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RESTRICTED
:IRAQ: IMPRESSIONS OF FALLUJAH: 12 MAY
From: BAGHDAD

TO IMMEDIATE FCO
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SUMMARY

US claims that large strides being made in Fallujah backed up by bustling street life and Iraqi officials. \$31,234,200 property compensation paid to 16,770 claimants. Impressive US performance in which they shared centre-stage with Iraqi officials and military.

Detail

1. Waterworth (Political Counsellor) visited Fallujah on 12 May on a US hosted visit for Heads of Mission. The fast moving four-hour visit included a tour of Fallujah and briefing led by MajGen Johnson (II MEF). Iraqi officials and military officers also played a prominent role.

Atmospherics

2. A fifteen-minute drive took us from Camp Fallujah to the centre of town. Iraqi soldiers manned the Cloverleaf checkpoint and long queues attested to the volume of traffic wanting to enter town. The route took us through an area well known for car repairs and there was plenty of visible activity. A US Embassy adviser remarked that levels of commercial activity were much increased over the last two months. There was no getting away from the scale of destruction.

3. The principal briefing was given at the CMOC (the military/civilian interface). In addition to the US team two town officials joined the session and spoke openly. Their body language and the reciprocal kissing of the commanding colonel's cheeks mirrored their warm words for the CMOC team and the US presence. He, in turn, confessed that he had broken rule number one, to remain professional, he loved these people and wanted to make a difference. It did seem a very unusual team made up of reservists with a selection of skills that would qualify them to help turn Fallujah into the model Johnson wanted.

4. Johnson's overview stressed the great strides Al Anbar and Fallujah had made in recent months. Security was greatly improved (the alert state on 12 May was moderate, the second lowest of four tiers) and he asserted that insurgents were not getting back into the town in large numbers. FREs were the major problem in the city with religious elements more common in the surrounding countryside. The atrocities committed by the insurgents had convinced the population that they needed to take control of their own city: a kind of neighbourhood watch mentality had evolved. An Iraqi major later told us that the population was actively providing information that had led to the disruption of planned IED attacks.

5. The Assembly elections had had a major impact: probably 40% of those resident on the day had voted. The election of the town council was underway while we were in town.

Reconstruction

6. The estimated population in November 2004 had been 240,000, some 90-150,000 had returned. Numbers would probably have been even

As the current isles,
- this may be an overly
rosy view. But encouraging
nevertheless. We must
find a way of getting
this new Fallujah story
out.

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higher, but those who used Fallujah as a dormitory town were probably staying in Baghdad until housing was rebuilt.

All water treatment plants, tanks and pipes had been restored and two additional pumping facilities installed, which meant that there was more water available than before: the local authorities were in the process of connecting users to the supply. Drains had been installed that would prevent flooding in the low-lying city.

8. In the main residential area electricity lines had been restored to between 80-100% of the area, but only to 0-40% in the industrial south. By January 2006 coverage would be complete: the municipality would have connected up all consumers a few months later. During the day power is four hours on/two off, supply is continuous overnight.

not bad compared to rest of Iraq

9. Of the city's 69 schools 38 were open and 15 occupied by the military would be vacated by 31 May. 16 others would remain closed, but many new schools were holding lessons in tents. Likewise huge progress had been made in restoring healthcare and groundwork was underway for a \$47 million hospital.

10. A raft of clean up and economic redevelopment activities were also underway, but there were still challenges: intimidation of workers from the surrounding area remained an issue as did getting right the balance between security and access to the city, but progress was being made on both fronts. The two Iraqis happily corroborated the US briefing and spoke of them having, "put the smile back in our childrens' eyes." Johnson stressed that he provided security, the Iraqis provided the drive.

Property Compensation

11. As of 10 May, 16,770 cheques had been issued for a total sum of \$31,234,200. One of the Iraqi officials estimated that there were 30,000 families in the city, leaving 12-13,000 to be paid. Compensation remains the number one issue for the population and they expect their officials to pursue full compensation (the current rate is 20%).

SSR

12. Johnson laid huge stress on the development of the ISF. From a standing start he now had an army brigade in Fallujah plus Special Police Commandos and Public Order battalions in Ramadi. The first 100 Iraqi police are due on the streets on 1 June, with a target of 1,200 by December: all have been double vetted, trained for eight weeks in Jordan and undertaken three weeks unit training.

13. We visited a camp where US and Iraqi brigades are working side-by-side on the British partnership model, reinforced by a ten-strong Military Transition Team. The Iraqi Colonel led the brief and took questions. He took pride in their contribution to the arrest of 98 terrorists and the seizure of arms. A quiet word with one of US team elicited praise for the attitude and aptitude of the soldiers, but the opposite for the Ministry of Defence, which was not showing any improvement on the life support front.

14. Based on his experience, Johnson thought the ISF could be self-sufficient in Al Anbar by mid-2006.

Comment

15. This may be an over-rosy view of developments in Fallujah, it was a determined PR effort, but the signs of life around the town spoke volumes. Likewise, the prominence of Iraqis throughout the visit and US willingness to let them lead was not what we had expected. Congratulations to the US Marines!