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USF-I Weekly Assessment 16 - 22 October 2011

USF-I COMMANDER'S WEEKLY ASSESSMENT

Mr. Secretary, Chairman, Jim:

It was a quiet week in Iraqi politics; the Council of Representatives (COR) is in recess and many GOI leaders are abroad in preparation for the Hajj. After his conversation with President Obama, Jim Jeffrey and I discussed future opportunities for security cooperation with Prime Minister Maliki. Earlier in the week, I met with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Barzani to discuss the way ahead. He was dismayed by the central government's decision and expressed frustration with Prime Minister Maliki. I encouraged him to continue the open dialogue between GOI and KRG officials of recent weeks and to utilize the Combined Security Mechanism as a forum to resolve disputes between the two governments.

Security indicators were low across the board: incidents dropped by over half, casualties decreased by nearly 80 percent, and attacks against U.S. Forces (USF) dropped by almost half. These numbers reflect low levels of activity amongst Sunni and Shia extremist groups during the reporting period. They also reflect the decrease in host nation reporting that has occurred due to a loss of touch points with our ISF counterparts as we reposture. The low number of casualties can be attributed to a lack of successful high profile attacks by AQI, which is likely in a refit and resupply phase.

Our reposture remains on track. We are operating from 18 locations after transferring two bases during the reporting period. In addition, we have repostured approximately 1.68 million pieces of equipment since September 2010 and are on track to reposture remaining items no later than 31 December.

Political

The Ambassador and I spoke with Prime Minister Maliki after his video conference with the President. We discussed the elements of future security cooperation between the U.S. and Iraq: all troops will be out of the country by the end of the year; contractors under the OSC-I will help the ISF field new equipment; additional trainers under an enhanced OSC-I; and security cooperation exercises. Maliki was supportive of this approach and stressed his desire for an enduring relationship with the United States based on the Strategic Framework Agreement.

On 19 October, I met with KRG President Barzani. He expressed disappointment that political bloc leaders refused to grant privileges and immunities to a post-2011 U.S. training force. He feels the Prime Minister and other leaders succumbed to 1.4b, 1.4d instead of doing what was in the best interest of Iraq. He stated that although he was losing faith in Maliki, he and members of his government will continue to work with the GOI on issues such as Article 140 and hydrocarbons legislation, provided they are addressed within the framework of the Iraqi Constitution.

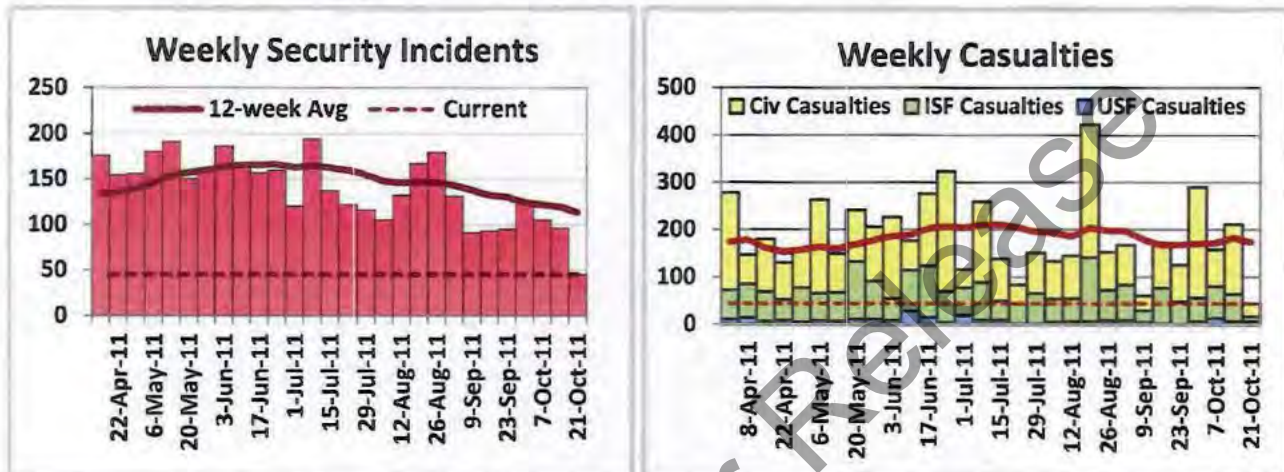
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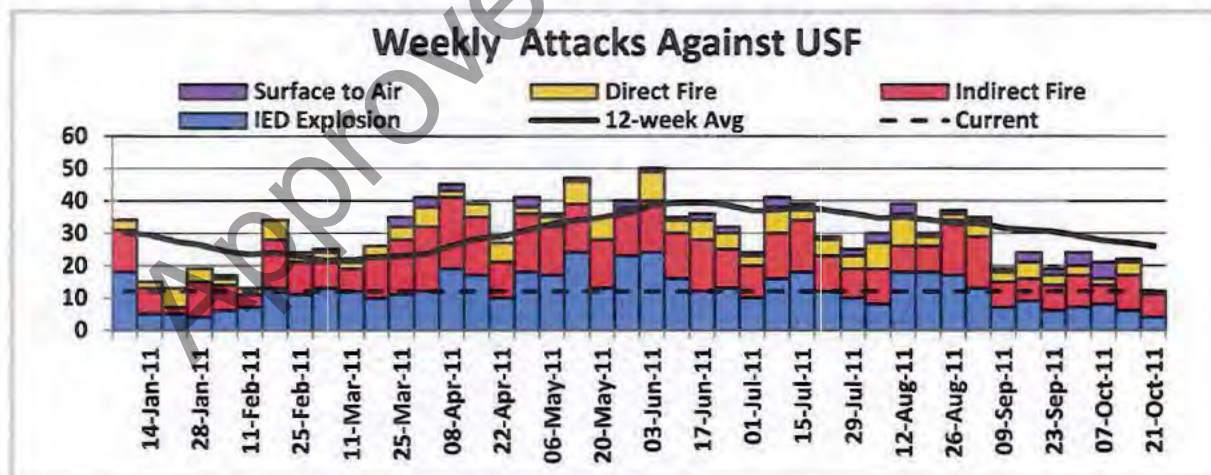
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Security

During the reporting period, there were 46 security incidents, a decrease from the previous week (96) and below the 12-week average of 114. The number of casualties was 47 (11 killed, 36 wounded), significantly lower than last week (211) and well below the 12-week average of 173. The number of attacks against USF decreased from 22 to 12 and remained below the 12-week average of 26 for the seventh consecutive week. Eight USF were wounded in action (non serious injuries).



The number of security incidents was the lowest on record. While this is a remarkable statistic, it is partly due to a lack of host nation reporting. As our footprint decreases, we continue to lose many of the touch points that supplied us with data; for instance, we no longer have liaison officers in many of the ISF regional commands. The beginning of the Hajj pilgrimage is also a contributing factor due to the heightened security posture of the ISF.



The number of casualties also dropped significantly, mostly due to a lack of high casualty-producing attacks by AQI during the week, as well as the aforementioned decrease in host nation reporting. Attacks against USF decreased by over 50 percent (see above). We attribute this to a number of factors, including our shrinking footprint and the operational pause by 1.4b and Promised Day Brigade.

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Joint U.S. – Iraqi Special Forces detained an Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) regional commander who was responsible for obtaining weapons from Iran and distributing them throughout the AAH network. Partnered forces also detained numerous extremists during an operation targeting an Ansar al-Islam (AI) kidnapping cell. A follow-on operation targeting the same cell resulted in the recovery of a child who had been kidnapped and the deaths of two AI operatives after they engaged in small arms fire with U.S. and Iraqi Special Forces. Finally, we detained a member of the Karkh AAH cell in Baghdad responsible for actively planning indirect fire attacks against USF.

Abd al-Qadir, Prime Minister Maliki's senior military advisor, led a delegation of Iraqi defense officials on a trip to China. The delegation will be in China for two weeks to explore the procurement of Chinese-made military hardware. During the trip, the delegation is scheduled to meet with Chinese military leadership for demonstrations and technical discussions.

During my regular meeting with acting Minister of Defense Dulaymi, he expressed growing frustration with Prime Minister Maliki. Dulaymi feels that he has been marginalized by the Prime Minister and that he has been excluded from a number of important security decisions. The exclusion from key decisions includes the removal of division commanders who are subsequently replaced by Maliki loyalists. I am concerned that these commanders are reassigned without COR confirmation, a violation of the Iraqi Constitution. I am also concerned that these actions will exacerbate the existing ethnosectarian imbalance among senior ISF leaders.

Iraqi security forces are currently providing security for pilgrims traveling to and from Mecca, Saudi Arabia, for this year's Hajj, which is observed 4-10 November. Large gatherings along pilgrimage routes have historically been targets of opportunity for extremist groups. The ISF has generally performed well when providing security for events such as religious pilgrimages, so we assess the security threat to be low.

1.4b, 1.4d

We held a very productive High Level Committee (HLC) meeting on 17 October. The Ambassador and I met with senior officials from the GOI and KRG. We made progress on a number of important issues (transitioning the Combined Security Mechanism (CSM) and provincial combined security areas; troop movements in Diyala; and establishing the Regional Combined Coordination Center). The group recommended minor revisions to the 15 Guiding Principles. We will hold follow-on Senior Working Group meetings and another HLC meeting in two weeks to ensure all parties adhere to the agreements and to finalize the Guiding Principles.

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Transition

On 20 October, we met another significant milestone as the soldiers of the 4th Infantry Division (U.S. Division-North) completed their mission. Henceforth, USF-I will consist of one division, U.S. Division-Iraq. The men and women of the 4th ID did a tremendous job to help set the conditions for continued progress in northern Iraq. A smaller element, Task Force-North, remains until 20 November to transition the two remaining bases and to transition oversight functions of the CSM to U.S. Mission-Iraq.

We currently reside at 18 U.S. and partnered locations and are on schedule for remaining base transitions. During the reporting period, we transitioned three installations, including one large base, COB Speicher in Tikrit. Over the next 30 days, we will transition 10 non-enduring bases to the GOI, including two large bases (COB Delta and Joint Base Balad), and transition one enduring site (COB Warhorse/Kirkuk) to OSC-I. We are on schedule to transition the remaining bases to the GOI, the Department of State, and OSC-I.

ISF Development

On 18 October, the ISF conducted live-fire collective training at Besmaya Combat Training Center. The training involved the M1A1 Abrams Tank, the M109 self-propelled howitzer, and the M198 towed howitzer, all of which were purchased from the U.S. under the foreign military sales program. The training consisted of artillery live-fire followed by a tank platoon live-fire exercise, demonstrating the growing capability of the ISF. The OSC-I office will continue to work with Iraqi Army personnel on these and other weapons systems beyond 2011. It is important to note, however, that this training demonstrates the limited extent of collective training that OSC-I personnel will be able to provide: platoon-level collective training with no combined arms training.



Next week I will travel to Jordan where I will meet with King Abdullah, the Jordanian CHOD, and Ambassador Stu Jones.

Respectfully,

Handwritten signature of the author.

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