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## USF-I Weekly Assessment 23 - 29 October 2011

### USF-I COMMANDER'S WEEKLY ASSESSMENT

**Mr. Secretary, Chairman, Jim:**

Motivated by his growing fear of a Baathist coup, Prime Minister Maliki ordered the arrest of hundreds of Sunnis throughout the country. We assess this is another attempt by Maliki to solidify his hold on power ahead of our departure. While the arrests raised the ire of Sunni provincial officials and tribal sheiks, the response from Sunni politicians has been generally muted. Most have called upon members of the Sunni community to remain patient, avoid violence, and use the political process to air their grievances.

The number of security incidents and casualties increased during the reporting period but remain below their respective 12-week averages. Many of the week's casualties were the result of two high profile attacks by AQI. The number of attacks against U.S. Forces (USF) also increased; most were conducted by Sunni insurgent groups in the North. An attack on COB Basrah reinforces our assessment that 1.4b especially Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), will continue to target our forces to support their claim that they are driving USF from Iraq.

We made tremendous headway in our effort to disrupt the AAH network. Partnered counterterrorism (CT) operations resulted in the detention of four members of AAH, including a cell leader in Baghdad and two cell leaders in Basrah. The most notable operation took place on 29 October, when CT forces apprehended the number one target in southern Iraq, a senior AAH commander responsible for countless attacks against USF.

As we begin the peak period of our operational maneuver out of Iraq, our reposture efforts remain on track. We are now operating from 12 locations. Designated units along our main line of communications are providing effective security for our troops as they move toward Kuwait. To reinforce ground-based security, we are utilizing ISR and counter-IED assets overhead. This approach has proven to be successful to date and has served as a deterrent against attacks by IBMs. I believe, however, that our adversaries will continue to look for opportunities to conduct attacks against our forces.

In addition to our reposture, we remain focused on successfully standing up the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq (OSC-I). The transition is going well; however, we are experiencing some challenges. Most notably, we are working with the Embassy to obtain land use agreements from the Government of Iraq (GOI) for enduring sites. In addition, we are pursuing the necessary Vienna Convention protections for personnel who will conduct the OSC-I mission under the authority of the U.S. Embassy-Baghdad. We also are pursuing the enhancement for the OSC-I in accordance with previous guidance.

#### Political

Sectarian tensions flared after Prime Minister Maliki ordered a nationwide operation resulting in the arrests of over 600 Sunnis accused of being Baathists. There are reports that Maliki may have received names of alleged Baath Party members from the

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Syrian government in exchange for his tacit support of the Asad regime. Sunni politicians, provincial officials, and tribal sheikhs called upon the Prime Minister to put an immediate end to the large-scale arrests. Thus far, we have not seen indications of a violent backlash from the Sunni populace. Sunni politicians have eschewed withdrawal from the government, instead encouraging Sunnis to address the matter through the political process.

On 27 October, the Salah ad Din Provincial Council voted to declare the Province a semi-autonomous region. The Council's decision was driven by the aforementioned arrests, the firing of Sunni professors from Tikrit University, and a desire for increased revenue from the central government. Success is possible but unlikely, since the process of becoming a federal region is a lengthy and deliberate one.

These developments, along with recent changes in ISF senior leadership in favor of Maliki loyalists, are indicative of the Prime Minister's growing fear that Saddam-era Baath Party members will attempt to overthrow his government. Additional reporting indicates that Maliki believes AQI may be allying with Baath Party members, exacerbating his fear of a coup. At this time, we do not assess that there is a credible threat of a coup; however, Maliki will likely continue to operate under this assumption, perpetuating divisions within his government.

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Barham Salih traveled to Baghdad as part of ongoing negotiations to resolve outstanding issues between the GOI and the KRG. Senior officials discussed implementation of Article 140, funding for Peshmerga troops, Kurdish representation in the ISF, and compromise on hydrocarbon legislation. Prime Minister Salih reported that the talks were productive but that additional meetings would be necessary to make additional progress.

On 26 October, KRG President Barzani expressed his support for ongoing talks between Irbil and Baghdad during his first visit to Kirkuk since 2009. He stated his government was committed to addressing problems as long as they were considered under the framework of the Iraqi Constitution. Although he said the KRG would accept the central government's decision to not keep USF beyond 2011, he opined that the ISF were not ready to provide security. These comments were likely intended to send a message to the central government that the KRG is willing to deploy Peshmerga troops in the disputed areas to provide security for Kurdish citizens. We will continue to monitor the situation and facilitate communication between the leaders to dissuade them from taking unilateral military action in the disputed areas.

### **Security**

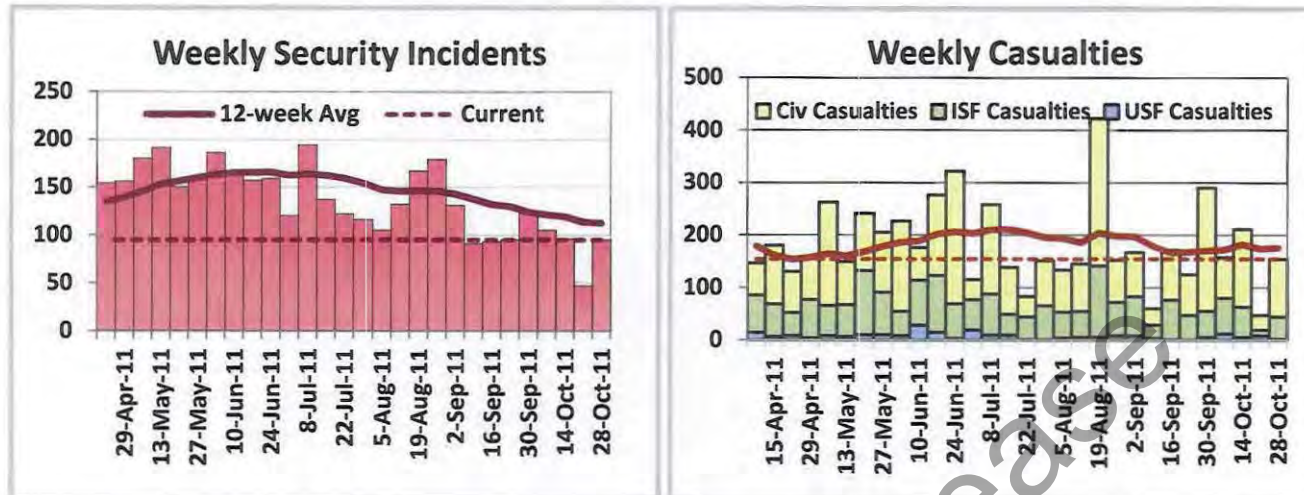
During the reporting period, there were 97 security incidents, an increase from the previous week (47) and below the 12-week average of 113. The number of casualties was 155 (47 killed, 108 wounded), significantly higher than last week (47) but still below the 12-week average of 175. The number of attacks against USF increased from 12 to 21 but remained below the 12-week average of 25. Two USF were wounded in action (non serious injuries).

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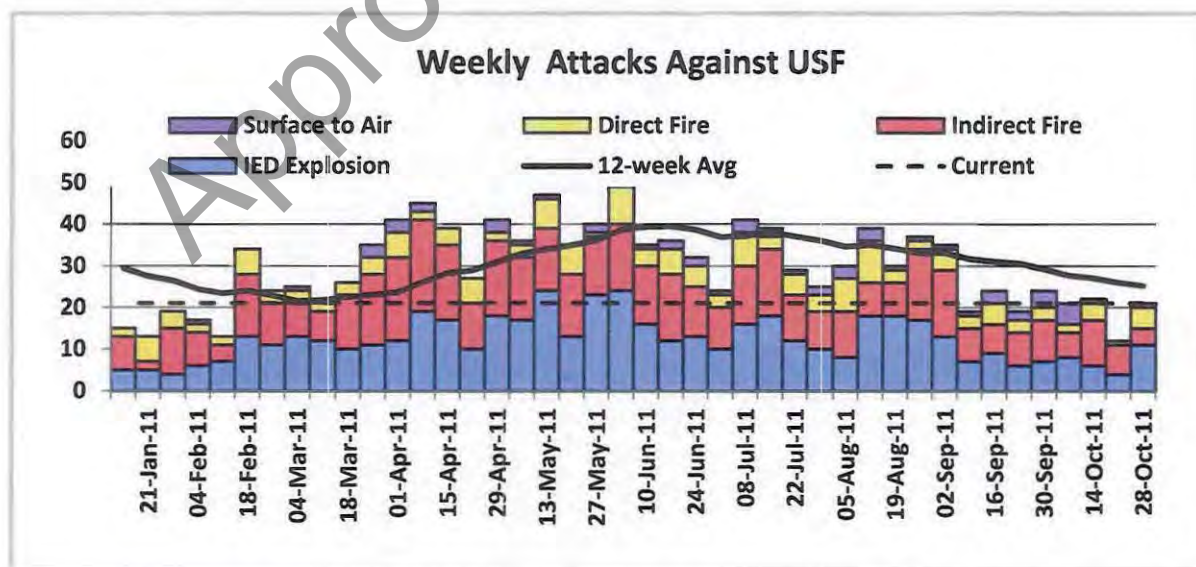
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After last week's remarkably low numbers, security incidents and casualties returned to levels similar to those we've seen in recent weeks. Over 40 percent of the week's casualties were the result of two attacks by AQI, including a vehicle-borne IED (VBIED) attack targeting the ISF in Mosul that resulted in 20 casualties and an IED attack near a police checkpoint in downtown Baghdad that resulted in 25 killed and 20 wounded. This level of activity by AQI is in line with our assessment that it had been in a refit and rearm phase but would resume its effort to target the ISF in an effort to undermine the GOI.

Attacks against USF increased (see below), with most attacks conducted by Sunni insurgent groups such as Jaysh Rijal Tariq al-Naqshabandi (JRTN) in northern Iraq. We assess an ineffective indirect fire attack on COB Basrah on 28 October was conducted by AAH supporting our assessment that the group will continue to conduct attacks against our forces as we reposition.



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Joint U.S. – Iraqi Special Forces detained a number of AAH operatives, including a senior AAH commander responsible for directing numerous attacks against USF in Dhi Qar Province. Partnered CT forces also detained a member of a Baghdad cell responsible for delivering operational instructions to cell leaders throughout the country and two AAH cell leaders in Basrah directly involved in IDF attacks on U.S. personnel. These individuals posed a significant risk; their detention by the ISF will likely disrupt imminent attacks.

Iraqi Army and Police from Anbar and Ninawa Provinces combined forces last week to conduct an operation in northern Anbar Province. We assess that the operation was intended mainly as a demonstration by the GOI that the ISF will be capable of dealing with extremist threats after USF depart and resulted in few significant arrests or cache finds.

### Transition and Reposture

Our transition and reposture remain on track. We are currently operating from 12 locations.

A major portion of our reposture is the movement of equipment throughout the country. We are averaging over 1,500 truckloads per day to provide sustainment for remaining forces and moving equipment out of Iraq. As predicted, the pace of moving equipment has increased from 45,000 items two weeks ago to over 75,000 items last week. We are receiving tremendous support from ARCENT and AFCENT. In addition, we are maximizing available assets to provide security for our troops as they move through the country towards Kuwait. These assets include ISF and counter-IED platforms as well as ground-based forces that are providing additional layers of security for convoys on our major line of communications.

We also remain focused on the transition of our mission to the Department of State and OSC-I. One vital component of USM-I's future success will be adequate force protection. Enduring force protection requirements at nearly half of the DOS and OSC-I sites have been completely resourced. Remaining sites are on track to have all force protection elements in place by 31 December.

Obtaining land use agreements for enduring sites and legal protections for OSC-I personnel have not been finalized and therefore remain a top priority. We are assisting the Embassy as they continue to press the GOI to approve land use agreements. We are also taking the steps necessary to obtain legal protections afforded OSC-I personnel under the Vienna Convention.

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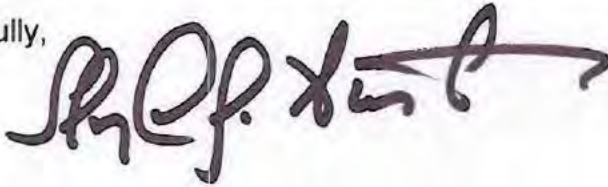
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Respectfully,



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