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USF-I Weekly Assessment 20 - 29 November 2011

USF-I COMMANDER'S WEEKLY ASSESSMENT

Mr. Secretary, Chairman, Jim:

I had the pleasure of sharing Thanksgiving with many of the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and civilians who have tirelessly supported our mission in Iraq. Their motivation and dedication to the mission continues to impress and inspire me.

During the 10-day reporting period, the number of security incidents remained well below the 12-week average. The number of casualties, however, rose significantly as a result of four AQI signature attacks. Additionally, AQI was likely responsible for a 28 November attack utilizing a magnetically attached IED (MAIED) on a vehicle traveling in the vicinity of the Parliament. We assess AQI conducted these attacks as part of its ongoing effort to destabilize the security environment, incite sectarian strife, and undermine the public's confidence in the ISF's ability to provide security.

Attacks against U.S. Forces (USF) were remarkably low, with the majority conducted by Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH). We continue to track reports that AAH intends to continue attacks and is actively planning to kidnap an American citizen. Hence, force protection and personnel accountability remain my top priorities as we conduct our reposture.

Our transition and reposture remains on track. There are currently 12,400 military and DOD civilians are operating from seven bases in Iraq. This represents a decrease of 7,826 personnel since my last report. Reposture of equipment is also going well. Overall, we are well postured to have all personnel and equipment out of Iraq by 31 December in accordance with the 2008 Security Agreement.

NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I), OSC-I, and Embassy personnel continue to work with the Government of Iraq (GOI) to obtain the agreements needed to operate in Iraq after 2011. OSC-I leaders are engaging GOI officials on a daily basis to resolve visa issues for contractors to avoid their departure by the end of the year when their current visas expire. The Embassy continues to work with the GOI to obtain land use agreements for enduring sites. While GOI leaders indicate there will be no problems, they have yet to sign the agreements. Finally, NATO leadership in Brussels has indicated that absent prompt action by the GOI to provide suitable legal protections and a commitment to cost sharing, they will begin to withdraw NATO personnel on 12 December, thereby ending NATO's training mission in Iraq.

On 22 November, we transferred 37 detainees to GOI custody. We are currently holding Ali Musa Daqduq at a secure location until his final disposition is determined. In July 2011, we transferred 203 detainees to the GOI when our facility at Camp Cropper closed. We have received word from officials at the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) that they intend to release 11 of those detainees in the near future. This decision comes after the Iraqi courts determined there was insufficient evidence to continue their detention. We will follow up with the MOJ to determine the identity of these individuals and assess the potential threat they may pose to U.S. personnel.

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We are assisting the Embassy as they complete preparations for the 30 November Higher Coordinating Committee, the first since 2009. We are also providing support to the GOI as they organize their "Day of Commitment" ceremony, which is scheduled for 1 December. The ceremony will include a speech by Prime Minister Maliki and the unveiling of a medal to recognize the efforts of coalition forces in the Iraq campaign.

Political

The situation remains stable in Kirkuk; however, reporting indicates approximately 5,000 Peshmerga troops remain positioned outside of the city awaiting a decision on whether or not the airfield will be converted to a civilian airport. Prime Minister Maliki reportedly discussed the conversion with the provincial governor and agreed to consider the proposal. We continue to monitor troop movement in the vicinity of Kirkuk and will discuss the matter at the next High Level Committee meeting on 4 December.

Although the GOI has repeatedly expressed support for continuation of NATO Training Mission-Iraq, the legal status of trainers remains unresolved. NATO lawyers have opined that an MOU would suffice; however, the GOI continues to insist that any agreement on legal protections would require approval by the Council of Representatives, something they are unwilling to pursue at this time. NATO and Iraqi lawyers are meeting this week to explore alternative methods by which legal protections can be provided. The North Atlantic Council (NAC) will meet on 7 December and will issue specific instructions for withdrawal if they have not received instructions, in writing, from the GOI that detail legal provisions and a commitment to cost sharing. If no commitment is received, the NAC will instruct NATO elements to activate their withdrawal plan on 12 December.

As mentioned in last week's report, Embassy personnel met with MeK leadership to determine their willingness to accept the proposed UNAMI plan that would relocate members of the MeK from Camp Ashraf to multiple locations within Iraq for the purpose of conducting UN refugee status determination. As anticipated, MeK leadership was not supportive of the plan. Meanwhile, the GOI continues to express intent to close the camp at the end of the year, increasing the chance of a violent confrontation between the MeK and the ISF if they attempt to forcibly remove residents prior to closing the camp.

Security

During the 10-day reporting period, there were 48 security incidents, less than the preceding 7-day period (63) and below the 12-week average of 79. The number of casualties was 183 (38 killed, 145 wounded), higher than the preceding 7-day period (48) and above the 12-week average of 132. The number of attacks against USF dropped from 22 last week to 8 over the last 10 days, below the 12-week average of 19. No U.S. service members were killed or wounded in action.

Four high profile attacks accounted for more than 75 percent of the casualties this reporting period. On 24 November, AQI conducted an attack in a market in Basrah consisting of a vehicle-borne IED (VBIED) followed by two IEDs targeting first responders. The attack killed 15 and wounded 65. Two days later, three IEDs exploded in a Baghdad

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market, killing two and wounding 17. On 28 November, 11 were killed and 18 injured when a suicide VBIED detonated near the entrance of Camp Taji in Baghdad. Later that day, an attack occurred in Kirkuk city consisting of three unknown explosions and small arms fire, resulting in one civilian killed and 13 injured.

We believe AQI was also responsible for an attack that occurred on 28 November near the Parliament building in the international zone. An MAIED on a vehicle detonated while attempting to enter the Parliament compound. Host nation reporting indicates the number of casualties was low, potentially two dead and one wounded. We will continue to refine our assessment as more information becomes available.

These five attacks demonstrate AQI's ability to conduct attacks throughout the country as well as its intent to undermine the public's confidence in the ISF. These attacks also underscore AQI's desire to incite sectarian tensions and to undermine the GOI. As previously reported, we assess AQI has regained capability since suffering leadership losses in 2010 and will continue to conduct attacks after the departure of USF.

The number of attacks against USF during this extended reporting period was low. Of the eight attacks, we assess six were conducted by AAH, half of which were indirect fire and half of which were explosively-formed penetrator IEDs. This activity confirms our assessment that AAH remains the only 1.4b group conducting attacks against our forces. Jaysh Rijal Tariq al-Naqshabandi (JRTN) was responsible for the remaining attacks. We expect their attacks against our forces will dwindle as our footprint has decreased dramatically over the past few weeks.

This year's Shia commemoration of Ashura falls between 4 and 8 December; however millions of Shia pilgrims have already begun their travel to shrines in Baghdad, Karbala, and Kufa. As in past years, the ISF will reinforce security in areas where there will be significant numbers of Shia pilgrims through concentric layers of forces around the shrines and checkpoints along pilgrimage routes. Although the ISF has proven capable of providing security during static events, AQI will view large gatherings of Shia pilgrims as attractive targets of opportunity and will likely attempt attacks in an effort to incite sectarian violence and challenge the ISF's ability to provide security.

ISF Development

I returned to Jordan on 22 November with Iraqi Defense Chief GEN Babakir, Iraqi Air Force Commander LTG Anwar, and LTG Jasim, the commander of Iraq's National Defense University. The purpose of the trip was to facilitate a meeting between the Iraqi and Jordanian military leadership in order to strengthen the military-to-military relationship between the two countries. It was a productive trip; the group discussed institutional training options, regional exercises, intelligence sharing, and border security. We also discussed potential cooperation between Iraqi and Jordanian counterterrorism forces in support of the upcoming Arab League Summit in Baghdad next spring.

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I traveled to the United Arab Emirates on 28 November to encourage the development of military-to-military relationships between the UAE and Iraq. I met with the Crown Prince and the Chief of Defense (CHOD). In a positive development, the Crown Prince agreed to send the CHOD to Iraq in the near future to meet with his counterpart, GEN Babakir. We are working to schedule a meeting in Baghdad prior to my departure from Iraq.

Transition and Reposture

We continue to make tremendous headway in our reposture; 12,400 USF-I military and DOD civilians currently operate from seven bases. We are on track to transfer Victory Base Complex, the largest U.S. installation in Iraq, within the next week.

The reposture of equipment remains ahead of schedule. Over the last 10 days, we reduced the amount of USF-I equipment in Iraq by 67 percent. Of the remaining pieces of equipment, 23 percent will transfer to the GOI, OSC-I, or the Embassy and 77 percent will leave Iraq for redistribution within the CENTCOM AOR or return to CONUS.

Respectfully,



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