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USF-I Weekly Assessment 13 - 19 November 2011

USF-I COMMANDER'S WEEKLY ASSESSMENT

Mr. Secretary, Chairman, Jim:

Arab-Kurd tensions flared after elements of the Iraqi Army (IA) moved into Kirkuk city to provide security at Contingency Operating Site (COS) Warrior after we transferred control of the base to the Government of Iraq (GOI). The placement of Iraqi troops at an Iraqi military installation is not usually controversial. In this case, however, Kurdish officials contend that the influx of IA personnel has altered the balance of security forces in the city, thus violating tenets of the Combined Security Mechanism (CSM). The CSM stipulates that changes to troop levels within the disputed areas be mutually agreed upon by members of the Senior Working Group and the High Level Committee (HLC). We attempted but were unable to bring both sides to a meeting prior to the deployment of IA troops. The situation is stable for now. Ambassador Jeffrey and I discussed the matter with Prime Minister Maliki and KRG President Barzani, emphasizing that constructive dialogue and transparency are necessary to avoid military confrontation. We will continue to aggressively engage with Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and GOI leaders to avoid a breakdown in communications, which could lead to a violent confrontation between Kurdish and Iraqi security forces. We will also address the matter at the next meeting of the HLC, which is tentatively scheduled for 4 December.

Attacks against U.S. Forces (USF) increased slightly this week. [REDACTED] 1.4b [REDACTED] Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) conducted multiple attacks. Additionally, the Sunni insurgent group Jaysh Rijal Tariq al-Naqshabandi (JRTN) conducted four indirect fire (IDF) attacks against our base in Kirkuk just prior to its transition on 18 November. IDF and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks remain our biggest threat as the number of locations from which we operate shrinks and as we conduct movement in support of our reposture. We are also closely monitoring threat reporting of an AAH plan to kidnap an American citizen. We will continue to implement aggressive force protection and personnel accountability measures in order to reduce the threat to our personnel.

Our transition and reposture efforts remain on track. There are currently 20,226 military and DOD civilian personnel in Iraq, a decrease of 4,436 over the past week. We are now operating from 8 bases, the first time we have been in single digits. The amount of equipment in Iraq was reduced by 23 percent during the reporting period, putting us ahead of schedule to retrograde or transfer all equipment by end of mission. Since September 2010, we have repostured approximately two million pieces of equipment.

On 17 November, we completed the transfer of six warranted detainees and facilitated the release of eight unwarranted detainees from our theater internment facility at Al Asad Air Base. Thirty-seven individuals will be transferred to GOI custody on 22 November. We are prepared to maintain short-term custody of [REDACTED] (b)(6) [REDACTED] pending the outcome of discussions between the USG and the GOI on his disposition.

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Political

Tension between Arabs and Kurds has been high since the Iraqi Army, in accordance with a Ministry of Defense directive, deployed to Kirkuk in order to provide security at COS Warrior after the base was transferred to the GOI. The KRG asserts that Kurdish security forces should be equally represented near the base since Kirkuk city is in the disputed areas. Kurdish-dominated local police initially blocked the IA from entering the base, resulting in a stand-off that was eventually defused after KRG President Barzani ordered the police to withdraw. Senior USF-I and Embassy officials continue to aggressively engage both governments, strongly encouraging them to keep the lines of communication open and be transparent. Additionally, Ambassador Jeffrey and I spoke to Prime Minister Maliki and President Barzani, respectively, and urged them to discuss the matter in order to avoid a military confrontation. We will continue to facilitate discussion ahead of the next HLC meeting, which is tentatively scheduled for 4 December. The provincial governor has proposed that the base be converted to a civilian airport, a move that would place its security under police, not military, control.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) continues to press ahead with its plan to relocate members of the Mujahadeen-e-Khalq (MeK) from Camp Ashraf, since the GOI remains intent upon closing the camp by the end of the year. The GOI refuses to allow the UN to conduct the refugee status determination process in Iraq. Therefore, UNAMI head Martin Kobler is advocating relocation to an interim site until a permanent solution is found. The GOI has indicated support for the concept. The plan was briefed to the MeK over the weekend; U.S. Embassy officials plan to meet with them on Tuesday to ascertain their willingness to accept UNAMI's plan. In the meantime, we have seen no ISF activity in the vicinity of the camp but expect the GOI will take action to close the camp by 31 December, a move that will likely result in a violent clash.

NATO Assistant Secretary General for Operations Stephen Evans conducted a two-day visit to Iraq regarding the future of NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I). The purpose of his visit was twofold: to obtain GOI guarantees for sufficient legal protections for NTM-I personnel and to obtain assurances on cost-sharing. Unfortunately, Iraqi National Security Advisor Fayyad and ASG Evans were unable to agree on a mechanism that would provide required protections, obviating the need to discuss cost-sharing. Fayyad expressed GOI support for continuing the mission but said the provision of immunities would be politically infeasible. Due to time constraints driven by the expiration of the current mission on 31 December, this development puts the continuation of NTM-I at risk. Legal experts from NATO and the GOI will meet to determine if there are alternate ways to provide legal protections within the framework of Iraqi law.

Security

During the reporting period, there were 63 security incidents, a slight increase from the previous week (52) and below the 12-week average of 87. The number of casualties was 48 (6 killed, 42 wounded), lower than last week (82) and below the 12-week average of 134. The number of attacks against USF rose from 18 to 22, just above the 12-week

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average of 21. One U.S. service member was killed in action; six USF were wounded in action (four seriously).

Although the reliability of host nation reporting has significantly decreased, we assess the overall security environment remains relatively stable. There were no high profile attacks by AQI for the second consecutive week, resulting in a low number of casualties. We assess AQI is in a refit and rearm period but continues to plan for future attacks. The lull in violence was likely due in part to the Hajj pilgrimage and the observance of Eid al-Adha earlier this month. We assess we will see a slight rise in the overall level of violence in the near term.

Attacks against our forces, particularly those utilizing IDF and IEDs, remain a top concern. We assess JRTN was responsible for four IDF attacks on COS Warrior prior to its transition on 18 November. JRTN will likely conduct additional attacks against the installation, which will continue to host diplomatic and OSC-I missions.

We assess AAH was responsible for two explosively-formed penetrator (EFP) IED attacks, one of which resulted in the death of a U.S. Soldier during a counter-IDF patrol near COS Taji, which is just north of Baghdad. AAH has conducted a steady rate of EFP attacks since the end of its operational pause. We will continue to conduct terrain denial missions such as counter IED/IDF patrols and show of force activities to disrupt further attacks against our forces.

Transition and Reposture

As of 19 November, there are 20,226 military and DOD civilians operating from 8 locations in Iraq. Future base transition and personnel drawdown activities remain on schedule.

The retrograde of USF-I equipment out of Iraq is currently ahead of schedule. Over 75 percent of remaining equipment will depart Iraq and over 20 percent will be transferred to the GOI or to USM-I in support of enduring sites.

The stand-up of OSC-I remains on track. The transition to contracted security will be complete at all sites by the end of the month. In addition, we continue the fielding of tactical radios and over 200 up-armored SUVs, and are implementing improvements to computer networks and infrastructure. Visa and passport processing for contracted OSC-I personnel is still a concern. LTG Caslen, Chief of OSC-I, continues to engage GOI officials on the matter and has emphasized that these documents are necessary if contractors are to remain in Iraq beyond 31 December. Finally, critical medical staff members are now in place at all OSC-I sites, freeing up remaining USF-I medical personnel for redeployment.

On 22 November, I will accompany senior Iraqi military officials to Jordan to facilitate a productive military-to-military relationship between the two countries.

Respectfully,



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