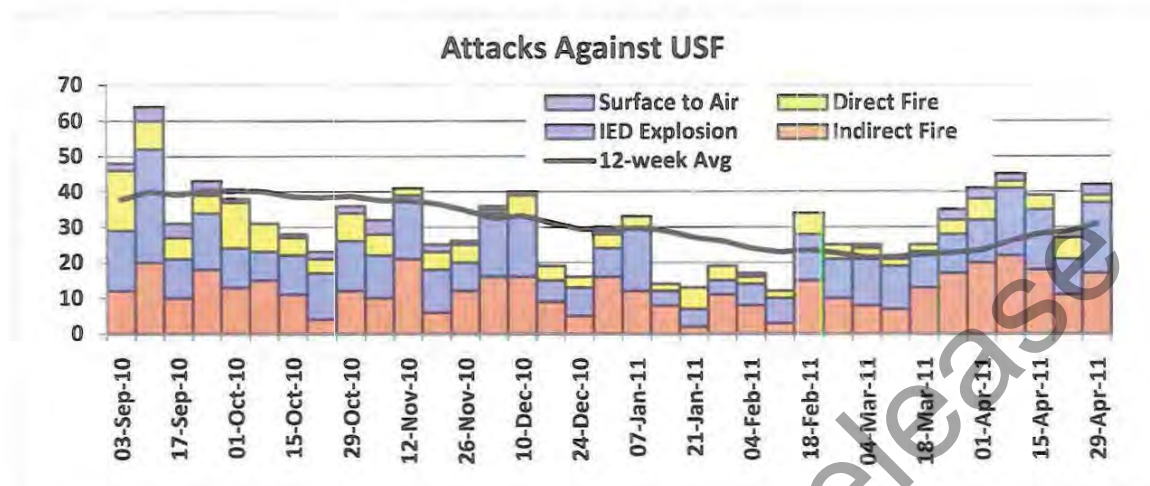
During the reporting period, there were 144 security incidents, a slight decrease from the previous week, but above the 12-week average of 138 for the eighth consecutive week. The number of casualties was 156 (44 killed, 112 wounded), an increase from the week prior and consistent with the 12-week average. One U.S. service member was killed in action; three U.S. service members were wounded in action.



Attacks against USF have been consistently above average for the past several weeks. There were 42 attacks this week, up from 27 and above the 12-week average of 31 (see below). We attribute the increase to Shia extremist group (SEG) activity that is likely driven by recent discussions among Iraqi politicians of a potential post-2011 U.S. military presence. Adding to the rise in violence is the competition between the various groups in their effort to take credit for expelling U.S. troops from Iraq. Reporting over the last few months indicates the SEGs have increased access to leadership candidates, trained operatives, and [1.4b]-supplied weapons. As a result, we have seen a steady increase in attacks, particularly indirect fire (IDF) and explosively formed penetrator (EFP) attacks

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that have resulted in recent U.S. casualties. We are actively working with the ISF to develop actionable SEG targeting packages. If they do not take steps to protect USF as required by the existing security agreement, we will conduct unilateral operations that target these extremist groups.



Although AQI's ability to conduct high casualty-producing attacks has been hampered by limited financing and loss of leadership, it retains the ability to conduct sporadic attacks. On 26 April, AQI conducted a coordinated attack targeting ISF in Kirkuk. Operatives initiated the attack by blowing up a fuel tanker with a magnetic IED and then detonated secondary IEDs targeting first responders. The attack resulted in 1 ISF killed and 24 wounded. Twelve civilians were also injured in the attack. We believe this was an attempt by AQI to exploit existing tensions between Arabs and Kurds in the Kirkuk area. On 28 April, a suicide operative detonated his explosive belt after evening prayers at a Mosque in Balad Ruz, resulting in 10 civilians killed and 13 wounded. We assess AQI targeted the religious service in an attempt to instigate retaliatory action and incite sectarian violence.

Extremist groups continue to target mid- and senior-level GOI and ISF officials for assassination. Although their objectives may be different, we assess both Shia and Sunni groups are utilizing this method of attack. A number of officials were killed this week, including a member of the Ministry of Defense legal department and a brigadier general who worked at Iraqi Air Force Headquarters.

During a routine patrol, U.S. and Iraqi special operations forces rescued three Turkish nationals who were kidnapped on 15 February near Kirkuk. The individuals were medically evaluated by USF and found to be in good condition. We assess the kidnapping was conducted by the Sunni insurgent group Ansar al-Islam in an effort to extract a ransom from the victims' employer. The operation was successful due to the cooperation between the GOI, the government of Turkey, the U.S. Embassy, and USF-I.

U.S. and Iraqi counterterrorism (CT) forces conducted 26 operations, resulting in the detention of 38 extremists. Twenty-one of these operations targeted Sunni insurgents, resulting in the detention of a number of AQI operatives. Detainees include the Military

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Emir of Bayji, an IED Emir involved in assassination plots and attacks against ISF in northern Mosul, a cell leader responsible for coordinating assassinations and IED attacks in Kirkuk, an extortion cell leader who targeted local businesses to fund AQI activity in the Mosul area, and a cell leader who coordinated IED attacks and recruited for AQI in Salah ad Din Province. Two CT operations targeting SEGs resulted in the detention of an associate of the Kataib Hezbollah network in Baghdad and three individuals linked to the Promised Day Brigade network in Basrah who were involved in IDF attacks against USF.

On 25 April, there was an altercation between Iraqi Army (IA) and Kurdish Assyish security forces in Kirkuk, resulting in two Assyish killed and two wounded. A member of the Iraqi Police (IP) who was in the vicinity was also injured. All involved were immediately taken into custody. The IA, IP, and Assyish agreed to form a committee supervised by an investigative judge to investigate the incident. All parties agreed they would adhere to the findings of the committee. In addition, a joint press conference was held to demonstrate cooperation and ease public anxiety over the incident.

In a successful unilateral operation, the Iraqi Federal Police discovered a significant weapons cache during the search of a Mosul home on 24 April. The cache contained over 100 mortar rounds, rocket propelled grenades, firearms (including rifles, AK-47s, Uzis, and a sniper rifle), Katyusha rockets, a magnetic IED, and an anti-tank mine. The location and quantity of the materials indicate the site likely belonged to an AQI cell that was known to target the ISF in the area. The seizure will degrade this cell's ability to conduct attacks in the near- and mid-term.

ISF Development

The ISF conducted its first Iraqi-led, joint military exercise from 18 – 28 April in Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Basrah. "Lion's Leap" involved infantry, special operations, armored, air, and naval units. The exercise included scenarios intended to refine ISF command and control; joint interoperability; cordon and search; air assault; hostage rescue; medical; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities. While the event was, in some ways, a well rehearsed demonstration, it provided the ISF an opportunity to conduct large-scale exercise planning, execution, and after action review.



Transition

Since the GOI began managing and funding the Sons of Iraq (SOI) program in 2009, USF-I has led interagency efforts to improve management and support to the SOI. Working with our Embassy partners, we have assisted the GOI as they move forward on their promise to transition SOI into government jobs by the end of 2011. On 1 May, USF-I officially transitioned lead of the SOI program to U.S. Embassy-Baghdad. To facilitate the transition, we identified 15 tasks in the following four focus areas:

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engaging the GOI to ensure timely pay and support to SOI; pressing for SOI transitions and processes that identify the most suitable employment options; conducting outreach with Sunni leaders to monitor SOI concerns; and creating reporting mechanisms that synchronize USG efforts in support of the SOI program. Although the Embassy will be in the lead, we will continue to provide support to ensure continuity of effort.

A congressional delegation led by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi will visit Iraq next week. We are looking forward to a visit from Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Motsek. His support of our transition efforts has been instrumental in keeping things on track.

Respectfully,



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