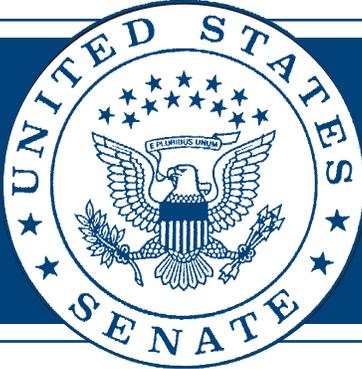


U.S. SENATOR JACK REED



IRAQ TRIP REPORT



By SENATOR JACK REED

JANUARY 17-18, 2008

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U.S. Senator Jack Reed

January 17-18, 2008

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

On January 17 and 18, 2008, I conducted my eleventh visit to Iraq.

I was ably assisted by Ms. Elizabeth King of my staff and LTC Cary Harbaugh, USA, USSOCOM Liaison Officer and MAJ Michael Stella, USA, Office of Congressional Liaison.

We visited Baghdad and spoke with General David Petraeus, Ambassador Ryan Crocker, and Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno.

We also had the opportunity to visit elements of the 169th MP Company of the Rhode Island National Guard in Ramadi, and in Baghdad, the Battery C of the 103rd Field Artillery of the Rhode Island National Guard and elements of the 65th Public Affairs Unit, Army National Guard, headquartered in Massachusetts with detachments in Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Throughout the evening of January 17 and on January 18, we visited Special Operations Detachments in Balad, Ba'qubah, Fallujah and Basra.

Once again, the extraordinary service and sacrifice of our military personnel and their civilian counterparts was evident. In demanding circumstances, their skill, courage, and patriotism have given opportunities for the Government of Iraq and Iraqi security forces to confront fundamental tactical and political problems.

Our forces have consistently gone beyond even our great expectations. Events in Iraq do hang in the balance, but it is not because our forces did not give their all in pursuit of American objectives.

Overview

First, the surge has not achieved President Bush's principal stated objectives, which are political in nature: significant progress on reconciliation, distribution of oil revenues and demonstration of basic governmental capacity by the Iraqi government. These tasks require difficult political decisions, not simply the diminution of violence.

But, efforts over the last several months have reduced the level of violence, and that is a notable achievement.

The bottom-line question typically posed with regard to Iraq is: "has the surge worked?"

Like a tourniquet: it has stopped the bleeding. But the very delicate political surgery needed to repair the deep wounds of Iraq and initiate a long-term process of healing and stability has not taken place, and that is the critical and decisive issue that we continue to face.

Because these critical political steps have not been taken and because the reduction of violence has been a result of multiple and dynamic factors in Iraq, the current relatively benign security situation can be reversed. American and Iraqi security forces have not yet achieved a self-sustaining situation of relatively low levels of violence.

Factors Contributing to the Current Security Situation

It is important to note the factors that are contributing to this reduction in violence. Popular commentary suggests that our increased military presence was the sole cause. A more thorough review suggests the presence of other factors. It is difficult to assess and prioritize the interaction of these factors. Some may have been a consequence of our policy, some coincidental. But, together they are shaping the security environment.

The most obvious factor was the increase of United States forces in Iraq, together with a much more aggressive use of these forces. The explicit recognition of the mission to protect the population and the deployment of U.S. forces in relatively small detachments throughout the battle space stabilized neighborhoods, interdicted the movement of insurgents, and facilitated the targeting and disruption of insurgent cells. These tactical approaches have contributed to improved security.

A second significant factor involved political developments within Anbar Province that began before the operational impact of the overall increase in American forces. In reaction to the brutality of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Sunni tribal leaders, with the encouragement and support of local American commanders, began cooperative efforts with United States forces directed at AQI. These efforts, the "Sunni Awakening," continue and have contributed to a reduction in violence and the displacement of AQI elements from the province.

A third factor was the August 29, 2007 decision by Moqtada al Sadr to order his Shia militias, the Mahdi Army or Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM), to stand-down and cease offensive operations for a period of six months. JAM, one of the largest paramilitary forces in Iraq, was created by Sadr. But as Sadr has taken on a more active role in the government, as many as a third of his militiamen have grown frustrated with the constraints of compromise and have splintered off into freelance death squads and criminal gangs.

Sadr extended the stand-down for an additional six months on February 22, 2008. It is still not clear what has motivated Sadr's decision for a ceasefire. Coalition forces had been applying pressure on JAM. There were and continue to be questions about whether Sadr is losing control over JAM as more militant factions took apparently independent actions. And, Sadr has tried both political and military approaches to advance his position.

The stand-down may signal at least a temporary attempt at political activity rather than armed confrontation. In any case, this deliberate decision has also contributed to a reduction in violence.

Finally, there are indications that the Iranians have exerted influence over their surrogates in Iraq that has translated into a temporary lull in their activities.

The Reversibility of These Factors

All of the factors contributing to the current level of stability can change over the next few months.

First, we will be reducing our military presence. By the summer, we will have 15 brigades in-country, down from 20 at the peak of the surge. And the force structure of the military is dictating this reduction just as much as anything that is happening on the ground.

Unless the Administration is prepared to continue 15 month deployments for Army personnel and accelerate the call up of National Guard and Reserve elements, the ability to maintain more forces is beyond the capacity of the current force structure.

General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker may very well argue for a pause in further reductions, but the pressure of force constraints indicates that United States ground force totals are headed in one direction that will ultimately lead to a reduced presence.

Commanders will use the present forces to damage insurgent networks as much as possible. They will redeploy remaining units to maximize as much as possible the ability to influence critical population centers and disrupt the movement of insurgent personnel and material. They will also call upon Iraqi security forces to shoulder more of the burden. Nevertheless, the reduction in American forces will have tactical and political consequences that inject uncertainty into the situation.

The Sunni Awakening, which has significantly transformed Anbar Province, must be integrated into the governing structure of Iraq. To date, the arrangement has been between Sunni tribes and coalition forces, with the Shia government in Baghdad having decidedly mixed emotions about armed bands of Sunni irregulars.

The operational structures of the Sunni Awakening are the local militias known as Concerned Local Citizens (CLCs) or “Sons of Iraq.” Presently 80,910 Sunnis are participating. They have their own weapons and the Coalition is paying them. Approximately 18,000 will be integrated into the Iraqi Security Forces, but the remaining 62,000 must be offered civilian jobs.

While 9,000 CLCs have been approved by Prime Minister Maliki and 20,000 have found jobs in Anbar Province, the question remains whether the CLCs will be supported fully by the Iraqi government once the Iraqi government has to pay them.

In Anbar Province, the decline of AQI has seen the revival of a political process as the Sunni community jousts for position with their own community and for entree to the Shia government in Baghdad.

There are three broad factions:

The New Baath Party is a new version of remnants of the old leadership. It derives support from exile figures, like Saddam’s daughter.

The second element consists of the tribal chieftains who are working with the U.S. but abstained from participation in previous elections that established Sunni representation in the government.

The final faction consists of those minority Sunnis who participated in the election and have had intermittently participated in the government.

This struggle for power could change the leadership and the motives of the Sunni community and could either strengthen their alignment with the government or place it on a path of communal confrontation.

With respect to Sadr, while his self-imposed suspension of provocative activities has been extended, questions remain about whether he can continue to control his more extreme elements and there are questions whether he will make a transition to political activity or resume, in various degrees, provocative activities. Sadr remains a wildcard.

The Iranians and their surrogates wield significant influence particularly in southern Iraq. There are indications that the Iranians continue preparations to support and train Iraqi surrogates and to stockpile weapons and bomb making materials. It is still difficult to determine Iranian intentions. They may be motivated to aggressively exploit political difficulties in Iraq in order to enhance their own regional position or they may, ironically, feel threatened by a potential military action by the United States or

Israel. In either case, the potential for instability caused by a change in Iranian policy is significant (it should also be noted that the “Iraqi portfolio” in Teheran appears to be under the control of the Quds Force, a unit of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard that operates outside Iran to assist pro-Iranian movements with weapons, training, and finances. Quds control over operations in Iraq injects a heightened degree of animosity into the equation).

The sum of all these factors is that the reduction in violence can be reversed. It is a fragile arrangement resting as much on political decisions as on the presence of U.S. forces.

Iraqi Political Capacity

The most salient impression that continues to emerge from my visits to Iraq is the fact that the government of Iraq still lacks the institutional and political capacity to govern effectively.

This failure decisively jeopardizes the long-term stability of Iraq and even the minimal achievement of our objectives.

The temporary increase in American forces was designed to prompt political action by the Government of Iraq. As President Bush indicated when he announced the increase in forces: “a successful strategy for Iraq goes beyond military forces ... So America will hold the Iraqi government to the benchmarks it has announced.”

Despite the increase in forces and the diminished levels of violence, the Government of Iraq has made inadequate progress on the benchmarks.

As we were visiting Iraq, the parliament had just passed the long awaited reconciliation legislation designed to reintegrate Sunni Baathists into the government. The de-Baathification efforts initiated under the Coalition Provisional Authority have been universally criticized as alienating the Sunni community and fostering profound resentment and animosity among the Sunnis.

But, contrary to the stated purposes of the legislation, this “Justice and Accountability law” may provide a legal pretext to purge Sunnis from key ministries rather than opening up access to the government.

The current view from Ambassador Crocker is that it depends on “implementation”. Given the difficulty of implementing anything at the national level, the result of these “reconciliation” efforts will likely either be negligible or perverse.

Iraq’s Presidency Council, which consists of the president of the republic and the two vice presidents, has to approve any legislation approved by Parliament. The Council allowed the law to pass on February 3rd but Tariq al-Hashemi, the Sunni member of the

council, objected to provisions of the law. In a statement quoted in the media, the council alluded to the possibility of further revisions, saying that the law in its present form would obstruct national reconciliation.

A second critical issue confronting the government and again relating to the perceived and actual status of the Sunni Community is the treatment of the CLC militias.

It is imperative that the Iraqi government assumes responsibility for these forces and financially supports them either through integration into the security forces or some form of employment. The longer this issue is unresolved the more likely that these forces will coalesce into criminal and/or anti-government forces.

Organizing and recognizing these forces represented a calculated risk by American commanders to undercut AQI in Iraq. The practical effect of our efforts was to legitimize Sunni militias in their role versus AQI. However, in doing so, we have also added a potential armed force for sectarian rivalry. Unless there is a timely political accommodation by the government with these forces, they could turn into a destabilizing factor.

A third major issue facing the government is the status of Kirkuk. During the Baathist regime, boundary lines of the Kurdish areas were changed and the regime deliberately attempted to repopulate the area with Arabs from other parts of Iraq. The Kurds viewed this as a blatant attempt to diminish their presence, power and prestige. They are seeking redress through Article 140 which calls for, among other items, bringing back displaced Kurds, providing compensation, conducting a census and providing a referendum on control by December 31, 2007. Another factor is the presence of extensive oil reserves in the region that add an economic impetus to the Kurdish sense of being aggrieved.

Through adroit negotiations by our diplomats and the assistance of UN officials, the deadline to address this issue has been moved forward to June. But, at this juncture, the parties are far apart. Moreover, like most political issues in Iraq, the issue of Article 140 has taken on a sectarian dimension. This is another issue that the Sunni community is using to judge whether they have an appropriate place in the emerging Iraq.

Coincidentally, this tension between the Kurdish community and the Sunni community is being exploited by remnants of AQI that have fled to the North from Anbar and from Baghdad. These AQI elements are trying to position themselves as the protectors of the Sunni community from Kurdish aggression. Indeed, it is one of a few remaining places that AQI is getting any traction within the Sunni population. By this summer, the issues around Article 140 could be another factor precipitating violence.

Compounding the specific issue of Article 140 is the need to address issues of regionalization and the distribution of oil revenues. The Iraqi Constitution could not avoid the reality of the semi-autonomy of the Kurdish region. It dealt with it by opening up the ability for other parts of Iraq to organize on a regional basis. Within the Shia community, this has led to considerable pressure to establish a Shia region in the South.

It has also heightened the anxiety of Sunnis since the geographic areas that they dominate (Anbar province and western Iraq) are not economically self-sufficient. Intersecting the regionalization issue is the issue of distributing oil revenues. The major producing areas and reserves are in the North and South adding an economic dimension to the sectarian drive for regions.

All of these complicated and interconnected political issues are overwhelming the limited capacity of the Government of Iraq. And, the political factions among the sectarian communities have shown very few political incentives to compromise. The Kurds and Shias seem to be consolidating their gains from the defeat of Saddam and the electoral process that has given them effective control. Within the Shia community, and to a much lesser extent the Kurdish community, there is a competition for leadership that could boil over. The Sunni community remains the “odd man out” with relatively little political leverage. As such, there is a significant likelihood that any one of these problems will lead to higher levels of violence in the coming months.

While acknowledging the lack of Iraqi governmental capacity, we must also recognize that, after five years, the Administration has still not effectively mobilized the non-military agencies of our government to assist the Iraqis.

Progress has been made in staffing and in focusing provincial reconstruction activities, but is far short of what is necessary and it is as much ad hoc as it is institutional, indicating that present efforts will be very difficult to sustain over the years needed for non-military assistance.

This is a significant failure that continues to undermine our efforts.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

The security improvements are real, but highly reversible in the relatively short term. The key factors underlying the improvements are political and, without increased political progress by the Iraqis, the security situation will deteriorate.

- **The Iraqi government must be strongly encouraged to take advantage of the improved security situation to make political progress.** Such steps should include:
 - **Fair implementation of the Accountability and Justice law;**
 - **Holding of provincial elections, perhaps on a rolling basis. Soon after my visit, the Presidency Council vetoed the provincial election law passed by the Iraqi parliament. Provincial elections, however, remain critical to integration of the Sunnis and credibility of emerging local leaders and the issue must be pressed;**
 - **Passage of a hydrocarbon law;**
 - **Improving ministerial capacity and provisions of essential services;**
 - **Integration of CLCs into the security forces or other areas of employment; and**
 - **Continuing negotiations to fairly resolve the issue of Kirkuk.**

- Private exhortations by the Administration to pressure the Iraqi political leadership have been ineffective. The continued opposition by President Bush to Congressional conditions on Iraqi policy and his insistence on a “blank check” undercuts the argument that the Iraqi political leaders must act or risk real consequences. **The United States must make clear that the presence of military forces is not indefinite or unconditional.**

- Unless the Administration mobilizes civilian efforts to complement military action, Iraq will remain a failing state with the increasing potential for internal instability further undermining the region as well as Iraq. **The Administration and Congress must explore and create proper incentives to encourage civilians from agencies such as Justice, Agriculture and State to serve in Iraq.**

- Long term efforts to stabilize Iraq must involve all of its neighbors, including Iran. **As a first step, regular lines of communications must be established with the regional parties.**

- While it is encouraging that AQI seems to have been disrupted in Iraq, global al Qaeda is not defeated and their goal of a caliphate remains. **The United States must properly allocate resources to continue to track and destroy this network worldwide.**

- **The Administration must work diligently, in coordination with Congress and according to past precedents, to negotiate and finalize a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) before the end of the year.** A SOFA is not a basing or access agreement, but rather defines the legal status of U.S. personnel and property in the territory of another nation. The purpose of such an agreement is to set forth rights and responsibility between the U.S. and host government on such matters as criminal and civil jurisdiction, the wearing of uniforms, carrying of arms, tax and customs relief, entry and exit of personnel and property and resolving of damage claims. It does not discuss the commitment of U.S. forces to a country. Any commitment of forces must be subject to the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate.

III. OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Wednesday, January 16, 2008

Meeting with Lieutenant General James Lovelace, Commanding General United States Army Central (ARCENT), Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), Camp Arifjan, Kuwait.

One of LTG Lovelace's roles is to provide command and control of Third Army/CFLCC forces in Afghanistan. He confirmed that the Taliban has had a resurgence and is concerned about troop levels in Afghanistan.

He observed that Afghanistan is larger than Iraq but the United States only has 26,607 troops (20,000 Army) there, compared to about 155,846 troops (115,000 Army) in Iraq.

He echoed General Dan McNeill, Commanding General of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Afghanistan, who stated that while many are complaining about what NATO will not do, we also have to be aware of what they are doing, and how much more difficult it would be without them.

LTG Lovelace also agreed that Pakistan was very vulnerable at this time. He noted that CFLCC does not presently have a strategic reserve but could call on the Marine Expeditionary Force which moves in and out of the region.

Regarding Iraq, LTG Lovelace stated that militarily, the situation was going well. He believes the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are improving every day. The question in his mind was whether the Iraqi government will be able to take over. He noted that Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus were pushing the Iraqi government hard to make progress.

LTG Lovelace agreed that Moqtada al Sadr's six month ceasefire has helped significantly in security progress.

LTG Lovelace has held his present command for one month. In that time he has visited Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and met with officials in Kuwait. He said that all the officials he has met with have counseled him on the Palestinian situation. These leaders also express concern about Iran. The Kuwaiti Minister of Interior was particularly worried about Iranian influence over the Shia in southern Iraq and the possible spillover into Kuwait. Saudi Arabian officials asked if the United States would ensure a stable Iraqi government before the United States withdrew its presence – they are concerned that Iran could grow too powerful and challenge Saudi Arabia's leadership position in the Middle East.

LTG Lovelace also discussed the state of the Army. When I noted that the surge had to end this summer because of force structure constraints and if it was to continue it would require faster mobilization of National Guard units and extended deployments, LTG

Lovelace stated that “the math hasn’t changed.” We also shared concern over the reduced retention rates of young officers and junior enlisted who are bearing the brunt of the increased operations tempo.

Additionally, we discussed the difficulty the Army may face in maintaining support for its growth initiative. While a slow economy may improve the Army’s recruiting base, the Army may not receive all the funds requested because of competing domestic needs, rising deficits, and the eventual end of supplemental funding.

Thursday, January 17, 2008

Meeting with Ambassador Ryan Crocker and General David Petraeus, Baghdad

Ambassador Crocker stated that the Iraqi government has made some positive political progress. Iraq has completed the Accountability and Justice Bill that is an alternative to the de-Baathification law enacted by former Coalition Provisional Authority. The bill was passed on January 12, 2008 by the Iraqi parliament, and the Presidency Council was approved by the Presidency Council, but still faces reservation and mistrust by numerous Iraqi factions and is strongly opposed by the Sadrists. The law allows 30,000 Baathists to receive pensions they earned under the former regime.

Ambassador Crocker noted that while the Accountability and Justice Bill had passed, it was not a perfect piece of legislation. He is worried that there are loopholes in the Accountability and Justice bill that can lead to further retribution. The law does not specifically require that Baathists be given their old jobs, and it may be used to drive the remaining working Baathists from major ministries such as Defense, Interior, Justice, Finance and Intelligence. Therefore, the implementation of the law is key. Despite concerns about prejudices against Baathists, General Petraeus noted that some Baathists did remain in high ranking positions in the government.

Ambassador Crocker said that the next major issue was provincial powers. The question is: what authority should the regions have over resources and what authority should the state have? The three focal points of this problem are the hydrocarbon law, control over the governors, and control over security forces.

Prime Minister Maliki wants central control, including the ability to appoint and dismiss provincial governors, while most of the Shia want decentralized power, including control over security forces.

Ambassador Crocker believes that a compromise may be reached to allow governors to be elected and dismissed by the provinces and allow the Prime Minister to have exclusive authority over security forces.

The issue of taxes has not been approached. Ambassador Crocker stated that to mention taxes at this time would be political suicide. The Iraqi people still have the mentality

from Saddam's regime that the central government must provide everything. The people believe they are entitled to services without cost.

On the economic front, Ambassador Crocker noted another sign of success was that a foreign investor had taken control of three cement plants. These plants would not be privatized but there was an agreement for long term management and modernization. Ambassador Crocker was pleased that foreign countries were willing to start investing in Iraq and the Iraqis were willing to negotiate deals.

Ambassador Crocker stated that because of improved security, some political movement had taken place, but it was still reversible. He noted that there was a great deal of fear and distrust and the Iraqis still faced many existential decisions.

On the issue of sectarian violence and ethnic cleansing, General Petraeus stated that while minorities in some neighborhoods fled, millions of Sunnis still live in Baghdad and on the whole, there are not homogenous neighborhoods. There are still ethnic fault lines all over Baghdad. The violence around these fault lines did not stop until Coalition and Iraqi forces met with the locals and developed accommodations.

When I asked if a return of minorities who fled their homes would destabilize these accommodations, General Petraeus said it would depend on the neighborhood. He gave the example of Gaziliyah where the Sunnis who live there want their old Shia neighbors to return because the Sunnis who moved in are of a different and lower class. Ambassador Crocker stated that sectarianism in Iraq has not historically been a big issue and there has always been intermingling and intermarriage.

General Petraeus stated that the Coalition has been working hard on political engagement with Sadr. To date, every time there has been a rumor that Sadr is going to increase violent activity, General Petraeus has asked and been reassured that this is not the case. General Petraeus believes that Sadr is continuing to lose control over JAM.

On Iranian activity, Ambassador Crocker stated that Iranian purposes and plans are not homogeneous. General Petraeus said that the Iraqis are happy to take what they can from the Iranians, such as tourism and investment.

Ambassador Crocker said he thought that Iran was viewing Iraq for the short term purpose of using it as a weapon against the United States, rather than with a long term view that Iran needs a stable neighbor in Iraq. This oversight may work against them in the long run.

Regarding putting pressure on the Iraqi government to make progress, Ambassador Crocker stated that such pressure had to be carefully calibrated. He agrees that the Maliki government needs to feel pressure, but he believes that if such pressure is in the context of the U.S. elections and withdrawal of U.S. forces, then the pressure could backfire. For example, he noted, when the Sunnis in al Anbar Province decided to turn against AQI, it was because U.S. forces were present and receptive. He does not know if there would

have been the same result if the Sunnis thought the U.S. was withdrawing. Ambassador Crocker says he fears that if the U.S. withdraws, the Iraqis may decide “it is time to stop extending the hand of compromise and start digging trenches.”

Presently, United States forces are deployed in Iraq under the mandate of United Nations Resolution 1511 which authorizes the multinational force to take “all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability” in the country.

This resolution was passed in October 2003 and has been renewed annually. It will expire at the end of 2008.

Ambassador Crocker confirmed that the U.S. will not ask for the UN mandate to be extended to 2009. He agreed that without a UN mandate, a SOFA must be completed by the fall.

The major issue during negotiations will likely be what jurisdiction Iraqi courts have over U.S. military personnel. The Ambassador explained that the Iraqis had recently created an Executive Council, staffed by a secretariat. Ambassador Crocker stated the Executive Presidential Council had been quickly put into place because Secretary Rice had visited and the Iraqis wanted to show progress. This Council will select the team to negotiate the SOFA with the United States.

Ambassador Crocker stated that it was important for this team to represent the entire political leadership, not just the Prime Minister. Ambassador Crocker said it remains to be seen how effective the Council will be.

General Petraeus said that he believed the Iraqi ministers had renewed incentives to work within the Maliki government because Maliki has survived this long. He also said Prime Minister Maliki feels that the U.S. is responsible for his survival.

On the issue of funding of political parties, Ambassador Crocker stated the U.S. government does not fund parties but individuals.

General Petraeus noted that there is a lot of corruption and the biggest problem is when the corruption funds AQI.

Ambassador Crocker agreed that incorporation of the CLCs into the government was important to keep violence down and further political progress.

Both Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus stated that the Iraqi government had to stop relying on Coalition forces to provide services and to start providing services on their own. A key was getting credible ministers in place.

Ambassador Crocker also discussed the issue of inadequate American civilian personnel. He stated “Not only are we not a nation at war, we are not a government at war.” He noted how difficult it was to get individuals from other agencies like the Departments of

Agriculture and Justice because these departments were not provided funding and did not have people to replace detailees.

On the subject of AQI, General Petraeus stated they need senior leaders, weapons, money, ideology, safe havens, popular support and foreign fighters. To deny them these needs, the United States must put pressure on countries which are the source of foreign fighters, weapons and funding, control the borders, increase intelligence, provide jobs, and effectively use the CLCs and coalition forces.

General Petraeus stated that he could see AQI thinking about when to cut losses in Iraq and move back to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Ambassador Crocker stated that Al Qaeda continues to seek their goal of a caliphate but tactically will be flexible – if it is easier to move to another country they will. Fighting AQI is the specialty of our Special Forces, but General Petraeus noted that the United States cannot do counterinsurgency with Special Forces alone.

General Petraeus and General Crocker confirmed they will return to testify before Congress in early April.

Meeting with 169th Military Police, Rhode Island National Guard, at Ramadi

The 169th Military Police Company has been tasked with a highway patrol mission. They are working with Iraqis to secure the economic corridors in al Anbar province.

The major corridor is a six lane divided highway. The Iraqi Highway Patrol was created in 2003 and is officially sanctioned by the Iraqi government. Individuals are screened by ISF and the Coalition. The soldiers I spoke with said they believed the Iraqis were committed to their jobs and not playing sectarian games.

The U.S. soldiers are formed into “station advisory teams.” They deploy overnight with the Iraqis and go on patrol with them. The Iraqis are always in the lead, to build both the confidence of the patrolmen and the population. The U.S. soldiers are helping the Iraqi patrolmen build relationships with the populace and overcome their tribal mentality. The U.S. rotation is ten days out with Iraqis and two days back at the base.

The highway patrol’s primary mission is counterinsurgency. There is smuggling, but since everyone is involved in it, it is difficult to crack down on it.

The Iraqis are increasingly doing more operations on their own – they get a tip about a robbery and they set up a checkpoint with U.S. assistance. The U.S. soldiers said the Iraqis have a very good “micro,” or local, intelligence system, even though it is tainted with rumors and rivalries.

The bigger problem is that Iraqis do not share intelligence on a “macro” level. The U.S. soldiers I spoke with said the Iraqis will have the necessary skills to stand on their own in a year.

These Iraqi patrolmen, however, are dependent on the United States for many essentials, including pay. A patrolman receives \$570 per month and a police chief receives \$900 per month which are good wages in Iraq.

The Iraqis also rely on the U.S. completely for fuel and partially for water and ammunition. They have had trouble getting a supply and logistics headquarters set up by the Iraqis for resupply. Therefore, concerns remain about what will happen when the United States is no longer the supplier.

The Coalition will stop supplying fuel soon. U.S. soldiers said that the Iraqis have said, “If we don’t have fuel, we will sit.” The U.S. soldiers were trying to talk them into patrolling on foot, but were unsure if they would be successful. No date has been set for responsibility of salaries to be transferred from the U.S. to the Iraqis.

In al Anbar province, the CLCs are unpaid volunteers who act as a neighborhood watch.

I asked three members of the 169th how violent the area was. All three stated it was very quiet.

I asked if it was “before the storm” quiet or “after the storm” quiet. Two soldiers said they thought it was “before the storm” quiet and as soon as the U.S. stopped providing supplies and funding, the patrolmen would return to tribal loyalties. One soldier felt that the AQI had overplayed their hand and the Iraqis were invested in a new way of life and would continue to do their jobs.

The members of the 169th had new uparmored HMMWVs, four new ASVs and all the supplies they needed. They also had access to Apaches and Medevacs in the area. They said that the supply situation was vastly improved from their first deployment in 2003.

Meeting with C/103rd Field Artillery, Rhode Island National Guard, Baghdad

I met with members of the C/103rd Field Artillery of the Rhode Island National Guard, who are performing various important but classified functions at Camp Victory. I discussed their mission with them and found that morale was good.

Meeting with Special Operations Forces, Fusion Cell, Baghdad

I met with a special operations fusion activity which specializes in synchronizing inter-agency actions to integrate intelligence and improve U.S. capability to discover and apprehend terrorists.

Meeting with 65th Public Affairs Unit, Rhode Island National Guard, Baghdad

I met with several members of the 65th Public Affairs Unit. This unit has a variety of jobs, including assisting journalists who want to embed with military units; providing credentials for journalists; and providing summaries of Iraqi news reports for items of interest to coalition forces. Again, I found that these troops were proud of what they were accomplishing and morale was high.

Meeting with Mr. David Pearce, Senior Advisor to Ambassador Crocker, Baghdad

Mr. Pearce is working on the Kurdish issue. The Kurds number 20-25 million and are the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East. They have never obtained statehood but are given minority status in Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq.

There are an estimated 4 to 4.5 million Kurds in Iraq, which is roughly 15 to 20 percent of the Iraqi population. Beginning in 1961, the Kurds led an intermittent insurgency in Iraq, which faced increasing suppression after the Baathists took control of the country in 1968. In 1975, Iran stopped supporting the Kurdish insurgency under the U.S.-supported “Algiers Accord” with Iraq. In 1977, the Baathists changed the borders of the Kurdish minority area, essentially cutting it in half, and then added Arab populations while reducing Kurdish populations.

The Iraqi constitution recognizes the three Kurdish provinces of Dohuk, Irbil, and Sulaymaniyah as a legal “region.” Kurdish Iraqis seek to remedy the reductions of land in the 1970s and believe that the city of Kirkuk and surrounding Tamim Province should be incorporated into Kurdish territory. The Kurds insisted that this issue be addressed during the 2005 constitutional negotiations, resulting in the inclusion of Article 140.

A referendum on Kirkuk is still considered an explosive issue. Kirkuk is a major source of oil. The Kurds feel that Kirkuk is historically Kurdish even though Kurds are only 30% of the population there, while the Arabs and Turkmen believe that keeping Kirkuk is a national Iraqi issue. The Kurds’ enthusiasm for expanding their influence has annoyed the Arabs and Sunnis and AQI has capitalized on this. The number of AQI in the area is also increasing because they are being pushed out of Baghdad and Diyala Province by the surge.

Given the destabilizing nature of this issue, the United States, working with the UN, through Ambassador Negroponte and Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Iraq, negotiated with the Kurds and the government of Iraq for a six month technical delay in the referendum. Mr. Pearce said that the agreement to delay the referendum was in itself a significant act of political will for both sides. Mr. Pearce clearly stated that this delay does not mean trading one deadline for another. It is unclear what will happen in June 2008.

The Kurds also agreed to seek UN technical assistance on finding a way forward on implementation. Mr. Pearce said this was significant because historically the Kurds have been suspicious of the UN.

Mr. Pearce emphasized that the final resolution on Kirkuk needed to be sustainable. He said that it was customary for everyone involved to overplay their hand. At the moment, the positions of the Kurds and the Iraqi government are far apart, but it was key that the two sides are talking. Mr. Pearce hoped to have the two sides continue talking and break the problem into manageable portions. He said there has to be a clarification of what is possible. No one is going to get his first choice. The goal is that the resolution will be fair and transparent.

Mr. Pearce believes that the issue of Kirkuk will ultimately be resolved as part of the larger issues of provincial elections and the hydrocarbon law. There may not be a resolution within six months but it will be progress if there is a way forward in that time.

Meeting with Special Operations Forces, Balad

The special operations units I met with in Balad are commanded by Lieutenant General Stanley McCrystal and have benefited from his four and a half years of leadership.

These soldiers believe that AQI has been too disrupted to come back in Iraq. However, they will move to other targets of opportunity. Beginning in May, Iran, Iraq, and the U.S. held tripartite talks on three separate occasions. Presently a date for the next set of talks has not been set. These soldiers believe that Iran will wait 60-90 days after the next tripartite talks and then decide if they will reengage in violent activity.

Meeting with Headquarters, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force –Arabian Peninsula

These forces have found very beneficial the authorities and funding first provided in Section 1208 of the FY05 Defense Authorization Act and renewed in the FY08 Defense Authorization Act under Section 1202. This provision provides \$25 million to provide support to foreign forces, irregular forces, groups or individual engaged in supporting or facilitating ongoing military operations by US special operations forces to combat terrorism.

Friday, January 18, 2008

Meeting with SOTF-Central, Baghdad

I visited with and observed a training exercise of the U.S. soldiers who train Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF). One U.S. soldier patrols with each ISOF team so the U.S. soldier must rely on ISOF for protection. ISOF owns the ground but Coalition forces provide the air assets and medevacs.

ISOF soldiers still leave their uniforms on the base so they are not harassed while in the population. Eighteen months ago ISOF was seen as secretive and disliked by the general population, but this reputation is slowly changing.

Meeting with General Raymond Odierno, Commander, Multi-National Corps-Iraq

General Odierno provided statistics regarding the drop in violence. At the time of my visit, violence had been on a steady decline for 29 consecutive weeks. IED attacks were also down and under 10% in effectiveness. Civilian deaths had also declined. Coalition casualties were down and wounds were not as severe.

General Odierno noted, however, that while sectarian violence was down, sectarian tensions remain. Politics is an igniter. In addition, AQI and militias see sectarian tension as a pressure point they can exploit.

General Odierno said one reason violence and the insurgency has declined is because AQI overplayed their hand. AQI is no longer getting passive support from the population – they relied heavily on intimidation to get the support they needed.

Sadr's ceasefire has also contributed to the drop in violence. General Odierno believes that Sadr has ceased fighting because he is trying to project a political message bolstered by social services.

He also stated that Syria has reduced their support for foreign fighters, but it was purely in their own interests.

General Odierno stated that the fundamental threat in Iraq is the communal struggle for survival, power, and resources. The surge has pushed AQI to the north. General Odierno is concerned that if Sunnis are not soon given a voice through provincial elections, they will move toward AQI.

General Odierno is also worried about the Kurdish issue. He believes that the longer the Kirkuk referendum is delayed, the more the Kurds will solidify. He also thinks there are other areas that present serious security problems, like Mosul, which the Kurds may be interested in but is not mentioned in the constitution.

General Odierno stated that the U.S. must remain an influence in Iraq or the U.S. will be supplanted by the Iranians. He thinks we should use the supply of U.S. military equipment as leverage. He noted that the Foreign Military Sales process was still too slow.

General Odierno noted there are several positive trends: AQI activity is down, Coalition forces are successfully partnering with Sunnis, and the ISF continue to grow and improve. He believes that over the next year, the competition for power and resources in Iraq will be resolved and it would be better to do it with less violence rather than more.

He stated that the surge and other factors contributing to a drop in violence have “opened a window” and the Government of Iraq must be pressured to take advantage of it. He believes that in the meantime, the U.S. should continue to facilitate bottom up reconciliation, develop the ISF, and transition the ISF to provide population protection.

General Odierno emphasized that the ultimate solution in Iraq is political. All brigade commanders agree that provincial elections must be held because the provinces are where the true leaders are emerging. In addition, the Accountability and Justice legislation must be properly implemented. There must also be substantial improvements in ministerial capacity.

General Odierno stated that the CLCs are not a sustainable mechanism for localized security. He said they must be integrated into the ISF or another formal Iraqi government structure. In Anbar Province, they are being integrated, but Baghdad may be more problematic. One side effect of the CLCs is that the increased number of Iraqis with income is boosting the economy.

In southern Iraq, General Odierno observed that the Iraqis stepped up to fill the gap left by the drawdown of British troops.

On the drawdown of U.S. troops, General Odierno said it must be carefully calibrated. There are nineteen brigades in Iraq now and there will be eighteen in one month, with fifteen by the summer. He said different options must be considered, like taking out one battalion at a time rather than a whole brigade.

General Odierno stated that his mission was to achieve “irreversible momentum by late summer 2008.” This would involve securing the population, defeating AQI and other extremists, and neutralizing insurgent and militia groups.

He believes the U.S. also must work on “non-kinetic” operations such as creating jobs, developing the agriculture sector, establishing rule of law, and providing essential services. He thinks there is now momentum, but it is not yet irreversible.

General Odierno thinks that if Sadr returns to violence, there will be problems.

He thinks that there are ten to fifteen individuals who are key to the Iranian influence and if they were apprehended, it would make a difference.

General Odierno believes that AQI is disrupted but trying to survive. They are reorganizing. They are likely looking for a high profile attack to reestablish themselves and the U.S. forces are trying to stop that.

General Odierno also made the following points:

- The priority task for 2008 was negotiation and completion of a SOFA.
- Echoed General Lovelace in expressing concern about retention rates of young officers and junior enlisted.
- The U.S. leaders in Iraq need to be able offer the new President several “way ahead” options.

Meeting with Special Operations Forces, Diyala Province

These troops are focused on foreign internal defense (FID). They work with both the Iraqi army and Iraqi police. All activities are to be done “by, through, and with Iraqi forces.”

The Army was formed first so they were initially doing police functions. Now that the police force is growing, they are taking over their proper role. In the long run, the Army should be looking out to protect Iraq from external threats, while the police should focus on internal threats. The Iraqi Army and police are training together and it is working well. It is a way for them to become familiar with each other and gain each other’s trust. Iraqi instructors are also starting to take over the training which shows progress.

As an example of the increased effectiveness of the ISF and the increasing trust of the population, one soldier noted that previously it took an entire U.S. battalion to clear a certain area. When it had to be cleared a second time, it was accomplished with only 30 U.S. soldiers and 250 Iraqis.

The enemy in this province is a combination of AQI, JAM, and Sunni rejectionists. The Sunnis and JAM are fighting over smuggling routes. As JAM pushes the Sunnis out, the Sunnis turn to AQI. JAM “special groups,” or rogue JAM militias, are currently out of favor in this province.

In this area, the CLCs are volunteers and are not paid by the United States. They bring their own weapons. U.S. soldiers do supply some requested comfort items such as blankets and heaters at checkpoints.

The ability for the local government to provide essential services is not yet 100% and differs depending on the area. Electricity is abundant because it is supplied by Iran. Water supplies are at 60-70% and improving daily.

The troops I spoke with stated that corruption and criminal activity exist and it has to be accepted that it will always exist at a certain level. They did say that the army and police had been vetted so that the most corrupt elements had been eliminated.

Diyala Province is 45% Shia, 45% Sunni and 10% Kurds. Presently, the Shia hold all the high government positions. The SOF believe that since their operating base had been established, violence against Sunnis had decreased and the displacement of Sunnis had ceased. Again, these troops reiterated the need for provincial elections. They stated that if the elections were held today, a mix of Sunni and Shia would be elected and many problems would be solved.

These troops stated that the Iranian influence was not as open and pervasive as they expected in the province, but they noted the border was very porous. Offensive operations by Iran had stopped. Iran was, however, stockpiling weapons, perhaps to start violence when the U.S. leaves. The troops stated that weapons flowed through Iraq but were not necessarily being used in Iraq. In addition, Iranian nationals and Kurdish Iranians moved across the border freely.

Meeting with Special Operations Forces, Fallujah

The mission here is FID training, targeting and engaging local tribes, predominantly to gain information. The Iraqi police are the primary effort, the Iraqi Army secondary. There has been a decrease in violent incidents for twelve consecutive months. The primary reason is the AQI has been cleared out of the population centers. These troops believe that if these trends continue, AQI will soon be a non-entity in al Anbar province.

The major threat in this area is the return of Sunni nationalist groups which have started to filter in as AQI has left. The former regime elements are few in number but are well funded. These troops believe the reconciliation law, if properly implemented, will help stem violence.

These troops believe the long pole in the tent is getting the Iraqi national government to support local initiatives. They say that in this area, the Maliki government is referred to as “the Persians.” The residents of al Anbar want to know what the next steps will be. They also want essential services supplied.

The Bedouins do not recognize national boundaries and cross at will. It was noted that they are wealthy despite their nomadic lifestyle.

The Iranian influence is virtually nonexistent in this area.

Meeting with Special Operations Forces, Basra

The U.S. troops arrived in Basra in October. The British troops are presently at 5,000. One British battalion leaves in February and the second battalion leaves this summer.

The British do not leave the base often. As one soldier noted, “The British would consider it a major policy failure to go downtown in an armored car.” They focus on training Iraqis who come to the base.

At this time, U.S. troops are not able to enter Basra, which is the center for 80% of the trade in the province. The last time U.S. troops attempted to go to Basra, they found 57 IEDs on the road.

The main problem facing the Iraqi Army is a shortage of NCOs and junior officers. Company commanders shoulder much of the weight.

The Iraqis own the battle space and ISOF works alone. U.S. troops have not yet patrolled with ISOF since they arrived. The Prime Minister or Minister of Defense decide on the target and ISOF develops a battle plan. The Iraqi commander in the region can express reservations about this battle plan but he can be overridden.

If the U.S. troops receive intelligence, they will pass it to the Iraqis to develop a plan of operation. The U.S. soldiers say that the Iraqis are improving, but slowly. “It is not a bridge too far, but it is a long bridge.”

In this area, Iranian influence is everywhere. The soldiers said that the Iranians were literally unloading frigates of materials – “from cigarettes to bombs.”