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> [Other Remarks](#) > [2006 International Organization Affairs Speeches/Remarks](#)

Statement on the Situation Concerning Iraq

Ambassador Jackie W. Sanders, U.S. Representative to the UN for Special Political Affairs

Remarks to the Security Council

New York City

December 11, 2006

USUN PRESS RELEASE #391

As requested by the UN Security Council in Resolutions 1546, 1637 and 1723, I am pleased to report to the Security Council on behalf of the 25 countries making up the Multinational Forces-Iraq (MNF-I), on the Force's progress towards fulfilling its mandate.

Mr. President,

There have been a number of important developments in this reporting period. We welcome the Security Council's unanimous adoption of Resolution 1723 to extend the Multinational Force-Iraqi (MNF-I) mandate and the arrangements for the Development Fund for Iraq and the International Advisory and Monitoring Board. The MNF-I continues to play a vital role in the security and stability of Iraq and to work in partnership with Iraqi authorities to support the transition of security responsibility to Iraqi Security Forces. As noted in the Secretary of State's November 17 letter to the Council President in support of the MNF-I mandate, the Government of Iraq and MNF-I have three common goals: Iraqi assumption of recruiting, training, equipping and arming of the Iraqi security forces; Iraqi assumption of command and control over Iraqi forces; and transferring responsibility for security to the Government of Iraq.

The Iraqi Government has made progress on its ambitious reform agenda. On October 10, the Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) adopted a new foreign investment law. The CoR also passed a federal regions law on October 11 that will allow Iraq's provinces to hold referenda to merge themselves into larger federal regions. This law is to come into effect in 2008. In addition, a Constitutional Review Committee was established on September 25 to explore options for amending the Iraqi constitution.

Progress continues as well on the International Compact with Iraq, an Iraqi initiative to create a new partnership with

the international community and build a strong framework for Iraq's continued political, security and economic transformation and integration into the regional and global economy. The final Preparatory meeting took place in Kuwait on October 31, and the Compact was endorsed unanimously by the Iraqi Council of Ministers on November 26. This Compact is expected to be finalized by early next year, we hope, with broad and active international support.

Despite progress on these fronts, security remains a grave concern. Sunni insurgent attacks against the Iraqi Security Forces and MNF-I remain at high levels, and the forces continue to experience attacks from armed Shia groups, especially in the Baghdad region. At the same time, sectarian violence, much of it directed toward civilians, has increased.

Security Situation

Mr. President, insurgents, extremists and terrorists continue their attacks. The ongoing violence continues to take a toll on the country and its people. The number of attacks increased 22 percent over this reporting period, attributed in part to a spike in violence during Ramadan. Fifty-four percent of all attacks occurred in 2 of Iraq's 18 provinces, Baghdad and Anbar, although violence was significant in Diyala province and in the cities of Kirkuk, Mosul, Basrah, Al-Amarah, and Balad. MNF-I and Iraqi Security Forces continued joint efforts to address security in Baghdad and Basra.

More Iraqi units are taking the lead in combat operations against the insurgency. In October the 4th Iraqi Army division planned, coordinated and executed an Iraqi--controlled, division-level operation in Kirkuk in response to the spike of vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attacks just prior to and during Ramadan. The operation was the first division-level plan executed under control of the Iraqi Ground Forces Command headquarters.

The rise of sectarian violence has become the greatest threat to security and stability in Iraq. Approximately 80 percent of the sectarian violence in Iraq happens within a 35-mile radius of Baghdad. In response to the worsening situation, Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki announced a four-point plan on October 2 to unite Shia and Sunni parties in his government behind the drive to stop sectarian killings that have plagued the country. The Iraqi Government has also sponsored a series of four reconciliation conferences across Iraq aimed at promoting a national dialogue and soliciting recommendations for action.

Two meetings of tribal leaders and civil society have already taken place. In October, the Organisation for the Islamic Conference hosted a gathering of Sunni and Shiite religious leaders in Mecca, which called for the end to sectarian bloodshed in Iraq.

While infrastructure attacks have decreased, they average one per week and hamper the provision of essential services, such as electrical power, water, and fuel. These ongoing attacks and the difficult security environment are impediments to improving the supply of these essential services. The Iraqi infrastructure will continue to be a high-value target for disruptive elements.

Iraqi Security Forces

Mr. President, the Multinational Force in Iraq continues to train, develop, and contribute to the capabilities and readiness of Iraqi Security Forces. Iraq is making progress in building security forces that are capable of independently combating insurgents and fighting terrorists. The security forces of the Ministry of Defense and Interior continue to increase in size and capability, and are increasingly taking over leadership roles in fighting insurgents and terrorists. On

September 21, MNF-I transferred Dhi Qar Province to provincial Iraqi control, putting security responsibility in the hands of the Provincial Governor and his local police force of 10,000. MNF-I continues to support and assist the Iraqi Security Forces as they move toward conducting fully independent operations and achieving security self-reliance.

The number of counter-insurgency operations conducted independently by Iraqi forces as a percentage of total combat operations continues to increase steadily. One hundred and six Iraqi Army and Special Operations battalions and 11 Strategic Infrastructure Battalions are now conducting counter-insurgency operations, with 98 battalions assessed as capable of taking the lead in operations or operating independently.

The Iraqi government, alongside MNF-I, has identified a force structure to maintain a security environment that will provide a basis for transitioning Iraq to security self-reliance. The authorized end-strength force structure of the Armed Forces is 137,500 personnel, including one Iraqi Ground Forces Command, 10 divisions and 36 brigade headquarters, 114 Army and Special Operations Battalions, 17 Strategic Infrastructure Battalions, six Air Force squadrons, three navy squadrons, and 19 combat support battalions.

The Iraq Ministry of Interior, with the assistance of the MNF-I, has begun a multi-phased National Transformation Plan to assess National Police Battalions' current capabilities, reinforce police training, and establish practices for continuing education of the police forces. The end-strength force structure for all Ministry of Interior forces is 188,200 trained and equipped personnel manning two division headquarters, nine brigade headquarters, and 27 combat battalions. The force structure plan is designed to enable a stable civil-security environment that leads to a democratic and representative government, and a prosperous economy.

As of November 13, six Iraqi Army division headquarters, 30 brigade headquarters and 91 battalions have the security lead in their areas of operation. These numbers reflect approximately 70 percent of the Iraqi Army. The MNF-I has transferred 55 of the 110 forward operating bases to Iraqi control.

Mr. President, the United Nations continues to play a crucial role in Iraq's stability and development. The UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) is providing important expertise under its mandate, which was extended in August 2006 for another year (UNSCR 1700). Due to security concerns, the UN has recently decided to temporarily reduce staff positions in Baghdad. A robust UNAMI presence remains essential to supporting Iraqi efforts, including on national reconciliation, Constitutional Review and future provincial elections. Also, a UNAMI presence will be crucial in taking forward work on the International Compact, jointly with the Government of Iraq. In addition to Baghdad, the UN has limited representation in Irbil and Basra. MNF-I continues to assist UNAMI and to help UNAMI achieve its goal for a full, robust and secure presence in Iraq.

Multinational Forces, notably the Georgian, Romanian, and South Korean contingents, continue to provide security for the United Nations in Baghdad, Basra, and Irbil, respectively. These troops provide static site security, reconnaissance, security patrols, convoy escorts, checkpoints, and, when necessary, MEDEVAC and emergency evacuation. Contributions to the UN Distinct Entity Trust Fund will ensure continued support for this critical security function. Under a separate UN agreement, Fijian troops also provide static and close-in protection for UN personnel and facilities in Baghdad.

Conclusion

Mr. President, the implementation of Iraq's National Reconciliation Plan will be an important component in the government's efforts to build a united country. Concerted efforts to control the sectarian violence and confront the insurgency remain critically important to Iraq's future. Training and equipping of the Iraqi Security Forces continues, and we anticipate a continued process of transferring security responsibility for specific areas from MNF-I to the Iraqi authorities. MNF-I continues to support the Iraqi government as it prepares to assume full responsibility for the country's security.

Iraq's stability and security is a regional issue, as well as an international issue, and Iraq's neighbors have an important role to play. We call on the entire international community to support Iraq's sovereign government and assist efforts for a democratic, united and prosperous Iraq.

Released on December 11, 2006



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