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Backgrounder #6

Reports on Iraqi Army Operations, Part 1 Operations of the 8th Iraqi Army Division in Qadisiyah August 27, 2007

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The 8th Iraqi Army Division (IAD), commanded by Major General Othman Farhood, is based ninety miles southeast of Baghdad in Diwaniyah. It is deployed, securing the population and terrain and fighting against violent members of the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) and Badr Corps rogue elements to stabilize the mostly Shia-on-Shia violence occurring in Qadisiyah province.¹ It also provides security against al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and other Sunni extremists as they attempt to mount spectacular attacks and foment civil war. The 8th Division conducts operations with popular support and coordinates with local police and local government. The 8th Division compliments ongoing coalition efforts to secure Baghdad and coordinates security operations with Coalition forces to its north. 8th Iraqi Army soldiers contributed to major named operations: Operations BLACK EAGLE, MONGOOSE, and MARNE AVALANCHE.

The Fight in Diwaniyah

Violence in Diwaniyah is not divided along sectarian lines. The struggle is between Shia factions and has been largely political, with Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army (JAM) and the Badr Corps vying for power and influence among the civilian population.² In order to challenge the Badr Corps control over the governor's office and provincial council, "an estimated 300 gunmen of the [JAM] had imposed their form of Islamic law," in northern Diwaniyah.³

The Baghdad Security Plan added a new dimension to this fight. As coalition forces increased their presence in Baghdad, JAM fighters dispersed into outlying provinces and cities including Diwaniyah.⁴ Polish Major General Pawell Lamla, then commander of Multi National Division-Center South with his headquarters near Diwaniyah, claimed that militia members traveled from the capital "to conduct

kidnappings, assassinations, and assist in the militia's intimidation campaign."⁵ Despite the unique and intense nature of conflict in Diwaniyah, the 8th Iraqi Army performed well within this context.

Operation BLACK EAGLE

With coalition assistance, members of the 8th Iraqi Army have successfully responded to attacks since 2006. Their performance during Operation BLACK EAGLE highlighted their competence and ability to work with members of the Iraqi police force.⁶ The operation, which ran from April 6th through April 15th, supported the Baghdad Security Plan and aimed to "re-establish security in the area and create an environment where the government can improve the quality of life for the people of Ad Diwaniyah."⁷ Approximately 3,300 US and Iraqi forces entered Diwaniyah, encountered organized militia resistance, conducted cordon and search missions and established checkpoints throughout the city.⁸ With support from coalition aircraft and soldiers, the 8th Iraqi Army Division led the assault.⁹ Days of heavy fighting resulted in the capture of many valuable JAM assets.¹⁰ "More than 60 Shiite militants" were "killed or captured."¹¹ In addition, the 8th Iraqi Army Division apprehended "two wanted terrorists," uncovered numerous caches of weapons, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), explosively formed projectiles (EFPs), and discovered several EFP and IED factories.¹²

As Operation BLACK EAGLE concluded, the 8th Iraqi Army coordinated with members of the Iraqi Police and the provincial government to maintain security and re-establish services and infrastructure for the local population. As early as April 8th, "Iraqi police began manning key checkpoints throughout the city" to help enforce the rule of law.¹³ Cooperation between the Iraqi Army and the local government facilitated the supply of "aid, food rations, fuel," as well as "health water and sewage" to the citizens of Diwaniyah.¹⁴ Government facilities and schools also re-opened shortly after the Operation BLACK EAGLE ended.¹⁵ Iraqi forces carried out Operation BLACK EAGLE in response to "more than 700 requests from the people of Diwaniyah," and nested their mission with the over-arching Baghdad Security Plan.¹⁶

Beyond Operation Black Eagle

The 8th IAD has continued making strides since Operation BLACK EAGLE. On May 13th, 2007, "soldiers from 1st and 2nd Battalions, 4th Brigade, 8th Iraqi Army Division and paratroopers" from the American 25th Infantry Division, "carried out 'Operation Mongoose' to capture individuals responsible for," conducting mortar attacks and emplacing IEDs south of Diyarah.¹⁷ Coalition forces captured twenty-five suspects during this mission and the 8th IAD assumed responsibility for confining and questioning them.

In July 2007, the 8th IAD led Operation ALGERIA III in support of the Coalition Operation MARNE AVALANCHE.¹⁸ During this mission in North Babil, "Soldiers from the [8th IAD] and the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division moved from house to house searching for any presence of insurgent activity or violations of the rule of law set forth by the Iraqi government."¹⁹ As a result, 8th IAD forces captured a JAM recruiter and organizer "suspected of facilitating cross-border training, garnering financial support, and transporting equipment and weapons," including EFPs and IEDs.²⁰

The 8th IAD has also captured two other important leaders during recent operations against Jaysh al-Mahdi cells. First, on August 12, 2007, “Soldiers from the 8th Iraqi Army [Division] and U.S. Special Forces detained a high-value rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi special groups facilitator during an early morning operation in An Najaf, Iraq.”²¹ Intelligence indicated that this individual, among other offenses, was responsible for murdering the Kufa police chief in 2004 and recruiting over 200 JAM members.²² In a second raid on August 15, 2007 in Najaf, the 8th IA Division captured a “former battalion commander of the Jaysh al-Mahdi militia suspected of leading an independent extremist group.”²³ This former JAM commander was suspected of conducting numerous EFP attacks during 2005 and 2006 as well as forming an independent extremist group with more than 150 members “that took part in an August 2006 battle against coalition forces in Diwaniyah.”²⁴

Challenges

Major General Othman’s unit battles “competing Shiite militias linked to political parties,” in the Iraqi government. He and his subordinates receive intense pressure from local and national officials seeking to undercut his efforts to protect the local population from these militant groups.²⁵ In addition, the quality of the Iraqi Police Forces in Qadisiyah province is variable. Although the police have plans to continue training with coalition forces and “hire an additional 3,000 policemen,” this effort will require time, attention, and resources.²⁶ Finally, the 8th IAD still depends “on the Coalition to provide technical support and expertise to help us find and remove,” IEDs. They also need air support, fire support, and logistical support to conduct operations and will not be self-sufficient until they possess these capacities. Despite these shortcomings, the 8th Iraqi Army is operating to secure the population and support the central government.

¹ “Morning Edition,” Subject: Fighting Shia-on-Shia Violence in Diwaniyah; Host: Steve Inskeep; Tuesday April, 10, 2007.

² “Morning Edition,” Subject: Fighting Shia-on-Shia Violence in Diwaniyah; Reporter: Mike Shuster; Tuesday April, 10, 2007.

³ Morning Edition,” Subject: Fighting Shia-on-Shia Violence in Diwaniyah; Reporter: Mike Shuster; Tuesday April, 10, 2007.

⁴ Jennie Matthew, “60 Shiite Militants Killed or Captured in Iraqi City,” Agence France Presse-English, Monday, April 9, 2007.

⁵ Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Release No. 20070411-16, “Operation Black Eagle City Recovers Through Efforts of Iraqi Army and Coalition Partners,” Multi-National Corps-Iraq PAO, April 11, 2007.

⁶ Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Release No. 20060828-06, “IA, IP in Ad Diwaniyah Repel Attack,” Multi-National Corps-Iraq PAO, August 28, 2006.

⁷ Commander, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, Colonel Michael Garrett, quoted in Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Release No. 20070406-17, “Operation Black Eagle Begins in Ad Diwaniyah,” Camp Victory, PAO, April 6, 2007.

⁸ Commander, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, Colonel Michael Garrett, quoted in Jennie Matthew, “60 Shiite Militants Killed or Captured in Iraqi City,” Agence France Presse-English, Monday, April 9, 2007.

⁹ Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Release No. 20070408-03, “Operation Black Eagle: Iraqi General notes ‘Great Success’,” Multi-National Corps-Iraq PAO, April 8, 2007.

¹⁰ Morning Edition,” Subject: Fighting Shia-on-Shia Violence in Diwaniyah; Reporter: Mike Shuster; Tuesday April, 10, 2007.

¹¹ Jennie Matthew, “60 Shiite Militants Killed or Captured in Iraqi City,” Agence France Presse-English, Monday, April 9, 2007.

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- ¹² Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Release No. 20070408-03, "Operation Black Eagle: Iraqi General notes 'Great Success'," Multi-National Corps-Iraq PAO, April 8, 2007.
- ¹³ Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Release No. 20070409-04, "Iraqi Police Join the Security Mission in Diwaniyah," Multi-National Corps-Iraq PAO, April 9, 2007.
- ¹⁴ Provincial Governor of Qadisiyah Province, Jalil Hazma, quoted in HT Media Ltd., "Diwaniyah 'Returning to Normal, Step by Step,'" Sunday, April 15, 2007.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Commander, 8th Iraqi Army Division, Major General Othman Farhood, quoted in Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Release No. 20070409-04, "Iraqi Police Join the Security Mission in Diwaniyah," Multi-National Corps-Iraq PAO, April 9, 2007.
- ¹⁷ Department of Defense Press Release, Congressional Quarterly, Inc., "48 Detained, Weapons Caches Found in Iraq Operations, Monday, May 14, 2007.
- ¹⁸ Financial Times Information, "Coalition Forces Target Al Qaeda Leaders Around Baghdad," A200708085E-15973-GNW, Tuesday, August 7, 2007.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Release No. 20070807-14, "Iraqi Army, U.S. Special Forces Detain Suspected Rogue JAM Recruiter; ISOF Detain," Multi-National Corps-Iraq PAO, August 7, 2007.
- ²¹ Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Release No. 20070814-07, "Iraqi Army, U.S. Special Forces Detain High-Value Rogue JAM Special Groups Leader," Multi-National Corps-Iraq PAO, August 14, 2007.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ HT Media Ltd. "Phantom Strike Operations Target Terrorist Safe Havens in Iraq," Wednesday, August 15, 2007.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ "Morning Edition," Subject: Developing Iraqi Security Forces: An American Priority; Reporter: Anne Garrels; Tuesday, June 5, 2007.
- ²⁶ HT Media Ltd., "Diwaniyah 'Returning to Normal, Step by Step'," Sunday, April 15, 2007.