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Statement on the Multinational Force in Iraq

Ambassador Alejandro Wolff, Acting U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations

Remarks to the Security Council

New York City

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Thank you, Mr. President.

At the outset, I would like to thank Iraqi Vice President Abd al-Mahdi for attending this meeting. His presence in this Chamber underscores the Iraqi government's clear international engagement on behalf of its people. And likewise, I would like to welcome back Special Representative Qazi.

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

Despite the sobering scale of violent attacks, the Iraqi government and people continue to pursue their political and economic development and security goals. Toward that end some important steps were taken since the start of the year.

On January 23, the Council of Representatives passed a law that established an Independent Higher Election Commission; the establishment of the Commission is a key step in preparing for Iraqi provincial elections. On February 26, the Council of Ministers approved the draft hydrocarbon law; its passage by the Council of Representatives, together with complementary legislation, will ensure national control and equitable distribution of Iraq's oil wealth.

During the UN-hosted International Compact meeting tomorrow, the final Compact document will be shared with members of the international community. The Compact is a key component in Iraq's efforts to complete its transition to financial self-sufficiency and integration into the regional and global economy. Active participation by regional and global partners in the International Compact with Iraq will be critical to assisting Iraq's development efforts.

Although progress has been made on the electoral and economic fronts, overall violence and the resulting instability continue. In response to the ongoing attacks in Baghdad, Prime Minister Maliki announced in January, and the Council of Representatives approved, the Baghdad Security Plan (BSP) to renew the efforts of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to lead operations and secure Baghdad from insurgents and militias. The plan includes a commitment of elements of nine additional Iraqi Army battalions to the operation. Announcing a New Way Forward on January 10, U. S. President Bush committed an additional 21,500 U.S. troops to the Iraqi-led effort, with 4,400 committed in early March. While we must be cautious about drawing conclusions about results of the new Baghdad Security Plan, there has been a decrease in violence in the Iraqi capital after the increase of ISF in the Iraqi capital.

Lasting stability in Iraq requires more than a security element, and the Baghdad Security Plan includes increased economic, political and reconstruction efforts to improve the government's ability to meet the needs of its people and assist with security. The Iraqi government will spend \$10 billion on infrastructure and reconstruction projects, creating jobs for the Iraqi people. The U.S. and other governments have announced assistance plans to support Iraq's reform and development.

Assistance is also needed to address Iraq's grave humanitarian situation. In addition to the daily suffering of Iraq's population due to the ongoing violence, approximately 2 million Iraqis have fled the country and another 1.7 million persons are internally displaced. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees launched a \$60 million appeal to fund its work over the next year to assist this vulnerable population.

Mr. President, the insurgents, extremists and terrorists remain capable of and intent on carrying out attacks against Iraqi civilians, officials, and security forces. The three-month period marks a continuation of violence in the country, though there has been a downturn recently in Baghdad violence as noted above.

Al-Qaeda continues to focus its attacks in order to destabilize the Iraqi government and force the withdrawal of MNF-I. As has been the case during the last reporting period, much of the violence is attributable to sectarian motives, including hostility between factions within sects. More than 80 percent of the violence observed by MNF-I troops is limited to four provinces, Baghdad, Anbar, Salah and Din, and Diyala, and within 30 miles of the Iraqi capital itself. However, such violence also occurs in other population centers such as Kirkuk, Mosul, and Basra.

Iraqi civilians and the Iraqi Security Forces suffer the majority of casualties. Attacks, such as the February 3 truck bomb in the center of Baghdad that killed 105 civilians and wounded 251 and the March 6 attacks in Hillah that killed over 100 people and injured more than 150, continue in an effort to intimidate and demoralize the Iraqi people and destabilize the country.

Infrastructure attacks have decreased, down from over four per week in 2005 and early 2006, to an average of one per week more recently. Yet, weak ministerial oversight and ineffectual rapid-repair teams have proved major impediments to improving the supply of essential services.

In announcing the Baghdad Security Plan (BSP) in January, the Prime Minister and his government committed to the following actions by the Iraqi Security Forces: holding accountable all those who break the law without regard to sect or political affiliation; denying sanctuary for criminals or murderers; not allowing militias to serve as a replacement for the state control of local security; and providing military commanders freedom of action and an ability to do what is

needed without political interference or micromanagement.

Although it is too early to point to a firm trend, the initial security effort under the new plan has recently reduced violence in Baghdad. The effort has been assisted by citizen-provided tips to find several insurgent bomb-making sites and weapons caches in the Baghdad area.

As part of measures to address the source of the this violence, the Iraqi government has allocated about \$150 million of its 2007 budget for a demobilization, disarmament and reintegration process (DDR) for militias. Putting this process into action, along with continued political progress on national reconciliation and passage of a de-Ba'athification law, are important components to ensuring long-term stability in the country.

The Iraqi Security Forces are increasingly taking the operational lead and demonstrating an increased capability to plan and execute counter-insurgency operations. On December 20, 2006, MNF-I transferred security responsibility for the An Najaf Province, with a population of nearly one million residents, to provincial Iraqi control. In February, the British Government announced that it would withdraw 1,600 of its 7,100 troops from southern Iraq by the end of the year as it transitions increased security responsibility to Iraqi Security Forces.

As of March 5, 2007, 8 Division Headquarters, 31 Brigade Headquarters, and 93 Iraqi Army battalions had assumed the lead for counter-insurgency operations within their assigned areas of operations. Iraq and MNF-I continue to work to address ISF logistical and sustainment capability needs.

Coordination between Iraqi and MNF-I forces in security operations has been good. On February 27, Special Iraqi Army forces detained 16 suspected militiamen during operations with Coalition advisers in Sadr City, targeting the leadership of several rogue Jaysh alMahdi cells who allegedly direct and perpetrate sectarian murder, torture, and kidnapping. Iraqi-MNF-I cooperation is also evident in other areas of Iraq. Last month, approximately 500 Iraqi Police led a large-scale operation in Anbar province that resulted in the capture of 13 known terrorists and one large weapons cache. A combined force of 1,000 soldiers from both the Iraqi and U.S. armies cordoned off the area to assist the police during the operation. Continued coordination is critical to combat the ongoing threat to peace and stability in the country and to prepare Iraqis for assuming full responsibility for the country's security.

Mr. President, the United Nations' Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), under the leadership of SRSG Ashraf Qazi, is playing an important role supporting Iraq. UN leadership and expertise will continue to be needed as Iraq moves forward to prepare for provincial elections, conduct possible referenda, continue work on national reconciliation and the constitutional review, as well as implement the International Compact. The UN's efforts to protect and promote the rights of Iraqis and to assist the vulnerable are also critical elements for Iraqi stability. A robust UNAMI presence remains essential to these efforts. In addition to Baghdad, the UN has representatives in Irbil and Basra. MNF-I continues to assist UNAMI and to help UNAMI achieve its goal of 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. Under a separate UN agreement, Fijian troops also provide static and close-in protection for UN personnel and facilities in Baghdad.

The UN Distinct Entity Trust Fund, which covers the "middle ring" security expenses, is facing dwindling resources. Contributions to the Fund are necessary to ensure the continued critical support provided by the "middle ring" security forces for the UN mission in Iraq and we call on Member States to consider contributing.

The Iraqi government remains engaged in efforts to build positive relations with its neighbors. Over the last three months, Syria and Iraq have reopened their embassies in each other's capitals and Iraq reestablished its embassy in Saudi Arabia. The Iraqi government also invited its neighbors, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, as well as Bahrain, Egypt, the UN Security Council P-5 Members and the UN to a meeting in Baghdad March 10. At that meeting all attendees announced their support for Iraqi security and stability.

In conclusion, Mr. President, the Iraqi government continues its efforts to secure a stable future for Iraq's citizens. Further progress in the political, economic and security arenas is essential to helping Iraq achieve its goals. The continued support of the international community remains important to Iraq's efforts, rooted in respect for Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thank you, Mr. President

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