



UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

USUN PRESS RELEASE # 146(08)
June 13, 2008

Office of Press and Public Diplomacy
United States Mission to the United Nations
140 East 45th Street
New York, N.Y. 10017

AS DELIVERED

Statement by Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, U.S. Permanent Representative, delivering the mid-year review of UNSCR 1790 on behalf of MNF-I, in the Security Council, June 13, 2008

It is my honor to report to the Security Council today on behalf of the Multi-National Force in Iraq, or, MNF-I. I would like to begin by warmly welcoming His Excellency, the Foreign Minister of Iraq, Hoshiyar Zebari, to the Security Council. I also want to welcome Under Secretary-General Ibrahim Gambari and Assistant Secretary-General Controller Warren Sach and thank them for their participation in today's discussion. We also remember our UN colleagues in the field, and on behalf of the Council I extend our appreciation to Special Representative Staffan de Mistura and the staff of UNAMI for their dedication and hard work.

I am pleased to report that the security environment in Iraq continues to improve thanks to the efforts and sacrifices of the Iraqi Security Forces and MNF-I. All major violence indicators are markedly lower compared to pre-surge levels. The Iraqi Security Forces have made important strides in capability and proficiency, and have now assumed command and control of all of Iraq's Army divisions. Iraqi and Coalition forces achieved these security gains even as Coalition forces have been drawing down from surge levels.

While this progress is encouraging, challenges remain. For many Iraqi families, the effects and threats of violence continue to be a daily concern. Advancements in the security field must be expanded and consolidated, and complemented by commensurate gains in national reconciliation and governance. We commend the government and the people of Iraq for their commitment to build upon this hard-won progress in order to achieve a secure, unified, and democratic Iraq that can govern, defend and sustain itself.

Today, on behalf of MNF-I, I would like to discuss four points. First, let me address the decrease in security incidents and violence. Total security incidents have now fallen to their lowest level in over four years, notwithstanding a temporary increase in violence associated with recent Iraqi military operations in Basrah, Sadr city, and Mosul. The number of civilian deaths due to violence has fallen by 75 percent since July 2007. Monthly high-profile attacks in Iraq such as car bombs decreased in May 2008, falling below the previous two-year low reached in December 2007. Yet the use of suicide bombers (including female suicide bombers) remains a threat, especially as population security measures and local opposition to insurgents in some provinces make it difficult to employ suicide vehicle-borne Improvised Explosive Devices, or IEDs. The number of incidents of suicide bombers increased from October 2007 to February 2008, before declining in March and April 2008.

High-profile attack explosions for May 2008 are down more than 70 percent from the peak in March 2007. Nonetheless, al-Qaeda in Iraq and other extremists still have the intent and the capability of

carrying out high-profile atrocities, as they did on April 15th when 150 civilians were killed in a series of attacks throughout Iraq.

However, the number of deaths due to ethno-sectarian violence is now at the lowest level in the past several years, illustrating the growing inability of the terrorists to re-ignite the cycle of ethno-sectarian violence. During the last two weeks of May 2008, there were no confirmed ethno-sectarian deaths in Baghdad. In April and May 2008, there were 38 deaths in Baghdad attributed to ethno-sectarian causes. This is a remarkable improvement when compared to the incidence of more than 1,600 ethno-sectarian deaths in December 2006.

At the same time, we remain concerned by the presence of foreign fighters in Iraq. The Government of Syria must do more to halt the operation of foreign fighter networks within its territory, which continue to supply the overwhelming majority of suicide bombers responsible for the deaths of innocent Iraqis. The Government of Iran must also cease the training, equipping and financing by the Iran Republican Guards Corps-Quds Force of violent Iraqi elements who have challenged the security of Iraq and the authority of the Iraqi government and security forces. In this regard, we call on the Government of Iran to follow through on its pledge to respect the sovereignty of Iraq and the integrity of its borders, which to date it has not done.

Second, I would like to describe the welcome increase in the capability and proficiency of the Iraqi Security Forces. More than 559,000 personnel now serve in the Iraqi Security Forces. This number represents an increase of more than 19,000 personnel since I last reported to you in April. As of May 1, 2008, 147 Iraqi Army combat battalions are conducting operations, which represents an increase of 24 combat battalions since my last report. Another eight battalions are currently in force generation, and MNF-I plans an additional 14 for force generation in 2008. Four Special Operations battalions are now capable of conducting operations with minimal Coalition support, and another two are in force generation.

Among the formed Iraqi Army combat battalions, 65 percent are rated as not only being able to take the lead in operations, but also being able to plan, execute and sustain operations with minimal or no assistance from Coalition forces. Since March 2008, an additional nine battalions have improved their proficiency and can now conduct counterinsurgency operations with Coalition support.

Both the Iraqi Air Force and the Iraqi Navy are gaining proficiency, as well. Over the past nine months, the Iraqi Air Force sortie rate has increased by almost 750 percent, with the Iraqi Air Force flying over 5,000 sorties so far this year. In that same nine month period, the number of Iraqi Navy patrols has grown by approximately 250 percent, with an average of 35 patrols per week now conducted in Iraqi territorial waters.

The Iraqi National Police also continues to increase its proficiency. There are now 44 National Police battalions authorized, including the National Emergency Response Unit. And of those, 11 battalions are capable of planning, executing and sustaining operations with Coalition support.

Moreover, during the last three months, there has been a significant increase in Iraqi-led operations. In March 2008, the Iraqi Government launched Operation Saulat al-Fursan to restore law and order in Basra. In April and May 2008, the Government of Iraq planned and executed similar operations in Sadr City and Mosul. With these operations, the Iraqi Security Forces demonstrated their capability to conduct simultaneous extensive operations in three parts of the country.

Overall, Iraqi Security Forces continue to grow and improve, but at varying rates. In many areas

throughout Iraq, Iraqi Special Operations Forces, Army battalions, National Police and Special Police units operate independently of, or side by side with, Coalition forces. These units consistently demonstrate a high level of proficiency in counterinsurgency operations against al Qaeda in Iraq and other extremist groups. In many cities, such as ar-Ramadi and Kirkuk, the Iraqi police are in the lead for population security, where they are performing well and earning the trust of the local population.

Third, I'd like to provide an update on the Coalition role. I want to remind the Council that more than 30 countries currently play a critical role in enhancing security in Iraq, whether by participating as a Coalition member, supporting the NATO Training Mission, or contributing to UNAMI operations. Coalition members other than the United States contribute some 10,000 forces to the Multi-National Force, and another 450 personnel to support UNAMI. Every contributor, large and small, from the British in the southeast, to the Italian police trainers providing paramilitary expertise to the Iraqi National Police, from the Mongolians who are providing camp security, to the Georgians whose many missions include protecting UNAMI staff members, –plays a vital role in enabling the Government of Iraq to assume full responsibility for the defense and security of its people.

Fourth, I want to emphasize that MNF-I continues to progressively transfer responsibility for security to the Government of Iraq. At the outset, it is important to recognize that Iraqi and Coalition forces have achieved the security gains I have described even as MNF-I is down from the surge levels. By the end of May 2008, three U.S. Brigade Combat Teams, two U.S. Marine battalions and a Marine Expeditionary Unit had left Iraq without replacement. Additionally, Australia withdrew its forces from Dhi Qar province in early June.

As of mid-May 2008, the Iraqi Ground Forces Command had assumed command and control of the 12 Iraqi Army divisions, including 50 brigade headquarters and 164 battalions. In addition, the 6th and 9th Divisions are now subordinate to the Baghdad Operations Command of the Ministry of Defense for tactical control, with the Iraqi Ground Forces Command retaining administrative control. Operational commands have expanded to include the provinces of Ninewa, al-Karbala, as-Samarra, al-Basrah and al-Diyala.

Likewise, the Government of Iraq continues to assume greater provincial security responsibility through the Provincial Iraqi Control, or PIC, process. Nine of eighteen provinces have assumed PIC, and the remaining provinces are progressing well. For example, the provinces of al-Anbar and al-Qadisiyah are expected to transition to Iraqi control in the early summer of 2008.

Finally, I want to highlight that the United States and Iraqi governments are now in the process of negotiating a long-term relationship which will recognize this transition and the increasing ability of Iraqi Security Forces to assume greater responsibility for security and stability.

In conclusion, it is clear that the recent improvements in the security situation throughout Iraq are significant. Nonetheless, the Government of Iraq must intensify the implementation of complementary measures to sustain these gains. These measures include actions to support the delivery of humanitarian assistance and essential services to all the citizens of Iraq; continued improvement in budget execution to advance Iraqi responsibility for reconstruction and development; the generation of sustainable employment; and continuing progress on political reconciliation. Credible provincial elections will also play an important role in facilitating reconciliation and the formation of representative provincial governments.

We can, and we must, help Iraq succeed. I want to take a moment to recognize and thank the Multi-National Force in Iraq and all its members for what they are doing to help the Iraqi people continue their

historic struggle to build a stable and secure nation. This struggle for the future of Iraq is vital, for it will shape the future of the broader Middle East, and the future of the broader Middle East will affect the stability and security of us all. As we have seen, tremendous progress has been made, but there is still some distance to go. We urge Iraq's neighbors and the entire international community to pitch in and help the Iraqis finish the job. Thank you.