

## Timeline of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) Negotiations and Iranian Interference

Updated October 28, 2008

- Sep. 12, 2006: Nouri al-Maliki makes his first trip to Iran as Iraq's Prime Minister, meeting with Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to promote Iraq's domestic security.<sup>1</sup> According to one report, Prime Minister Maliki signs several immigration, intelligence sharing and commercial agreements with Iran at this time, and threatens to expel the 3,400 MEK members held on Iraqi soil.<sup>2</sup>
- Nov. 26, 2006: On a trip to Tehran, Iraqi president Jalal Talabani receives fresh vows of assistance from Iranian president Ahmadinejad in curbing violence levels in Iraq. A number of Iraqi officials, including Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari accompanied Talabani.<sup>3</sup> Also, Khamenei statement that "the first step to solve the security issue in Iraq is the exit of the occupiers from this country and leaving the security issues to the people-based Iraqi government," foreshadows Iran's increasingly pronounced anti-SOFA posture.<sup>4</sup>
- May 4, 2007: In an editorial in the Washington Post entitled "Don't Abandon Us," Foreign Minister Zebari writes that "those calling for withdrawal may think it is the least painful option, but its benefits would be short-lived."<sup>5</sup> His appeal is an interesting precedent, considering he eventually becomes head of the Iraqi negotiating team charged with securing withdrawal timetables.
- Aug. 8, 2007: Maliki arrives in Tehran, Iran, to discuss security and co-operation.<sup>6</sup> During his visit, he states that Iran is playing a "positive and constructive" role in "providing security and fighting terrorism in Iraq,"<sup>7</sup> while Iran pledges to curb aide to Shiite militias in Iraq.<sup>8</sup>
- Aug. 9, 2007: President Bush warns Maliki that there "will be a price to pay" for his rapprochement with Iran if indeed the latter has ill intentions in Iraq.<sup>9</sup>
- Aug. 18, 2007: According to one report, Maliki's growing ties with Iran have effected a splintering of his government: "several groups, both Sunni and Shi'a, have followed the Sunni al-Tawafuq bloc (Iraqi Accord Front) in quitting the U.S.-backed government."<sup>10</sup>

- Aug. 28, 2007: Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad states that “Tehran is ready to fill an imminent power vacuum in Iraq.”<sup>11</sup> This sort of rhetoric coincides with the earliest signs of a proposed long-term security agreement between the U.S. and Iraq.
- Nov. 26, 2007: President Bush and Maliki sign the “Declaration of Principles for a Long-Term Relationship of Cooperation and Friendship Between the Republic of Iraq and the United States of America.”<sup>12</sup> This is the official start of SOFA negotiations, which also sets July 31, 2008, as the deadline to secure an agreement.
- Nov. 26, 2007: On the same day Bush and Maliki cosign the Declaration of Principles, Talabani holds a low-publicity meeting with Iran’s ambassador to Iraq Hassan Kazemi-Qomi to discuss Iran’s support for “measures that guarantee the country’s security and stability.”<sup>13</sup> Talabani’s visit with Qomi on the same day of the DOP’s signing is likely not coincidental.
- Dec. 10, 2007: Maliki renews the U.N. mandate for multinational forces “one last time.”<sup>14</sup>
- Jan. 9, 2008: A December 21, 2007 letter emerges in which the Kurds issue an ultimatum to Maliki, saying if he fails to pass key pieces of legislation they will move to unseat him.
- Jan. 18, 2008: Several Iraqi officials indicate that they could not take full control of their country’s internal security until 2012, and that it could be another 10 years before ISF can properly defend Iraq’s borders.<sup>15</sup> According to one report, Defense Minister Abdul Qader al-Obeidi believes that Iraqi forces need to significantly boost their capabilities before they could defend themselves.<sup>16</sup>
- Feb. 8, 2008: A report emerges that Adel Abdul Mehdi travelled to Iran in January to engineer and seek approval for the ouster of Maliki from government, but that his request was refused by the Iranians.<sup>17</sup> Also in the report, threats of a possible no-confidence vote from ISCI and the Kurds against Maliki are floating around parliament.
- Feb. 13, 2008: The Council of Representatives (CoR) passes three pieces of lagging benchmark legislation in a move which re-injects much needed confidence in Maliki’s government.<sup>18</sup> The passing of legislation created enough momentum for him to capitalize on internal consolidation efforts.
- Mar. 2, 2008: Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad makes a landmark visit to Baghdad, shunning standard security measures by “riding from Baghdad’s airport in a civilian-style sedan – and not an armored military vehicle or helicopter.”<sup>19</sup> Maliki describes the visit as the opening of a “new chapter in bilateral ties with Iraq.”<sup>20</sup> He meets with both Maliki and Talabani, who offers to “expel Iranian rebels based in Iraq;”<sup>21</sup> Tariq al-Hashemi, however, a Sunni, is “conspicuously absent” at the arrival ceremony.<sup>22</sup> Ahmadinejad’s low-security, high-profile, visit to Baghdad contrasts sharply with unannounced, high-security visits from U.S. leaders. As such, the laxity of Ahmadinejad’s security

precautions is a provocation, suggesting that Iran is more confident and more capable of controlling the levels of violence in Iraq than the United States.

- Mar. 3, 2008: Several Iraqi lawmakers respond to Ahmadinejad's visit. Mahmoud Othman, a Kurd, hopes Iran and Iraq "get closer together,"<sup>23</sup> while Adnan Dulaimi, a Sunni, says that this is "like a kind of international confession that Iran has an enormous influence and role inside Iraq."<sup>24</sup>
- Mar. 7, 2008: Later during the July 2008 timeframe, there is retroactive mention of an initial March 7<sup>th</sup> draft agreement which is "deliberately misleading and leaves open the possibility for the US to respond 'defensively' to threats to its troops or other interests."<sup>25</sup> This may corroborate a subsequent statement made by a U.S. official that Iran was then able to exploit perceptions of an overly aggressive U.S. negotiating posture.<sup>26</sup>
- Mar. 23, 2008: The Baghdad "Green Zone" is repeatedly shelled for six of the next seven days.<sup>27</sup> The attacks are traced to areas traditionally operated by Sadr's Jaish al-Mahdi.<sup>28</sup> Officials blame rogue elements of the Mahdi Army for breaching the ceasefire, however, and Iranian-backed Special Groups come under increased scrutiny for their role in controlling these elements.<sup>29</sup>
- Mar. 25, 2008: Arriving in Basra the day before, Maliki launches Operation Knight's Charge to regain control of the city and purge criminal elements in the area.<sup>30</sup>
- Mar. 30, 2008: In an unannounced trip to Tehran, Ali al-Adeeb and Hadi al-Ameri meet with Sadr to negotiate a ceasefire in Basra which was brokered by Qassem Soleimani, IRGC-Qods Force commander.<sup>31</sup> It is unclear if even Maliki was aware of Adeeb's and Ameri's engagement with Iran.
- Mar. 31, 2008: According to one report, the weapons and tactics used in Basra are a clear sign of intense, high-level Iranian involvement: "The rebels in Basra are using a large number of armored vehicles to move men and material around –something no other Shiite militia, and certainly not the Mahdi Army, had ever done."<sup>32</sup> This is further evidence of Iran's hand in the battle for Basra.
- April 4, 2008: Talabani allegedly holds a secret meeting with Brig. Gen. Qassem Soleimani after clashes with Sadr's Mahdi Army in Basra, whereby the latter "promised to stop arming groups in Iraq."<sup>33</sup> According to the report, Soleimani gave Talabani a message for Gen. Petraeus, noting that his portfolio includes Iraq, Gaza, and Lebanon. Soleimani's only demand, according to the report, was that the group of Iranian rebels known as the MEK be forced to leave Iraq.
- April 8, 2008: Ambassador to Iraq Ryan C. Crocker, testifying before Congress, discusses two separate accords. The first is a "status-of-forces agreement," which would codify legal protections for U.S. military personnel and property in Iraq. Details of the second accord are more

unclear. Referred to as a "strategic framework agreement," the measure would broadly address issues not covered by the SOFA, including those outlined in the November 2007 Declaration of Principles.<sup>34</sup>

- April 8, 2008: Details of a March 7, 2008, draft SOFA agreement are leaked, indicating provisions for an open-ended U.S. presence in Iraq.<sup>35</sup>
- April 30, 2008: Maliki attempts to emphasize his independence from both the U.S. and Iran: "I have never been the man of Iran, and I told America that I'm not the man of America in Iraq."<sup>36</sup>
- May 1, 2008: In the wake of the Basra offensive, Maliki sends a delegation of senior officials to confront Iran over claims it is arming and financing Shiite fighters (i.e. Special Groups) in Iraq.<sup>37</sup> Among Maliki's emissaries are Ali al-Adeeb, a senior member of Maliki's Dawa Party, and Hadi al-Ameri, a senior member of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq; another member is Tariq Abdullah, an old friend of Maliki's.<sup>38</sup> Subsequent reporting on the delegation's trip to Iran revealed that it was heavily scolded for "having forgotten" what Iran did for the Iraqi Shiites during Saddam's rule.<sup>39</sup>
- May 5, 2008: After discovering large quantities of Iranian-made munitions in Basra, Maliki appoints a Cabinet-level committee to investigate Iranian interference in Iraq.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, Gol Spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh scolds Iraqi officials who had accused Iran of acting "irresponsibly."<sup>41</sup> For its part, Iran has clearly not honored its pledge to curb aide to Shiite militias, even though it continues to deny interference in Iraq.
- May 11, 2008: In an effort to pressure Iraq, Iran's "Press T.V." escalates its anti-SOFA campaign, suggesting that "'selling Iraq to the U.S.' is what best describes a secret security accord"<sup>42</sup> between the U.S. and Gol.
- May 12, 2008: In a rare, direct jab at Maliki, an Iranian hard-line newspaper accuses him of lacking a backbone in talks with U.S. negotiators.<sup>43</sup>
- May 15, 2008: It becomes clear that the recent fighting in Basra and Sadr City has weakened the Sadrist Trend while strengthening both Maliki and ISCI domestically.<sup>44</sup> As a result of Maliki's increased political clout, his domestic platform of support has expanded and has given him greater mobility against U.S. demands.
- May 24, 2008: An Iranian news agency reports that Ali Akbar Velayati, top adviser to Khamenei, described the SOFA according to the "'law of domination,' saying the US is resorting to 'various plots to secure an unlimited control over Iraq for itself and the Zionists.'"<sup>45</sup>
- May 25, 2008: According to several reports, Sistani apparently opposes any SOFA agreement; the credibility of the reports, however, seems questionable.<sup>46</sup> Subsequent articles reveal efforts continuously to misconstrue Sistani's call for "peaceful resistance."<sup>47</sup>

- May 29, 2008: As part of its anti-SOFA propaganda campaign, Iran's "Press T.V." accuses the U.S. of having "offered bribes to Iraqi MPs to lure them into endorsing a security deal that critics believe would make Iraq a U.S. colony."<sup>48</sup> Evidently, Iran's anti-SOFA campaign is very active during the May timeframe; possibly explanations may be to pre-empt the potential for Maliki's rapprochement with the U.S. in the wake of receding Iranian-backed militias, or implicitly to admonish Maliki not to confuse an Iranian tactical retreat in Basra with strategic defeat.
- May 29, 2008: A letter from leading CoR parliamentary blocs is delivered to the U.S. Congress, proclaiming that any executive agreement which is not subject to CoR review is illegal; also, the letter stipulates that any agreement between the U.S. and Iraq must be linked to clear troop withdrawal mechanisms and timetables.<sup>49</sup>
- June 5, 2008: Highly suspect reports surface that U.S. negotiators are attempting to secure "50 military bases, control of Iraqi airspace and legal immunity for all American soldiers and contractors."<sup>50</sup>
- June 6, 2008: Amidst accusations that President Bush is tying the hands of his successor, several unnamed senior Iraqi officials alluded to the possibility that Gol may in fact request a U.N. mandate extension despite earlier pledges not to do so.<sup>51</sup>
- June 6, 2008: Rumors are spread that "the U.S. is holding hostage some \$50 billion of Iraq's money [...] to pressure the Iraqi government into signing an agreement seen by many Iraqis as prolonging the U.S. occupation indefinitely."<sup>52</sup> Although it is true that Iraqi funds are channeled through the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, thereby creating the possibility for such action, it is highly unlikely that this was ever actually attempted by the United States Treasury Department.
- June 8, 2008: After a late-night interview in Tehran with Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki, Maliki declares that "we will not allow Iraq to become a platform for harming the security of Iran,"<sup>53</sup> confirming Ali al-Dabbagh's earlier statement that Maliki would use the visit to assure Iranian leaders that "Iraq will not serve as a base or staging ground to launch attacks against neighboring countries."<sup>54</sup>
- June 9, 2008: During his interview with Maliki in Iran, Khamenei reiterates that "the most fundamental problem of Iraq is the presence of the foreign forces."<sup>55</sup> This is part of a continued Iranian effort to pressure Maliki into backing-out of the U.S. SOFA, and highlights Maliki's delicate position between the U.S. and Iran. At the same time, Iraqi and Iranian ministers of defense signed a "memorandum of understanding during Maliki's visit to boost defense cooperation,"<sup>56</sup> in an attempt to undercut the U.S.'s bilateral negotiations with Iraq.
- June 9, 2008: ISCI's Jalal al-Din al-Saghir inflames anti-SOFA sentiment by stating that "the points that were put forth by the Americans were more abominable than the occupation."<sup>57</sup>

- June 9, 2008: According to an L.A. Times report, Iraqi newspaper al-Mada publishes an editorial: "The challenge for Iraqis is to handle two friends who are enemies."<sup>58</sup>
- June 11, 2008: As part of its anti-SOFA propaganda campaign, Iran's "Press T.V." suggests that the "Iraq-U.S. security treaty includes classified articles that would give the U.S the right to attack other nations from Iraqi soil."<sup>59</sup>
- June 12, 2008: During his visit to Jordan, Maliki issues a statement that U.S. proposals for bilateral political and security agreements "have reached a dead-end."<sup>60</sup> This statement is issued soon after Maliki's return from Iran. Although Iran probably pressured Maliki to issue the statement, it seems his increasing hostility to U.S. demands is also an attempt to appear more nationalistic to improve his standing in advance of the election.
- June 12, 2008: According to one report, the U.S. watered down its conditions, including a lesser emphasis on preserving troop immunity.<sup>61</sup>
- June 28, 2008: U.S. Special Forces conduct a raid in a Karbala neighborhood, "inadvertently" killing Ali Abdulhussein Razak al Maliki, a relative of Prime Minister Maliki.<sup>62</sup> Due to its pertinence to the U.S. immunity status in Iraq, this incident added more stress to the already tenuous talks between U.S. and Iraqi SOFA negotiations. Once again, U.S. troop immunity is under question.
- July 4, 2008: Abdul Azziz al-Hakim states that "we do not want Iraq to be a launching pad to operations against neighboring countries, especially Iran that stood next to Iraqis for a long time and sacrificed for them."<sup>63</sup>
- July 6, 2008: Mowaffak al-Rubaie, Iraq's national security adviser, announces that Iraqi negotiators are now looking at a number of options to replace the SOFA agreement, citing that ISF "are not very far from the self-reliant, self-dependent status;"<sup>64</sup> ISCI's Jalal al-Din al-Saghir mentions a "protocol, or even less than this, possibly some kind of memorandum of understanding." Meanwhile, Secretary Gates says that further troop reductions will depend on conditions on the ground: "as the Iraqi security forces get stronger and get better, then we will be able to continue drawing down our troops in the future."<sup>65</sup> The success of recent ISF operations continues to elicit a disproportionate amount of confidence from Iraqi politicians; either that, or Iraqi politicians are purposely exaggerating ISF readiness in a bid to advance their own agendas.
- July 8, 2008: An Iranian news agency reports that "Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the most revered Shiite leader in Iraq, rejected any security agreement with US, stressing such deal will affect the country's sovereignty."<sup>66</sup>
- July 10, 2008: Depending on the source, Sistani, either 1) merely emphasized Iraq's duty to protect its own sovereignty or 2) explicitly pressed for withdrawal timetables. Either way, both Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim's and Mahmoud Othman of the Kurdish Bloc's response accept Sistani's

“proposal” for timetables. Also, the fact that Sistani met with Rubaie a few days ago indicates Rubaie’s continued interest in the negotiations.<sup>67</sup>

- July 14, 2008: Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama meets with Maliki during his tour of the region.<sup>68</sup> In a subsequent interview with Der Spiegel Magazine, Maliki is quoted as supporting Obama’s 16-month withdrawal plan;<sup>69</sup> soon after the article is released, however, Maliki distances himself from perceptions that he is actively endorsing Obama.<sup>70</sup> Another article discusses the possibility that during his visit Obama asked Iraqi negotiators to delay any security agreement until after the elections and a new administration was in place.<sup>71</sup>
- July 21, 2008: Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama meets with Maliki during his tour of the region.<sup>72</sup> Maliki is quoted as agreeing with Obama’s withdrawal plan but then [who?] distances himself from comments made during an interview with Der Spiegel magazine, where he alluded to endorsing Obama’s 16-month withdrawal timetable.<sup>73</sup> Later on, an article discusses the possibility that Obama asked Iraqi negotiators to delay any security agreement until after the elections and a new administration was in place.<sup>74</sup>
- July 29, 2008: Interior Minister Jawad Bolani announces that U.S.-Iraqi negotiations are on the right track, standing by Iraq’s capacity to “absorb the terrorist threat.”<sup>75</sup>
- July 31, 2008: According to a New York Times article, U.S. negotiators are pushing hard to secure an agreement by the end of the month.<sup>76</sup> Bush’s “time horizon” concession is credited for having revived the negotiations, and several other Iraqi lawmakers reveal different aspects of the current draft: U.S. soldiers would continue to have immunity, the draft is broken into a strategic framework section, protocol section, and appendix.
- Aug. 6, 2008: Several ISF commanders discuss ISF readiness, indicating that the ISF may not be ready until 2015.<sup>77</sup>
- Aug. 8, 2008: Another draft is reportedly circulating whereby all U.S. combat troops would leave Iraq by October 2010, with remaining troops withdrawing over the next 3 years, specifically out of Iraqi cities by the summer of 2009.<sup>78</sup>
- Aug. 10, 2008: Zebari announces that negotiations are “very close” to concluding, and that a draft would be presented to CoR by early September, once the U.S. provides a “very clear timeline” for troop withdrawal.<sup>79</sup>
- Aug. 14, 2008: Zebari announces that “our negotiators and the Americans have almost brought it [the accord] to a close.”<sup>80</sup> According to the latest draft, U.S. forces are to withdraw from cities by the summer of 2009, after which they would be barred from unilaterally mounting attacks inside Iraq.<sup>81</sup>
- Aug. 14, 2008: An Arabic news source reveals that a preliminary March 17, 2008, SOFA draft did not originally include timelines.<sup>82</sup> The article then discusses the possibility that Maliki’s

sudden demands for timetables came as a result of a leaked draft to Iranian authorities, who then pressured Maliki to secure a withdrawal timetable (according to the report, a May 11, 2008, article written by Iranian editor Hossein Shariyatmadari in a hard-line Iranian newspaper accuses Maliki's leaked position).

- Aug. 15, 2008: Iranian president Ahmadinejad states that regional nations ought to fill the security vacuum when U.S. troops withdraw from Iraq.<sup>83</sup>
- Aug. 17, 2008: An Arabic news source discusses Iran's efforts to depress Iraq's agricultural sector by "dumping" its products onto the Iraqi market and sabotaging local crops and farms to further subdue Iraq into economic dependency.<sup>84</sup> The article also mentions that the results of Maliki's committee on whether Iran played a direct role in supporting domestic terrorism were never in fact made public.
- Aug. 17, 2008: Iraqi hotel owners complain of Iranian interference in Iraq's religious tourism industry, specifically in Najaf.<sup>85</sup>
- Aug. 18, 2008: U.S. and Iraqi sources suggest that negotiators have succeeded in reaching a final SOFA draft.<sup>86</sup>
- Aug. 19, 2008: Mahmoud Othman, Kurdish MP, issues a statement denouncing other statements made so far by U.S. and Iraqi negotiators as attempts to merely confuse negotiations in order to hide fundamental disagreements.<sup>87</sup>
- Aug. 20, 2008: Abdul Karim al-Samaraie, deputy chair of the security and defense committee and member of the Sunni Tawafiq bloc, denounces prolonged Iranian influence over Iraq's domestic affairs (specifically Iraq's southern provinces), and calls for Gol's initiative in suppressing it.<sup>88</sup>
- Aug. 20, 2008: In an Arabic news source interview, ISCI's Amar al-Hakim explains that Iran's penetration of Iraq is due to other Arab countries' lack of presence in Iraq.<sup>89</sup>
- Aug. 20, 2008: Mahmoud Othman, Kurdish MP, denounces the SOFA as transgressing Iraqi sovereignty, and laments U.S. efforts to pressure Iraqi negotiators into finalizing an agreement before the end of President Bush's term.<sup>90</sup>
- Aug. 21, 2008: Senior U.S. officials declare that the talks have concluded; Mr. Hammoud, Iraq's chief negotiator says that joint U.S.-Iraqi committees will be formed to resolve outstanding issues as they emerge.<sup>91</sup> It is important to note that Hammoud suddenly emerges as Iraq's "top negotiator," while there is no prior mention of his involvement in the SOFA negotiations. It is still unclear who he is, and what roles he has played up to this point.
- Aug. 21, 2008: Two main sticking points remain in the negotiations: setting a timeline for U.S. troop withdrawal, and settling U.S. troop immunity status.<sup>92</sup> For his part, Muhammad al-Haj Hamoud, referred to as the "chief Iraqi negotiator" (who suddenly emerges despite



Zebari's and Rubaie's previous "ownership" of the negotiations), says that the current draft neither addresses immunity issues nor timetables; those issues would be resolved later, he said.<sup>93</sup>

- Aug. 22, 2008: Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Zebari announce that progress has been made along the security agreement, but that "any deal still faces significant challenges winning the Iraqi government's approval."<sup>94</sup> According to the report, the current draft stipulates a 2011 withdrawal date, with U.S. troops leaving urban centers as early as June, 30, 2009. Meanwhile, Ali al-Dabbagh suggested there is no rush to approve a deal before Bush leaves office, and Secretary Rice, perhaps in an attempt to hide her administration's sense of urgency in the matter, declared "we'll have an agreement when we have an agreement."<sup>95</sup>
- Aug. 22, 2008: Another report points to the withdrawal of U.S. forces by 2011 "if conditions in Iraq remain relatively stable."<sup>96</sup> Meanwhile, during her surprise visit to Baghdad, Secretary Rice tries to avert timetables, reiterating instead the importance of a conditions-based withdrawal.<sup>97</sup> It seemed at this point that a final draft had finally been concluded, according to Zebari's confirmation that "all of the issues have been addressed."<sup>98</sup>
- Aug. 23, 2008: Gol spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh describes the current SOFA draft as expiring in three years.<sup>99</sup> Elsewhere, amidst Sadrist anti-SOFA protests, al-Dabbagh attempts to downplay suggestions that the draft was final by describing the withdrawal dates as hypothetical.<sup>100</sup>
- Aug. 23, 2008: The current draft apparently cancels U.S. contractor immunity pertaining to CPA Order 17.<sup>101</sup>
- Aug. 25, 2008: During a speech to tribal leaders, Maliki reiterates his position that "no foreign soldier remains in Iraq after a specific deadline, not an open timeframe."<sup>102</sup> Elsewhere, Maliki states that an unconditional withdrawal timetable is a prerequisite to any U.S.-Iraqi security agreement.<sup>103</sup> There are, in fact, conflicting reports of Maliki's position during this timeframe; he confirms that outstanding issues have been resolved on one occasion, and denies this on another.<sup>104</sup>
- Aug. 26, 2008: Wafiq al-Samarraie, a Sunni Arab and once an official of Saddam Hussein's regime, quit his job as security adviser to Talabani in order to speak freely against what he referred to as the "danger Iran poses in the Middle East."<sup>105</sup>
- Aug. 27, 2008: Talabani announces that as the U.S. team originally proposed a 2015 withdrawal date while the Iraqi delegation wanted 2010 instead, both delegations finally agreed to 2011.<sup>106</sup> According to Talabani, Iraq reserves the right to extend U.S. troop presence.
- Aug. 27, 2008: Concerns finally emerge that Maliki may have used "military power to suppress domestic political opposition and views the continued presence of U.S. troops as an

obstacle to that,” while the “U.S. may be reaping some of the consequences of exaggerating the real progress in Iraqi security forces.”<sup>107</sup> This complements perceptions that Maliki is “slow-rolling” integration of the Sunni Sons-of-Iraq into Iraqi security forces, a process which will be easier for him to do once U.S. forces are gone.<sup>108</sup>

Aug. 29, 2008: In a surprise move, Maliki reshuffles his team of SOFA negotiators, apparently replacing the Kurd-dominated team with Mowaffak al-Rubaie, Tariq Najm, and Sadiq al-Rikabi, three of his closest advisors.<sup>109</sup> Another source reports that this may be an attempt to sabotage the negotiations;<sup>110</sup> there is also the possibility that Maliki may have tried to seal a possible Kurdish leak of the agreement, especially given his dispute with the Kurds over Khanaqeen.

Aug. 31, 2008: Iran’s parliamentary speaker, Ali Larijani, declares that “the U.S. proposed security agreement is in fact aimed at humiliating the dignity of the Iraqi nation.”<sup>111</sup> This is continued evidence of a sustained Iranian propaganda campaign against a U.S.-Iraqi SOFA, and indirectly targeting Maliki’s internal consolidation efforts.

Aug. 31, 2008: On the same day, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki called for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, while “expressing his delight over the growing sovereignty of Iraq”<sup>112</sup> following his meeting with ex-negotiator and current Deputy Foreign Minister, Mohammed al-Haj Hamoud.

Aug. 31, 2008: At this juncture, it seems as though two SOFA teams are contesting the negotiation process: one led by Maliki’s inner circle, and the other by the defunct Kurdish team which was led by al-Haj Hamoud, Deputy Foreign Minister.

August 31, 2008-September 30, 2008: Ramadan

Sep. 3, 2008: An interesting analysis by a Syrian political scientist in the Asia Times discusses several Iranian interests in Iraq: according to the report, a senior meeting was held in Tehran to discuss Talabani’s deteriorating health and the potential loss of a strong ally in the Iraqi Kurdish community.

Sep. 3, 2008: Ali al-Adeeb of the Dawa Party reveals that the U.S. has three remaining days on a requested 10-day extension to review the Iraqi negotiation team’s SOFA terms; the sticking points remain U.S. troop immunity.<sup>113</sup>

Sep. 8, 2008: An article discusses Maliki’s seemingly “nationalistic” stance in the SOFA negotiations: “posing as the nationalist who managed to get the U.S. to accept a timetable for withdrawal [...] allows Maliki to distance himself from his main Shiite allies in the government, [ISCI], seen as keen backers of the occupation.”<sup>114</sup>

Sep. 10, 2008: On a trip to Iran, Adel Abdul Mehdi, Iraqi VP and member of ISCI, discusses SOFA negotiations with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki.<sup>115</sup>

- Sep. 10, 2008: During a visit to the White House, Talabani reiterates that "there's no place, no inch of Iraqi land under the control" of terrorists, while emphasizing that Iraq's relations with its neighbors have normalized.<sup>116</sup>
- Sep. 10, 2008: Ahmadinejad calls for a withdrawal timetable to remove U.S. forces from Iraq.<sup>117</sup>
- Sep. 12, 2008: Talabani tells President Bush that Iran and Syria now pose "no problem," while reiterating the need to sign a strategic framework agreement.<sup>118</sup> Talabani's role as of late has been conspicuously attuned to Iranian interests.
- Sep. 15, 2008: Defense Secretary Gates meets with Maliki to discuss improvements in Iraq and bilateral relations.<sup>119</sup>
- Sep. 15, 2008: Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hassan Qashqavi emphasizes the importance of Iraq's sovereignty in an attempt to disrupt ongoing SOFA negotiations.<sup>120</sup>
- Sep. 15, 2008: An article discusses the possibility that during his July trip Obama asked Iraqi negotiators to delay any security agreement until after the elections and a new administration was in place.<sup>121</sup>
- Sep. 16, 2008: The Los Angeles Times reports on Maliki's growing independence from the United States.<sup>122</sup>
- Sep. 16, 2008: U.S. embassy in Baghdad spokesperson Susan Ziada says that the U.S. delegation is waiting on the arrival of more U.S. experts to negotiate an agreement, considering its "level of complexity."<sup>123</sup>
- Sep. 17, 2008: Maliki announces that U.S. negotiators have not responded to the Iraqi proposals despite the passing of the ten day review extension; he also reiterates that there are "very serious and dangerous obstacles to the deal."<sup>124</sup>
- Sep. 22, 2008: Tariq Hashemi states that there remain disagreements with the U.S. as Iraqi negotiators are trying to secure an agreement which will respect both Iraq and neighboring countries' sovereignty.<sup>125</sup>
- Sep. 22, 2008: Zebari announces that the U.S. has made "huge concessions" in order to secure an agreement with Iraqi negotiators, while reserving the right to extend the U.N. mandate in case negotiations fail.<sup>126</sup>
- Sep. 22, 2008: A U.S. Embassy in Baghdad spokeswoman announces that the U.S. National Security Council's Brett McGurk and the State Department's David Satterfield will arrive soon in Baghdad to respond to the latest immunity proposals submitted by the Iraqi negotiating team.<sup>127</sup>
- Sep. 28, 2008: U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker publically accused Iran of trying to block the SOFA negotiations.<sup>128</sup>

- Sep. 29, 2008: Maliki acknowledges that a SOFA is both in the interest of the U.S. and Iraq.<sup>129</sup> He also recognizes the fact that “pressures are coming from east and west and north and south,” and identifies the immunity clause of U.S. soldiers as the most significant point of contention between U.S. and Iraqi negotiators.<sup>130</sup> Maliki’s tone is more conciliatory than before.
- Oct. 3, 2008: U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte arrives in Baghdad on an unannounced visit for talks with Iraqi officials on political, security, and economic matters.<sup>131</sup>
- Oct. 4, 2008: U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte and Ambassador Ryan Crocker met with Talabani and Barzani in Arbil to discuss the SOFA, provincial elections, and other security matters.<sup>132</sup>
- Oct. 5, 2008: Talabani meets with MNF-I Commander, General Odierno, to discuss the SOFA agreement, while Maliki met with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Negroponte to discuss such matters.<sup>133</sup>
- Oct. 6, 2008: Talabani and Barzani meet in Arbil for more discussions.<sup>134</sup>
- Oct. 7, 2008: Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari says that negotiators are “very close” to an agreement during a press conference with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Negroponte.<sup>135</sup>
- Oct. 7-8, 2008: Iraqi Parliament Speaker, Mahmoud Mashadani, travels to Iran for meetings on the SOFA with Iranian Majlis (parliament) Speaker Ali Ardashir Larijani, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, chief of the Expediency Council of Iran Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and head of the Judicial System of Iran Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi.<sup>136</sup> During his visit, Mashadani says that the “presence of foreign forces is the biggest problem facing Iraq,” in a clear reference to U.S. security forces.<sup>137</sup>
- Oct. 9, 2008: Talabani says that U.S. offered “good concessions” on the SOFA agreement and that he is confident a deal will be reached.<sup>138</sup>
- Oct. 10, 2008: Prime Minister Maliki meets with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf to discuss the SOFA. Ayatollah Sistani says he will not oppose the agreement as long as it is approved by Iraq’s Parliament.<sup>139</sup> Maliki’s meeting with the top Shiite cleric, whose approval is essential for the agreement’s viability, indicates that the deal may be in its final stages.
- Oct. 11-12, 2008: Talabani and Barzani return to Baghdad for further meetings with the leaders of Iraq’s top political factions.<sup>140</sup>
- Oct. 12, 2008: Iraqi President Talabani meets with U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker and U.S. negotiator, Ambassador David Satterfield, in Baghdad.<sup>141</sup> The series of meetings over the last week further indicates an agreement may be near.

- Oct. 13, 2008: General Odierno says that Iran has been interfering with the SOFA negotiations, referencing intelligence reports that suggest that Iran has even attempted to bribe Iraqi officials.<sup>142</sup>
- Oct. 15, 2008: A draft of the SOFA agreement is reportedly finalized.
- Oct. 19, 2008: The Iraqi National Security Council meets to discuss the SOFA draft before passing it on to the Iraqi Cabinet.
- Oct. 21, 2008: The Iraqi Cabinet meets to discuss the SOFA draft. During the six-hour meeting, the Ministers of Defense, Interior, and Planning support the current draft. Other members oppose the draft. By the end of the meeting, the Cabinet announces that it will seek amendments to the SOFA. The amendments would seek a harder deadline for U.S. withdrawal and expanded Iraqi jurisdiction over U.S. troops that commit serious crimes off-base and off-duty.
- Oct. 21, 2008: U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen voice their reluctance to make any additional changes to the draft.<sup>143</sup>
- Oct. 22, 2008: Ayatollah Kazem al-Haeri, an Iraqi cleric based in Iran, issues fatwa against the SOFA.<sup>144</sup> Haeri is reportedly overseeing Muqtada al-Sadr's religious studies in Iran.
- Oct. 23, 2008: Russia's Foreign Minister says that Russia will support a renewal of the U.N. mandate if it is sought by Iraqi officials.<sup>145</sup>
- Oct. 26, 2008: The Iraqi Cabinet postponed their vote on the proposed amendments to the SOFA draft, in a move widely seen as delaying the issue until after U.S. presidential elections on November 4, 2008.<sup>146</sup> ISCI and Dawa were reportedly unable to agree on a list of demands in the proposed amendments.<sup>147</sup>

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