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USF-I Weekly Assessment 2 - 8 October 2011

USF-I COMMANDER'S WEEKLY ASSESSMENT

Mr. Secretary, Chairman, Jim:

On 4 October, leaders from Iraq's major political blocs agreed that U.S. Forces (USF) are needed after 2011 to continue training Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). As anticipated, the issue of privileges and immunities was a sticking point. Bloc leaders concluded that there was not sufficient public support and therefore refused to consider a motion to move the issue to the Council of Representatives. Barring an unexpected development, this position will effectively limit the U.S. military footprint to the OSC-I with perhaps some modest augmentation. Ambassador Jeffrey and I will continue to work with senior military and government officials to determine the configuration of the U.S. presence.

Security remains relatively stable, with security incidents, casualties, and attacks against USF down and below their respective 12-week averages. While this is good news, I am concerned about recent intelligence reporting indicating that Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) has lifted its operational freeze. [REDACTED] 1.4b and Promised Day Brigade (PDB), on the other hand, are reportedly continuing their respective ceasefires. The reporting appears to have been borne out by two attacks against our forces in Basrah Province, both of which we assess were conducted by AAH. Whether or not this resumption is permanent is unclear at the present time. We are assessing what the potential implications for the security of our forces are, especially during our reposture.

Political

President Talabani convened a meeting of political bloc leaders on 4 October to deliberate whether or not to approve a post-2011 U.S. Force to continue training the ISF. While the leaders approved the presence of some U.S. trainers, they ruled out granting privileges and immunities. Political considerations were clearly the driving force behind this decision; most leaders conveyed that they did not believe there was sufficient public support for the legal protections we require.

Jim Jeffrey and senior USF-I leadership met with Prime Minister Maliki after the meeting. Maliki appeared eager to establish a U.S. training presence that is mutually acceptable in size, scope, and composition. As I mentioned last week, concern about the decision's impact on his political viability led to Maliki's reluctance to support privileges and immunities.

We are currently exploring options that will allow us to establish a beneficial military-to-military relationship within current political and legal constraints. It is my belief that the movement of equipment, coordination of contracts, and deployment of personnel drive us to a decision point of 15 October to enable the withdrawal of all forces by 31 December in accordance with the 2008 Security Agreement.

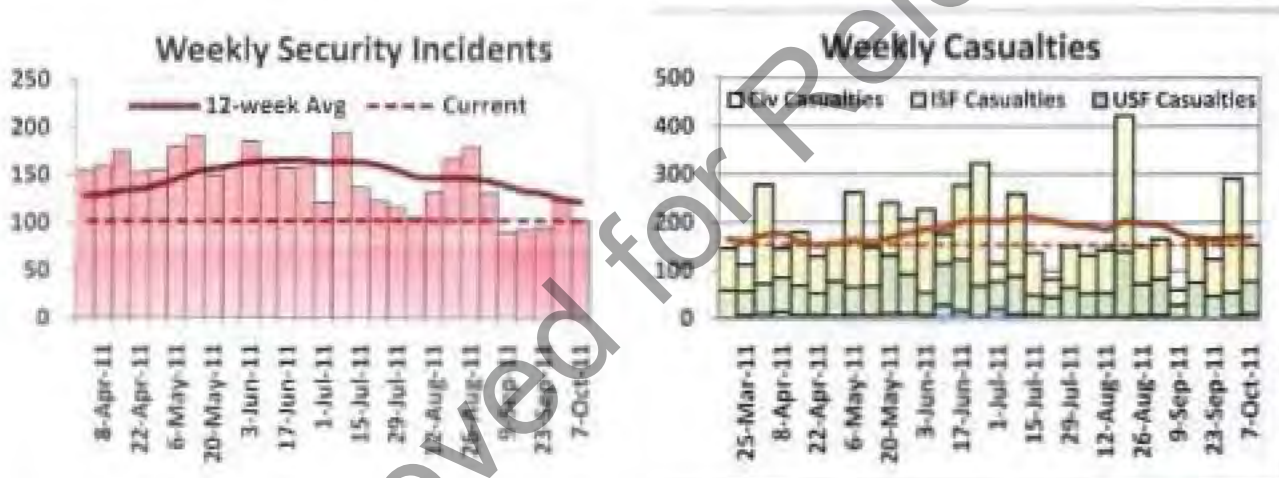
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A delegation representing Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Barzani traveled to Baghdad 6-7 October as part of ongoing efforts to improve recently strained relations between the KRG and the central government. High level officials from both governments explored ways to fully implement all provisions of the Irbil Agreement. There were some complex issues before the group; while the ultimate outcome remains to be seen, the fact that they are communicating is a positive sign.

Security

During the reporting period, there were 102 security incidents, a decrease from the previous week (123) and below the 12-week average of 121. The number of casualties was 155 (31 killed, 124 wounded), lower than last week (290) and below the 12-week average of 171. The number of attacks against USF decreased from 24 to 21 and remained below the 12-week average of 28. One USF (contractor) was killed in action and 11 USF (six service members, five contractors) were wounded in action (one seriously).



There were two high casualty-producing attacks last week; we assess both were conducted by AQI. On 5 October, 14 ISF and civilians were injured when insurgents detonated two vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIED) near a mosque in Ramadi (Anbar Province). The following day, insurgents detonated two IEDs in downtown Baghdad, killing 3 and wounding 26.

Although they did not produce a significant number of casualties, there were two additional attacks by AQI that warrant mention. On 2 October, members of the Kurdish Regional Guard Brigade repelled an attack by 20 insurgents near a checkpoint in Diyala Province. We assess AQI conducted the attack to destabilize the security environment in the North and heighten Arab-Kurd tensions.

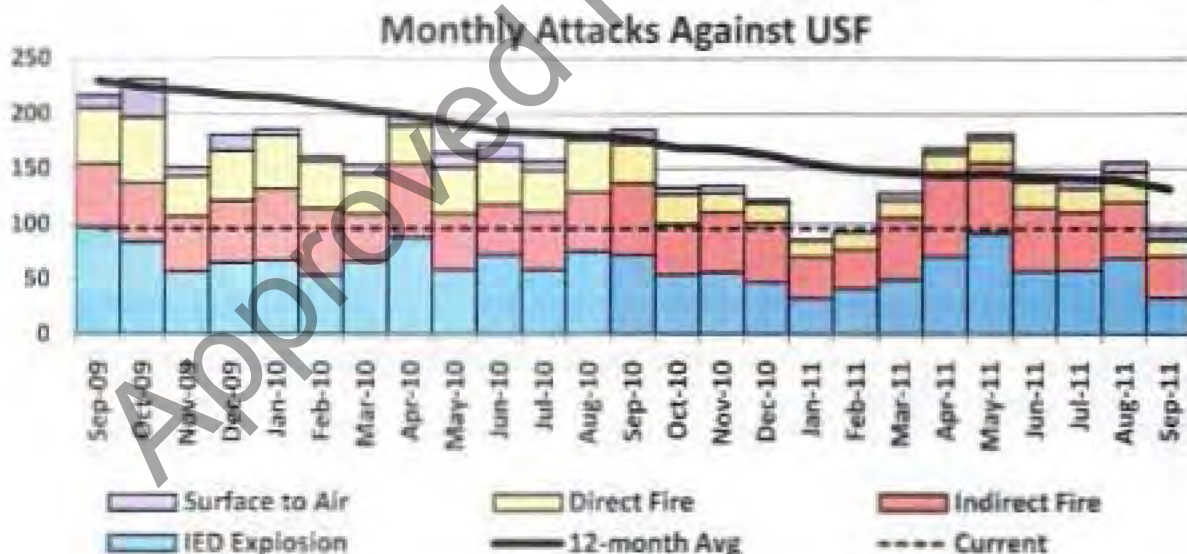
The other attack occurred on 3 October. Four attackers stormed a city council building in Ramadi, taking 21 hostages. The ISF successfully secured the building and all hostages were released unharmed. We assess AQI will continue to target government buildings in Anbar as it attempts to regain its foothold in the Province.

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Although the number of attacks against our forces decreased for the fifth consecutive week, multiple attacks by Sunni insurgent groups resulted in several U.S. casualties. The attacks included an indirect fire (IDF) attack in which three U.S. contractors were wounded (one seriously) and an attack on a logistics convoy in Baghdad that resulted in one U.S. contractor killed and two wounded (not seriously). Additional attacks on logistics convoys resulted in six service members wounded (none seriously). These attacks highlight the increased risks our forces face as our presence on major supply routes increases during our repositioning.

Intelligence reporting indicates the operational freeze by AAH has been lifted. This assessment was reinforced by two IDF attacks on COB Basrah in the South. Both were ineffective and resulted in no casualties and little damage. While we have a high degree of confidence that the freeze has been lifted, we have yet to determine the reason behind the resumption of attacks or its duration. We will continue our assessment and respond accordingly as more information becomes available.

For the month of September, there were 418 security incidents, a decrease from the previous month (663) and below the 12-month average of 621. Casualties for the month totaled 652 (184 killed, 468 wounded), much lower than August (996) and below the 12-month average of 787. The number of attacks targeting USF decreased from 157 to 96, the lowest since February 2011 and below the 12-month average of 621 (see below). One U.S. service member was killed in action and 11 were wounded in action.



During the reporting period, partnered and independent ISF counterterrorism operations resulted in the detention of multiple AQI operatives responsible for assassinations, kidnappings, and IED/VBIED attacks. Joint Iraqi - U.S. Special Forces also apprehended an AAH senior finance leader in Basrah, a member of an AAH cell operating in Nasiriyah, and a PDB commander in Baghdad.

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Transition

The Joint Intelligence Support Element (JISE) recently reached full operational capability in support of the Office of Security Cooperation – Iraq (OSC-I). Thirty-two of 34 personnel have been assigned to the JISE, which is now operating on a 24/7 schedule.

Last week marked a major milestone for the OSC-I logistics section, with the completion of train-the-trainer instruction for the first six professional military education classes. Working with the Air Force Institute of Technology, logistics experts developed over 2,000 pages of course material specifically tailored to the Iraqi military. Logistics personnel translated the material into Arabic, trained translators, organized the movement of CONUS instructors and translators, and conducted a total of seven courses resulting in 27 Iraqi instructors ready to teach at Iraqi Military leadership schools. This accomplishment is the first of its kind and is a significant step forward in developing logistics sustainment as a discipline and creating a professional logistics capability within the ISF.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. J. ...".

Approved for Release

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