

DOS 1.4(d)

OSD 1.4(d)

TRANSFERRED FOR [REDACTED] REPLY DOE

RECOMMEND FOR [REDACTED] CLASS [20]

BT

CONTROLS

~~SECRET~~ ANKARA 002819

DEPT. FOR NEA DAS CROCKER, NEA/NGA AND EUR/SE;
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH;
PARIS FOR O'FRIEL

Classification
Extended ~ Class:
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03/28/2017

REVIEW AUTHORITY: ~~Charles Paris, Senior Reviewer~~

E.O. 12958: ~~DECL: 04/07/2012~~

TEXT

TAGS: PREL MARR, PHUM, PTER, UNSC, TU, IZ
COMBINE: COMPLETE

SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRAQ OVERVIEW: USG DEL FINDS EAGERNESS
FOR CHANGE; INCREASING TERRORISM CONCERNS, IRANIAN
COMPLICITY, PUK SEEKS US ASSISTANCE

CLASSIFIED BY CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I., JIM JEFFREY, REASONS
1.5 B/D.

SUMMARY

1. (S) A USG DELEGATION LED BY NEA DAS RYAN CROCKER VISITED
NORTHERN IRAQ APRIL 1-4. KURDISH, TURKMEN AND
ASSYRIAN/CHALDEAN OPPOSITION GROUPS ALL GAVE THE USG DEL
VERSIONS OF THE SAME MESSAGE: EVERYONE IS READY FOR
FUNDAMENTAL DEMOCRATIC CHANGE AND FOCUSED ON ELIMINATING THE
REGIME IN BAGHDAD. THIS COMMON PURPOSE, COUPLED WITH
ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, HAS THE OPPOSITION PARTIES
ENERGICALLY COMPETING/QUARRELING WITH EACH OTHER,
BUT RELATIONS BETWEEN THEM ARE NOTICEABLY LOWER THAN THEY WERE
PREVIOUSLY. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE KDP AND TURKEY, HOWEVER,
IMPROVED. THE APRIL 2 ATTEMPT ON THE LIFE OF PUK "PRIME
MINISTER" SALEM BY SUSPECTED ISLAMISTS IN SULAYMANIYAH
UNDERSCORED THE INCREASING PROBLEM OF TERRORISM IN NORTHERN
IRAQ. PUK TOLD CROCKER THAT UP TO 60 AL QAEDA MEMBERS
WAS NOTED IN BIYARA, ON THE IRANIAN BORDER, AND THAT ONE-THIRD
OF THOSE WERE RECENT ARRIVALS. [REDACTED]
SAID HE BELIEVES THAT SINCE THE PRESIDENT'S STATE OF THE
UNION ADDRESS, IRAN HAS BEEN PUSHING AL QAEDA OPERATIVES OUT
OF IRAN AND INTO IRAQ, WITH SOME GOING TO BAGHDAD, SOME TO
BASRA AND SOME TO BIYARA. [REDACTED] TOLD ONW POLAD IN ANKARA
APRIL 7 THAT THE PUK NEEDED US ASSISTANCE TO GET THE
SITUATION IN BIYARA UNDER CONTROL. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) NEA DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY RYAN CROCKER LED A
DELEGATION TO NORTHERN IRAQ APRIL 1-4 INCLUDING NEA/NGA
DIRECTOR DAVID PEARCE, IRAQ DESKOFF REYNOLDS KIEFER,
OPERATION NORTHERN WATCH POLAD JONATHAN COHEN AND [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] THE DELEGATION VISITED
DOHUK, SALAHADEN, ERBIL, DUKAN AND SULAYMANIYAH, AND MET
WITH LEADERSHIP OF THE KURDISTAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (KDP), THE

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PATRIOTIC UNION OF KURDISTAN (PUK), THE IRAQI TURKMEN FRONT (ITF), THE ASSYRIAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (ADM), AND OTHER TURKMEN AND ASSYRIAN/CHALDEAN PARTIES, AS WELL AS THE PEACE MONITORING FORCE COMMANDER AND REPS FROM THE UN AND MINES ADVISORY GROUP, AN NGO. THIS MESSAGE PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF KEY ISSUES AND OBSERVATIONS FROM THE TRIP. DETAILED REPORTING WILL FOLLOW SEPTEL.

TERRORISM AN INCREASING CONCERN - WITH AN IRANIAN ANGLE

3. (S) ON THE MORNING OF APRIL 2 IN DUKAN, [REDACTED] TOLD CROCKER THAT 17 "AFGHAN ARABS" HAD RECENTLY ARRIVED VIA IRAN IN BIYARA, NEAR HALABJA ON THE IRANIAN BORDER, BRINGING THE TOTAL NUMBER OF SUSPECTED AL QAEDA MEN IN THE BIYARA AREA TO OVER 60. HE SAID THEY WERE LIVING IN TENTS AND CAVES IN ANSAR AL-ISLAM-CONTROLLED BIYARA AND 7 OTHER SMALL VILLAGES ALONG THE IRANIAN BORDER, THAT SOME OF THEM [REDACTED] AND THAT THE PUK'S INTELLIGENCE SERVICE WAS WATCHING THEM CLOSELY AND HOPING TO ARREST ONE OF THEM RETURNING TO BIYARA FROM A TRIP TO KIRKUK. [REDACTED] SAID IRAN HAD BEEN PUSHING THEM OUT OF ITS TERRITORY AFTER PRESIDENT BUSH'S AXIS OF EVIL REMARKS IN THE STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS AND USING NORTHERN IRAQ AS A "DEPOSITORY FOR PEOPLE FROM AFGHANISTAN." HE ADDED THAT THE PUK HAD ARRESTED ONE IRANIAN ARAB WHO HAD LINKS TO BOTH UBL AND SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE BAGHDAD REGIME AND THAT THEY WERE DEVELOPING MORE INFORMATION ON LINKAGES BETWEEN ANSAR AL-ISLAM, AL QAEDA AND BAGHDAD. PUK AND KDP REPS EMPHASIZED THAT IRANIAN SUPPORT FOR THE PKK REMAINED CLEAR, WITH [REDACTED] GOING SO FAR AS TO SAY THAT THE PKK WERE ESSENTIALLY MERcenARIES WORKING FOR THE IRANIANS.

ATTACK ON PUK'S HARBAN SALEH

AT APPROXIMATELY 16:00 APRIL 2, THREE MEN ARMED WITH RIFLES AND GRENADES ATTEMPTED TO ASSASSINATE PUK HARBAN SALEH AT HIS RESIDENCE IN SULAYMANIYAH. TWO OF THE ATTACKERS WERE KILLED IN THE ATTEMPT, AS WERE FIVE OF SALEH'S BODY GUARDS. SALEH WAS UNHARMED. THE THIRD ATTACKER WAS CAPTURED IN SULAYMANIYAH ON APRIL 3 HIDING IN THE HOME OF A BODY GUARD OF KURDISTAN ISLAMIC GROUP LEADER HAJI ALI BAFIR. THE THREE ATTACKERS WERE APPARENTLY ISLAMIST KURDS FROM ANSAR AL-ISLAM IN BIYARA. THE TWO WHO WERE KILLED WERE NEWLY SHAVED AND HAD KORANIC VERSES IN THE POCKETS OF THEIR CLOTHES. ONE OF THEM WAS THE BROTHER OF A PERPETRATOR OF THE 2001 ASSASSINATION OF ERBIL GOVERNOR FRANSO HARIRI. THE PUK AND KDP HAD BEEN AWARE OF A CREDIBLE ANSAR AL-ISLAM THREAT AGAINST BOTH SALEH AND KDP "FOREIGN MINISTER" HOSHYAR ZEBARI DUE TO THEIR SECULAR, PRO-US STANCES. [REDACTED] SAID THE PUK WOULD RETALIATE AGAINST ANSAR AL-ISLAM, BUT FIRST NEEDED TO CONDUCT A THOROUGH

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INVESTIGATION.

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+ 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(6)

ASKS FOR US HELP

5. (S) ON APRIL 7 IN ANKARA, [REDACTED] MET ONW POLAD. [REDACTED] REPORTED THAT THE KDP HAD SENT TWO OFFICIALS TO SULAYMANIYAH TO ESTABLISH WITH THE PUK A SECURITY COORDINATION CELL TO WORK TOGETHER ON THE PROBLEM OF TERRORISM COMING FROM BIYARA. [REDACTED] NOTED THAT "BIYARA IS BEYOND THE PUK'S CAPACITY TO HANDLE. THERE ARE OVER 60 AL QAEDA GUYS THERE. WE NEED US HELP WITH THE INVESTIGATION OF THIS ATTACK AND WE NEED THE US

[REDACTED] SAID JOURNALIST [REDACTED] HAD CALLED HIM TO ASK ABOUT THE ATTACK AND THE FACT THAT IT TOOK PLACE ON THE SAME DAY THAT A USG DELEGATION WAS IN SULAYMANIYAH.

KDP-PUK RELATIONS - "THE TRUST IS BACK"

6. (C) RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PUK AND KDP ARE VERY GOOD. SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE TWO GROUPS ARE MEETING ON A REGULAR BASIS TO COORDINATE POLICY, RESULTING IN MESSAGES THAT SOUND VERY SIMILAR AND ARE MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE: BOTH STATED THEIR FIRM COMMITMENT THEIR IDENTITY AS IRAQI CITIZENS OF KURDISH ORIGIN AND TO A DEMOCRATIC, PLURALISTIC, PARLIAMENTARY IRAQ WITHIN ITS INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED BORDERS THAT RESPECTS THE RIGHTS OF ALL ITS CITIZENS. BOTH SAY THEY WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN A FUTURE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND FAVOR A FEDERAL SYSTEM, THE SHAPE OF WHICH SHOULD BE DETERMINED BY THE IRAQI PEOPLE THEMSELVES. NEITHER PARTY SPENT MUCH TIME DISCUSSING UNRESOLVED AND UNIMPLEMENTED PROVISIONS OF THE [REDACTED] AGREEMENT, AND BOTH WERE MORE INTERESTED IN IMPLEMENTING AND FINE TUNING THE UN OIL-FOR-FOOD PROGRAM, AND CRAFTING A UNIFIED IRAQI OPPOSITION WITH A CLEAR PROGRAM FOR THE FUTURE OF IRAQ. HAVING JUST ENJOYED THE BEST RAINS IN FOUR YEARS, WATER AND ELECTRICITY SUPPLIES ARE ASSURED FOR THE NEXT NINE MONTHS, WITH RESULTANT ECONOMIC BENEFITS. AS THE REGION HAS DEVELOPED, THE PEOPLE AND THE LEADERSHIP ARE MORE INTERESTED IN JOBS AND THE ECONOMY THAN IN WHICH PARTY ENJOYS THE DAY'S ADVANTAGE ON ANY GIVEN ISSUE. THE TWO PARTIES ARE CURRENTLY THRASHING OUT A PAPER ON WHAT SORT OF FEDERAL SYSTEM THEY WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN A FUTURE IRAQ. AS PUK INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS CHIEF SADE PIRI PUT IT, BETWEEN THE KDP AND THE PUK, "THE TRUST IS BACK."

7. (C) EVEN THE IRAQI TURKMEN FRONT, USUALLY THE KDP'S HARSHEST CRITIC, FOCUSED IN ITS MEETING WITH US ON THE REAL PROBLEM IN BAGHDAD. WHEN [REDACTED] DID COMPLAIN ABOUT THE KDP, HIS APPROACH WAS MORE REALISTIC AND BALANCED THAN WE HAVE SEEN IN THE PAST. THE ITF AND THE ASSYRIAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT BOTH EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE KDP AND PUK MIGHT MAKE A PLAY FOR MOSUL AND KIRKUK, WORRYING THAT

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THEY WOULD EITHER BE SQUEEZED BETWEEN THE TWO OR BE LEFT OUT OF A FUTURE ARRANGEMENT.

KDP-TURKEY RELATIONS REMAIN POOR, TENSE

8. (S) APART FROM TERRORISM-RELATED DEVELOPMENTS, THE MAIN POTENTIAL FLASHPOINT IN NORTHERN IRAQ REMAINS THE TENSE KDP-TURKEY RELATIONSHIP. [REDACTED] EXPRESSED EVEN STRONGER SENSITIVITY TO TURKISH POSITIONS THAN HE DID LAST DECEMBER. [REDACTED] ASSURED CROCKER THAT THE KURDS ARE NOT WORKING FOR AN INDEPENDENT STATE, BUT THAT TURKEY REFUSES TO UNDERSTAND OR ACCEPT THIS. EVERY DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN IRAQ IS SEEN BY TURKEY AS ANOTHER STEP TOWARD KURDISH INDEPENDENCE. [REDACTED]

9. (S) THE PROBLEM MAY BE MORE PERSONALITY THAN SUBSTANCE AS [REDACTED] SAYS THAT ON-THE-GROUND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE KURDS AND THE KDP FUNCTIONS SMOOTHLY, AND EVEN [REDACTED] THAT THE TURKISH MFA HAS TRIED TO BE HELPFUL, [REDACTED] OVERRIDE THE GENERALS IN TGS. CROCKER HEARD FROM [REDACTED] IN ANKARA APRIL 5 THAT THE TGS BELIEVES TURKEY ALLOWED BARZANI TO BUILD HIMSELF UP INTO A MORE PROMINENT FIGURE THAN IS ACCEPTABLE FOR ANKARA. THE TGS PERCEPTION IS THAT BARZANI IS STRUGGLING AGAINST THE TURKMEN INSTEAD OF THE PKK. [REDACTED] SAID TWICE, AND RATHER OMINOUSLY, THAT IF BARZANI [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] SAID THAT IRAQIS SHOULD NOT ALLOW NEIGHBORS TRYING TO DECIDE FOR THE PEOPLE OF IRAQ WHAT IRAQ'S FUTURE WILL BE. [REDACTED] STATED TO US SEVERAL TIMES THAT TURKISH FEARS OF THE FORMATION OF A KURDISH STATE ARE BASELESS, THAT NO ONE IS ASKING FOR IT, AND THAT SUCH A PROJECT WOULD BE "IMPRACTICAL, IMPOSSIBLE, IT WOULDN'T WORK." [REDACTED] SAID HE HAD ASKED THE TURKS TO STOP RAISING THE POINT BECAUSE ITS REPETITION WAS HURTING THE REGIME CHANGE EFFORT BY STOKING UNNECESSARY FEARS AMONG THE IRAQI ARMY. THAT SAID, MANY TURKS, INCLUDING [REDACTED] REMAIN CONVINCED THAT THE LONG-TERM GOAL FOR THE IRAQI KURDS IN GENERAL AND THE KDP IN PARTICULAR, REMAINS AN INDEPENDENT KURDISH STATE. IN AN APRIL 5 MEETING IN ANKARA WITH TURKISH MFA [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] CROCKER NOTED [REDACTED] PERCEPTION THAT THE CHANGE OF TURKISH SPECIAL FORCES COMMANDERS IN THE SOUTHEAST SOME 18 MONTHS AGO HAD RESULTED IN A SHARP DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS, AND THAT THE KDP'S REAL PROBLEM WAS WITH THE

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SPECIAL FORCES COMMANDER IN THE SOUTH [REDACTED] WAS NOT WILLING TO GET INVOLVED IN TGS-KDP TENSIONS.

10. (S) CROCKER ALSO RAISED WITH [REDACTED] CONTINUED US OPPOSITION TO AN IRAQI BRIDGE OVER THE TIGRIS. HE NOTED THAT THE WINTER SEEMED TO HAVE SET BACK THE PROJECT, BUT THE IRAQIS WERE STILL ACTIVELY WORKING ON IT. CROCKER EMPHASIZED THAT THE CHANGE IN THE STATUS QUO IN FAVOR OF BAGHDAD THAT THE BRIDGE WOULD REPRESENT WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE TO THE US. [REDACTED] ASKED IF OUR EARLIER CONCERNS THAT THE BRIDGE WOULD ALLOW SADDAM TO MOVE HIS MILITARY NORTH MORE EASILY AND THAT HE COULD GET TO A DOWNED OPERATION NORTHERN WATCH PILOT BEFORE WE COULD REMAINED VALID. CROCKER SAID THAT WE STOOD BY OUR PREVIOUSLY VOICED OBJECTIONS. HOWEVER, THE TURKS SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT IN LIGHT OF STATEMENTS BY THE PRESIDENT MAKING CLEAR THAT WE BELIEVE THE SADDAM REGIME SHOULD GO, WE ARE NOT PREPARED TO SEE ANY STEPS THAT COULD EXPAND HIS CONTROL ON THE GROUND OR WHICH HE COULD PORTRAY AS A VICTORY.

SUPPORT FOR OPPOSITION WORK STRONG IN THE NORTH

11. (S) BOTH THE KDP AND THE PUK PLEDGED TO WORK TO MAKE THE MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE'S CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF IRAQ A SUCCESS AND REPEATEDLY STATED THEIR COMMITMENT TO WORK WITHIN THE OPPOSITION FOR A COMMON VIEW OF THE FUTURE. KDP [REDACTED] SAID THAT PEOPLE IN GENERAL ARE CONVINCED THE US HAS DECIDED THAT THIS REGIME MUST BE CHANGED, AND THAT THE IRAQI PEOPLE WANT AN END TO THE CURRENT SITUATION, NO MATTER WHAT OR WHO COMES AFTER. [REDACTED] URGED THAT WORK IN THE OPPOSITION NOT BE DONE "IN A NOISY WAY," BUT DISCREETLY AS HAS BEEN THE CASE WITH THE "GROUP OF FOUR" (PUK, KDP, SCIRI AND INA). HE SAID THE OPPOSITION IS DETERMINED TO CARRY OUT THE STRUGGLE FOR REGIME CHANGE, THAT IT IS NOT WEAK, BUT NOT UNITED, AND THAT THERE IS NO AGREEMENT YET ON HOW TO PROCEED. THIS COULD, HE SAID, BE FIXED IF THERE WAS ONE SERIOUS AND DETERMINED VOICE FROM THE US. HE SUGGESTED ADDING SUNNI, ASSYRIAN, AND TURKMEN ELEMENTS TO THE WORK OF THE GROUP OF FOUR TO ACHIEVE WHAT HE CALLED "A BOUQUET OPPOSITION." ADM [REDACTED] CAUTIONED THAT IF ACTION FOR CHANGE TAKES TOO MUCH TIME THE US AND THE OPPOSITION WOULD LOSE CREDIBILITY. ON THE OTHER HAND, [REDACTED] URGED US TO BE CAREFUL, METHODICAL AND SLOW, BUT ADDED THAT "IF YOU ARE REALLY READY TO DO THIS, AND TO FINISH IT, THE OPPOSITION WILL UNITE AND THE REGIME WILL QUICKLY COLLAPSE."

SUPPORT FOR THE INC WEAK

12. (S) BOTH THE KDP AND THE PUK MADE NEGATIVE COMMENTS ABOUT

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HOW THE IRAQI NATIONAL CONGRESS (INC) WAS OPERATING. THE KDP'S ██████████ WENT SO FAR AS TO SAY THAT HIS INTERVENTIONS WITH BARZANI WERE THE ONLY THING KEEPING THE KDP FROM LEAVING THE INC. PUK ██████████ SAID "WE MUST NOT LET AHMED CHALABI RUIN THE CHANCE WE NOW HAVE."

13. (U) NEA DAS CROCKER HAS CLEARED THIS MESSAGE.
JEFFREY

ADMIN
END OF MESSAGE

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Office of the Secretary of Defense 5 U.S.C. § 552
Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS +
Date: 04 MAY 2016 Authority: EO 13526
Declassify: _____ Deny in Full: _____
Declassify in Part: X
Reason: 1.4(b)(d) + 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(6)
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