

3.6 Mission Reviews

Iraq

Iraq reached a turning-point in 2010 with the withdrawal of American combat troops in August. Although 50,000 US personnel remain in the country training domestic forces, the Obama administration has laid out a road-map for a further reduction of this presence in 2011.¹ The drawdown of the American presence increases the importance of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) as a conduit of international support to Iraq. But it also brings risks, as UNAMI previously operated in the security framework provided by the Americans.

The mission has gained increasing credibility with both local actors and the US in recent years, playing a particularly important role in mediating Arab-Kurdish relations. Nonetheless, UNAMI now has to navigate an uncertain political environment following the disputed outcome of parliamentary elections in March 2010, in which former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi won slightly more seats than the incumbent Nouri al-Maliki, but without attaining an overall majority, creating political deadlock. As of August 2010, delays over the formation of a new government persist, and terrorist attacks have raised concerns about a possible deterioration of the security situation. While there are limits to UNAMI's ability to resolve Iraq's political tensions, the mission still has an important role to play in facilitating the country's prolonged transition to stability.

BACKGROUND

UNAMI was established in August 2003 initially as a one-year mission. A few days after the mission's start of operations, a devastating bomb attack on



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UNAMI's headquarters killed the Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello as well as 21 staff members and injured over 100. The UN withdrew the majority of the mission's staff members from Iraq and relocated them mainly to Amman, Jordan. In 2004, more staff returned to the mission's Baghdad headquarters to resume its mandated task to assist the people and government of Iraq in the formulation of new governing structures. Although constrained by security concerns, UNAMI assisted in the development of Iraq's constitution and a series of elections.

UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)

Authorization and Start Date	14 August 2003 (UNSC Res. 1500)
SRSB	Ad Melkert (Netherlands)
Deputy SRSB	Jerzy Skuratowicz (Poland) and Christine McNab (Sweden)
Budget	\$158.9 million (1 January 2010–31 December 2010)
Strength as of early 2010	International Civilian: 322 Local Civilian: 460 Military Experts on Mission: 13 Contingent Troops: 221

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In August of 2007, with the US reconsidering its political and military engagement in Iraq, the UN Security Council significantly expanded UNAMI's political and conflict resolution mandate. Resolution 1770 placed an increased emphasis on the mission's provision of technical assistance to the government of Iraq and the Independent High Electoral Commission for holding elections, as well as a greater coordination function for international humanitarian aid. UNAMI's mandate also included promoting national dialogue between Iraq's ethnic groups and the peaceful resolution of disputed internal boundaries, as well as fostering regional cooperation between Iraq and its neighbors.

Shortly after the new mandate was announced, the UN rotated its senior leadership in Iraq, and the mission moved its headquarters from Amman back to Baghdad – although Amman continues to be the base for a great deal of UN humanitarian and development activities for Iraq. The government of Nouri al-Maliki was not initially inclined to trust the newly-strengthened mission, but it gradually came to accept it as a useful partner. This was assisted by the Bush administration's positive attitude towards UNAMI after 2007, and reinforced by the Obama administration's equally supportive posture. US Vice-President Joe Biden, the White House point-man on Iraq, has repeatedly and warmly praised UNAMI in Baghdad.

In August 2010, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1936, extending the mission for a period of 12 months until 31 July 2011, but leaving the mission's mandate unaltered.

As an integrated mission, UNAMI has two substantive components handling political affairs and development and humanitarian issues – as well as independent offices dealing with human rights and public information – under the overall leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Ad Melkert, who replaced Staffan de Mistura in July 2009. UNAMI has a number of field offices around the country – including the politically sensitive city of Kirkuk – and coordinates the UN Country Team, involving sixteen funds and agencies. The mission maintains a significant presence in Jordan and liaison offices in Kuwait and Iran.

BOUNDARY ISSUES

On the basis of Resolution 1770, UNAMI has been intimately involved in efforts to resolve Iraq's internal boundary issues since mid-2008 when it published proposals for confidence-building measures in troubled districts on the Kurdish-Arab border in the north of the country. It was widely recognized that the greatest challenge lay in Kirkuk, an oil-rich city inhabited by a mix of Kurds, Turkomen and Arabs lying just outside the Kurdish Autonomous Region before 2003. In 2008, a committee of Kirkuk's politicians (known as the Article 23 Committee) was set up to discuss power-sharing for the city. UNAMI gave this group considerable technical support, including organizing a visit for its members to Northern Ireland to observe power-sharing arrangements there, but its discussions proved fruitless.

At first, the Kurds seemed happier than the government to see UNAMI involved in this process. The mission leadership worked hard to win over Baghdad to its involvement. In early 2009, UNAMI conducted a massive field and documentary study on the past and present status of 15 disputed areas south of the recognized Kurdish region, including Kirkuk. The resulting report, circulated in confidence in April 2009, outlined four potential options for the future status of Kirkuk. These included placing the Kirkuk governorate under the joint supervision of Baghdad and the Kurdish authorities in Erbil or giving it a special status as an autonomous government, but did not include transferring it to full Kurdish control. As a follow-up to the report, a High Level Task Force (HLTF) composed

of representatives from both Baghdad and Erbil met under UN auspices to discuss the report's proposed solutions. However, no immediate solution was forthcoming.

The work of the HLTF is ongoing and as of 2010, its members were primarily focused on functional issues like property disputes and language rights. UNAMI has provided expert support on these issues, for example conducting a study of educational rights with UNICEF. It is also involved in efforts to foster political dialogue in Ninewa, a province north-west of Kirkuk with a Kurdish minority that remains more prone to violence than other parts of Iraq.²

While the fundamental issue of Kirkuk's status remains unresolved – and the Kurdish parliament has declared that the city is part of its territory – UNAMI's involvement in this crucial dispute bolstered the mission's credibility. The willingness of US officials to let the UN lead on the topic, and the UN's ability to do so, signaled UNAMI's value as a mediator. The fact that its proposals have been even-handed won over skeptical Iraqi Arab politicians.

In 2010, Ray Odierno, the then commander of US forces in Iraq, raised the idea that a UN peacekeeping force might deploy to patrol unstable areas on the Arab-Kurdish boundary.³ However, this off-the-cuff proposal won little favor in the US and was never formally raised with the UN, and went no further.

ELECTIONS

UNAMI has also demonstrated its credibility in providing technical assistance to a series of potentially contentious elections. In January 2009 it supported provincial council elections across the country, overseeing the creation of a new electoral register and data-processing system. These polls were a success, contributing to the improved relations between UNAMI and the government. UNAMI also supported elections in the Kurdish Autonomous Region in 2009.

The 2010 parliamentary elections were inevitably sensitive. The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) was in the lead, and UNAMI again provided direct technical support and advice. In addition, members of UNAMI were present at polling stations on election day with an

emphasis on Baghdad, Kirkuk and the Kurdish areas. It also facilitated the IHEC's efforts to allow voting for Iraqis outside the country, enabling the large numbers of refugees scattered around the region to vote. Over a quarter of a million votes were cast in this way.

In March 2010, the elections resulted in a contested victory for Mr. Allawi over Prime Minister Maliki. The electoral process also saw the banning of candidates due to allegations of ties to the Baath Party, as well as disputes over the election results. A recount of all ballots cast in Baghdad governorate came to an end on 16 May, with UNAMI officials once again assisting the Iraqi authorities.

Since the results have been certified by the Supreme Court, UNAMI's leaders have engaged in diplomatic efforts with the competing political factions in search of a resolution and reiterated their willingness to further engage on the basis of consensus among political parties. To date, however, UNAMI's efforts have not resulted in a compromise.

REGIONAL ISSUES

UNAMI's mandate also includes a provision related to supporting the Government of Iraq (at its request) on regional issues. While this includes developing relations with neighbors such as Turkey and Jordan, there is a special emphasis on diplomacy with Kuwait. A number of Security Council resolutions placing obligations on Iraq vis-à-vis Kuwait remain in force, including compensation payments and border demarcation. UNAMI works closely with the Secretary-General's High-Level Coordinator for Iraq/Kuwait Missing Persons and Property, Gennady Tarasov, on the issues involved.

In 2009, Iraq called for the role of High-Level Coordinator to be terminated, which was opposed by Kuwait due to the lack of progress in addressing pending issues between the two countries. In mid-2010, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also noted with concern that Iraq had not responded to repeated requests to pay its share of a relatively inexpensive (\$600,000) but politically sensitive UN-managed boundary demarcation project.⁴ Still, bilateral relations between the two countries have improved gradually, with Iraq sending its first ambassador to Kuwait since 1990 this year. Kuwait

is also funding a project developed with the assistance of UNAMI to build the Iraqi Ministry of Human Rights' capacity in mass grave excavation and the identification of missing persons.

DEVELOPMENT, HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Although this review concentrates on the political dimensions of UNAMI's work, the mission and UN Country Team (UNCT) is also engaged in a wide range of humanitarian and development activities. These have not always been closely coordinated, and on taking over as SRSG, Ad Melkert declared his intention to make the activities of the mission and the UNCT more fully integrated. In May 2010 UNAMI's Deputy Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG), Christine McNab (who is triple-hatted as the DSRSG, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator) oversaw the completion of the first UN Development Assistance Framework with Iraq, projected to see the disbursement of \$186 billion on nearly 3,000 projects over four years. Senior UN officials have argued the organization's interactions with Iraq will increasingly focus on development rather than political issues.⁵

Iraq's humanitarian situation remains challenging, with approximately 1.55 million internally displaced persons in the country and over two million Iraqi refugees abroad. UNAMI was heavily involved in bringing aid to the displaced during its period based in Amman from 2003-7 and continues to work closely with other UN agencies in dealing with the problem. While there is no longer a humanitarian emergency in the country, pockets of vulnerability remain and humanitarian needs are grossly under-funded. In July 2010, DSRSG McNab revealed that only \$22.3 million out of \$187.7 million the UN had requested for relief operations in Iraq had been received.

UNAMI's human rights office – which is institutionally separated from the political arm of the mission – releases reports every six months on the country, and also reports to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. In 2009, UNAMI gave the authorities technical



UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

Ad Melkert (left), Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, is greeted by the United Nations Guard Unit upon arrival to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) office in Baghdad, Iraq, 18 July 2009.

support prior to Iraq's first appearance at the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the UN Human Rights Council, and also backed a series of UPR-related civil society projects.

UNAMI also monitors the situation of members of the People's Mujahideen Organization of Iran (an anti-Tehran militia) at Camp Ashraf, north of Baghdad following the incidents in July 2009 surrounding the Government of Iraq's attempt to establish a police station in the camp which resulted in violence that left 11 dead and over 300 injured. As a result, UNAMI conducted a fact-finding mission – a decision that mission staff believed required considerable political courage on the part of SRSG de Mistura – and has kept a humanitarian monitoring presence at the camp since then.

CONCLUSION

While UNAMI has taken a significant part in Iraq's political evolution since 2007, this is not certain to continue. One reason for this is basic security: although the mission is guarded by a contingent of 223 Fijian troops, its ability to maneuver around Iraq has depended on US forces. With the US departure looming, UNAMI has invested in new security measures for its headquarters in Baghdad, requested more armored vehicles and air assets to allow it to operate securely and discussed receiving protection from Iraqi forces with the government.

Staffing and the 2009 Human Resources Management Reform

The UN began a human resources management reform process in mid-2009 that continues to date. The reforms were designed to improve the UN's dysfunctional employment and recruitment system, which has had negative effects on the entire system, but especially impacts field missions that often have to adapt their staffing requirements according to changing political realities on the ground. In order to provide a more dynamic global work force and reduce recruitment delays, the reforms harmonized contracts between the field and Headquarters and introduced a new recruitment model, which prioritizes internal hires for vacancies. Rosters of pre-screened candidates are in development, which are intended to allow for more rapid deployment of skilled staff.

While the reforms were intended to improve hiring structures, the new recruitment system in some cases has further added to delays, with some positions taking up to one year to fill. These delays mean that often the most qualified and employable candidates take up positions elsewhere in the interim. Delays in recruitment exacerbate chronically high civilian vacancy rates seen across missions. As of 31 October 2009, UNAMI had a 27% vacancy rate and UNPOS was operating with 34% of its authorized posts empty. High vacancy rates hinder a mission's ability to take advantage of short but crucial windows of opportunity, especially important in political missions.

High mission vacancies also mean that field officers must lean on their counterparts at Headquarters for a variety of support work, putting additional pressure on limited staff in New York while minimizing their role in political analysis. UNPOS again provides an illustrious example where a desk officer in New York singlehandedly supported the day-to-day needs of the entire mission until a Junior Professional Officer was assigned to assist. The UNPOS Headquarters staff was overwhelmed and found it difficult to meet mission requirements, reflective of general understaffing and underfunding of the support capacity of Headquarters.¹

The reforms have also negatively affected staff mobility, especially between the field and Headquarters, limiting the realization of a global workforce. In addition, the reforms only partially achieved harmonization of contracts. Considerable gaps remain in the terms and conditions between Secretariat staff and their counterparts in UN funds, programs and agencies, in many cases leading to competition between the various UN entities to attract the best candidates.

Institutional Considerations

In addition to these reforms, there are two important institutional considerations that also have an impact on staffing of political missions – (1) the relationship between the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the Department of Field Support (DFS), and (2) the budget approval process.

Within the UN, DFS is designated to provide logistical and personnel support to field missions of both DPA and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). However, DFS may be structured to better suit the needs and requirements of DPKO's large-scale peacekeeping operations than the unique needs of niche political missions, especially with respect to their specific civilian staffing requirements, due to DFS's growth out of DPKO's Office of Mission Support. Inappropriate financial and procurement rules and procedures that govern DFS make it even more challenging for it to support both departments adequately. The institutional relationship between DFS and DPA, while improving, still has ample room for growth and there is recognition within DPA that it must further explore how to best utilize the resources available within DFS. In addition, the Global Field Support Strategy of January 2010 – that has received preliminary endorsement of the UN General Assembly in July 2010 but is still pending approval – seeks to address some of the above-mentioned challenges.

Second, political mission budgets generally and staffing requirements in particular, are the subject of considerable debate in the UN's Advisory Committee on Administrative & Budgetary Questions. There is a sense that proposed increases in staffing are disproportionately contentious within the Committee as compared to the more technical requirements of a mission. In addition, existing vacancies may lead the Committee to question the wisdom of authorizing additional posts, even in the face of shifting political circumstances.

Staffing represents a significant challenge to political missions, one that appears to have become more daunting – at least in the short-term – with the 2009 human resources reform. Delays in recruitment have concrete negative effects on the ability of missions to perform effectively and fulfill their mandates. As Kai Eide, outgoing SRSG of the UN Mission in Afghanistan, noted in his last briefing to the Security Council in March 2010, “the new recruitment system put in place in July 2009 simply has not worked...If not corrected soon, it will threaten the effectiveness, possibly even the survival, of many of the current UN Missions.”

¹ As noted in the 2010-2011 proposed budget for Special Political Missions (A/64/349).

Another major challenge for UNAMI is staffing. With the majority of UN agency staffers still based outside Iraq due to the security ceiling, there are still limits to what the UN funds and agencies can achieve inside the country. UNAMI itself has struggled to find and keep qualified political staff. In 2009, a gridlocked hiring process caused delays of up to 14 months to fill posts. Combined with budgetary constraints this has resulted in a 30% vacancy rate for UNAMI in the field. However, this situation has slightly improved since January 2010, when an exceptional authority for recruitment was granted to UNAMI, bringing the vacancy rate to about 19.5%.

This mixture of security and personnel concerns means that, even in a permissive political environment, the UN would still have to work hard to maintain its role in Iraqi politics. The continuing uncertainty over the country's government, and the constant challenge of Arab-Kurdish relations, make this an even more complicated task. It should not be assumed that UNAMI can maintain the political traction that it developed in 2007-10. This will only be possible if Iraq's politicians are ready to work with the mission and UNAMI is able to meet their needs.

NOTES

- 1 Gordon, Michael R., "Civilians to take U.S. Lead as Military Leaves Iraq," *New York Times*, 18 August 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/19/world/middleeast/19withdrawal.html>.
- 2 International Crisis Group, "Iraq's New Battlefield: The Struggle Over Ninewa," *Middle East Report N°90*, 28 September 2009.
- 3 "US Commander says Northern Iraq May Need UN Peacekeepers," *VOA News*, 6 July 2010, <http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/middle-east/US-Commander-Says-Northern-Iraq-May-Need-UN-Peacekeepers-97862034.html>.
- 4 The UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations is responsible for the demarcation project.
- 5 "As Iraq Makes Progress, UN to Focus More on Social and Economic Development," *UN News Centre*, 18 January 2010, <http://www.uniraq.org/newsroom/getarticle.asp?ArticleID=1239>.