

From: Rayburn, LTC Joel D. (USA)
Sent: Monday, December 15, 2008 7:06 AM
To: Landis, Joshua M.

Hello, Joshua--I left Baghdad in September and am now working on Gen Petraeus' staff in Tampa. We are just returning from the Manama Dialogue, sponsored by IISS. I commend to you the IISS website's transcript of Gen Petraeus' remarks yesterday (<http://www.iiss.org/>), which sent a message of strategic significance to the entire Gulf region.

The situation in Iraq has continued to improve, with levels of violence decreasing all around the country. November was the least violent month since the 2003 invasion, and US and Iraqi casualties each month are at or near record-lows. We have gone from around 180 attacks per day back in the spring of 2007 to fewer than 10 per day now. Unfortunately, there is still an intermittent terrorist threat, as we saw with the barbaric bombing in Kirkuk a few days ago. But even high-profile attacks like this have decreased sharply, indicating a drop in the enemy's attack capability. We all look now to next month's provincial elections for their potential to rebalance Iraqi politics at the local level. A free and fair election will, I hope, produce a result in which groups that have been disenfranchised since 2005 will enter the political system, and my further hope is that this will sap the various insurgencies of whatever political support they now retain. This will be particularly important in the provinces of Ninewa, Diyala, and Anbar. Meanwhile, beyond the political realm, the next several months will be taken up with working out how the US and Iraqi forces are going to work with one another under the new US-Iraqi strategic agreement, because common threats--such as Al Qaeda and the Iranian-backed Shi'a militias--will continue to be a problem that the Iraqis will need our help to confront.

Hope this helps. Let me know how it goes.

--Joel