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**Backgrounder #9**

**Baghdad's Neighborhoods: November 2006 – August 2007:  
The Baghdad Security Plan in Mansour District**

**Andrea R. So, Graduate Student in Security Studies, Georgetown University**

In March 2003, before Operation Iraqi Freedom I began, Baghdad's Mansour district was an affluent Sunni enclave with "villas, gardens, and private pools."<sup>1</sup> Also known as the "embassies district," it attracted shoppers seeking luxury foreign goods from all over the city.<sup>2</sup> Due to the ongoing Iraq War, however, the district and its many neighborhoods succumbed to sectarian violence. In the four years between 2003 and 2007, conflict between Sunni and Shiite militias transformed Mansour into "a bombed-out wasteland."<sup>3</sup> The intense violence included street battles between rival militias, kidnappings, bombings, assassinations and death squads. Thus, many residents fled from the area due to a lack of security and services. Because this district was "one of the most heavily contested by the Shiite and Sunni militias," restoring order there has been challenging for U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces.<sup>4</sup>

Violence Prior to the Baghdad Security Plan

The Mansour security district is located in northwest Baghdad and contains two of the country's most notorious locations: Abu Ghraib prison and Baghdad International Airport (BIAP). Route Irish, the road from BIAP to the Green Zone, also runs through Mansour. Throughout the war, soldiers have called this highway "IED alley" and many consider it "the most dangerous road in the world."<sup>5</sup> The district's fourteen neighborhoods include Ghazaliyah and Yarmouk; both have been strongholds for numerous Sunni militant groups and Muqtada al Sadr's Mahdi Army (JAM). In addition, there has been evidence of Al Qaeda activity throughout the area. Following de-Baathification in 2003, these groups began converging in Mansour to and carrying out horrific attacks against the local population.



Pfc. Scottie Marin pulls security outside of a house in Mansour, Iraq, during a combined cordon and search with the Iraqi army on March 4. The wooden door with its ornate trim, and the elegantly scrolled metalwork on the windows, characterizes the wealthiest part of this neighborhood. The Iraqi in the background appears to be filling out a form during the search. Photographer: Sgt. Tierney Nowland, Joint Combat Camera Center

### *Sunni Insurgents vs. JAM in 2006*

Sectarian violence has been raging in Baghdad since February 2006.<sup>6</sup> In Mansour, “Sunni Arab fighters gained a foothold,” several months later in Spring 2006.<sup>7</sup> Shortly afterward, power struggles between the Sunni and Shiite militias resulted in attacks, kidnappings, torture, and assassinations. On October 7, 2006, “Sunni gunmen shot two Shiite bakery workers dead at their shop,” Al Nahrain.<sup>8</sup> This happened just one day after fighting and mortar fire around BIAP “forced Secretary of State Rice’s plane to circle the city for 35 minutes.”<sup>9</sup> Later, on November 13, police in Ghaziliyah discovered six bodies with multiple bullet wounds and signs of torture.<sup>10</sup>

The month of November 2006 concluded with attacks in Sadr City that killed 215 Shia.<sup>11</sup> This attacked stoked violence in Mansour’s Yarmouk neighborhood where Mahdi Army fighters patrolled the streets in defiance of a government curfew. JAM battled the Sunni Omar Brigade “overnight and through the early afternoon,” on Saturday, November 25.<sup>12</sup> Abu Maha, a Mahdi Army commander claimed that, as vengeance for those killed in Sadr City, his militiamen executed six members of the rival Omar Brigade.<sup>13</sup> Several days later, as Iraqis waited for to receive the bodies of relatives killed during the fighting, two car bombs exploded at al-Yarmouk hospital, killing four and wounding seven others.<sup>14</sup>

Yarmouk hospital fared no better in December. On the third, gunmen attacked the medical center, killed one policeman and wounded three.<sup>15</sup> Later, on December 17<sup>th</sup>, gunmen stormed the Red Crescent Society offices in Al-Andalus Square and kidnapped

“scores of employees.”<sup>16</sup> This event was “the third mass kidnapping to take place in Al-Andalus Square in less than five months.”<sup>17</sup> It was also indicative of the frequent targeting of service professionals such as paramedics, aid workers, soldiers, police, and firefighters throughout Mansour.<sup>18</sup>

Events in December 2006 established Mansour as the “fault line” between Sunni and Shiite militants in Baghdad.<sup>19</sup> This division became even clearer following Saddam Hussein’s execution at Abu Ghraib on December 30<sup>th</sup>. Violence erupted in the city and, among other incidents in western Mansour; a car bomb exploded killing two and injuring eight.<sup>20</sup> Although U.S. and Iraqi forces were conducting operations in the district, there was an elevated level of violence well into the next year.

### Operations Prior to the Baghdad Security Plan

Before U.S. forces began to implement the Baghdad Security Plan, they maintained a significant presence in Mansour. Although most coalition troops remained stationed in Forward Operating Bases such as Camp Cropper and Camp Victory near BIAP, they did conduct joint operations in the district with the Iraqi Army and Iraqi National Police. For example, on September 14, 2006, members of 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, the 6<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division (IAD), and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Iraqi National Police Division “cleared 1,450 buildings, two mosques, and two muhallas,” in Mansour’s Khadra neighborhood.<sup>21</sup> This mission supported Operation Together Forward, the “clear, hold, and build” strategy advocated by American commanders prior to February 2007’s troop surge.<sup>22</sup>

In the fall of 2006, MND-B Soldiers also worked with the Iraqi Ministry of Health (notoriously associated with rogue militia elements) to provide health care to Iraqi citizens. On October 5, soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division supported a third Iraqi-run medical operation in Ghaziliyah. During this event, the 6<sup>th</sup> IAD, Iraqi National Police, and U.S. forces treated more than 400 local residents without interruption from militants or suicide bombers.<sup>23</sup> Despite successful efforts like this, Operation Together Forward failed to “win back control of Baghdad from sectarian death squads and insurgents,” and “failed to reduce violence across the city.”<sup>24</sup>

Due to a surge in insurgent attacks and American casualties, U.S. commanders elected to change the clear, hold, and build strategy and halt the neighborhood sweeps that supported it.<sup>25</sup> At this point, Mansour was still “untouched” and remained a bastion for Sunni and Shiite militant activity.<sup>26</sup> Frequent missions did not resume in the district until U.S. strategy transitioned to the current counterinsurgency model. When the Baghdad Security plan commenced, however, American and Iraqi soldiers established joint combat outposts and began clearing operations in earnest.

### Mansour at the Beginning of the Baghdad Security Plan

#### *Al Qaeda-Linked Bombings in January 2007*

Sensational attacks continued in early January 2007. On the 5<sup>th</sup>, two car bombs detonated in succession killed thirteen people and wounded twenty-five near the Abu Jafar gas station.<sup>27</sup> Although directed at a Sunni sector of Mansour, this method of attack was commonly attributed to the Sunni insurgent group Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.<sup>28</sup> On the same day, sectarian clashes occurred in Ghaziliyah.<sup>29</sup> On January 8<sup>th</sup>, “gunmen ambushed a bus carrying workers to Baghdad airport,” killed fifteen people and wounded

fifteen others.<sup>30</sup> Eight days later, a suicide car bomb “detonated near an Iraqi Army checkpoint killing two Iraqi Army Soldiers and seriously wounding three others.”<sup>31</sup>



Soldiers from 887th Engineer Company secure a concrete barrier for movement into place around the perimeter of a new combat outpost in the Ghazaliya neighborhood of Baghdad. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. David Hudson)

#### *The First Combat Outpost in Baghdad*

As January 2007 came to a close, U.S. and Iraqi forces began setting conditions for the Baghdad Security Plan amidst the continuing violence. On January 23<sup>rd</sup>, soldiers from C Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment (1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division) built Command Outpost Wildcard, later known as Combat Outpost Casino.<sup>32</sup> The purpose of this joint, U.S. and Iraqi security station was “to allow soldiers to quickly respond to violence and crime in the area,” and was “the first of 20 joint security stations (JSS)” that the U.S. military planned to establish in Baghdad.<sup>33</sup> Their first mission, Operation Thunder Tide began on January 26 and ended on the 28<sup>th</sup>.<sup>34</sup> U.S. troops from the 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment and Iraqi forces from 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 6<sup>th</sup> IAD completed this mission “to clear the streets in Ghaziliyah of trash and debris,” in order “to provide sanitation on the streets,” and “prevent terrorists from having a convenient place to plant roadside bombs.”

#### The Baghdad Security Plan in Mansour

The ongoing Baghdad Security Plan has made a significant impact in Mansour despite continued attacks. Although sensational bombings have occurred frequently during the past seven months, sectarian killings, kidnappings, and overt clashes between rival militias have diminished. As a result, Iraqis that fled between 2003 and 2006 are returning to the district to open shops, rebuild schools, and reconvene neighborhood councils. This progress was faster in some neighborhoods than others, but has gained momentum throughout the district since the final “surge” troops arrived last June.

Combat Outpost Casino, in Ghaziliyah, produced results quickly. By February 5<sup>th</sup>, two weeks after the JSS became operational, “the sectarian posses had disappeared, their freedom of manoeuvre curtailed.”<sup>35</sup> Despite initial skepticism, local Iraqis began providing forces at the outpost with valuable information in early March. On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, for example, coalition troops captured a large weapons cache “as the result of a tip from a



resident.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, on July 21<sup>st</sup>, U.S. and Iraqi forces captured a member of Al-Qaeda in Iraqi suspected for running a terrorist media cell.<sup>37</sup>

Coalition forces had similar success in Mansour’s Yarmouk and Hateen neighborhoods. In April, while carrying out Operation Arrowhead Strike 9, the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 6<sup>th</sup> IAD, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Combat Team cleared all the trash piles and abandoned vehicles from Yarmouk, cleared homes and business, and discovered several weapons caches.<sup>38</sup> U.S. and Iraqi troops followed this highly productive effort in July with a two-day operation called “Patriot Strike,” cleared more than 500 homes in Hateen and Yarmouk.<sup>39</sup> Endeavors like these allowed Hateen’s Neighborhood Advisory Council (NAC) to reconvene and discuss infrastructure improvements.<sup>40</sup> Soldiers from the 32<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Division, attached the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, also helped Iraqis renovate Yarmouk’s NAC and Hateen’s Al-Tameen Kindergarten.<sup>41</sup> Both have scheduled re-openings.



A weapons cache found June 13, 2007 contained 113 land mines, 63 grenades, three rockets, three mortars, two gas masks, five washing machine timers, more than 2000 rounds of AK-47 ammunition and seven boxes of various electronics and other assorted explosives. It is the largest weapons cache discovery by either U.S. or Iraqi forces to date in the western Baghdad neighborhood of Yarmouk. (US Army photo by 1st Lt. Patrick Henson, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment)

Progress in other areas of Mansour was far more mixed. During the month of February, there were several bombings in the district. One occurred inside the Ministry of Public Works and was “described as a possible assassination attempt.”<sup>42</sup> The most devastating attack happened in the neighborhood of Iskan, where a van exploded, killed sixteen people, and wounded forty others.<sup>43</sup> These types of attacks persisted in March, when a suicide car bomb hit the Mutanabi Street book market, killing twenty people and wounding more than sixty-five.<sup>44</sup> This was an extremely symbolic target for Iraqis because the market dated back “to the era when the Abbasid caliphate ruled,” and symbolized “Baghdad’s venerable intellectual history.” In June, however, two car bombs exploded in Abu Ghraib neighborhood and did severe damage to both a Sunni mosque and a Shiite mosque.<sup>45</sup> This attack, allegedly perpetrated by Al Qaeda, aimed “to disrupt the reconciliation process.”<sup>46</sup> Bombings of this nature, intended to undermine coalition efforts to restore security have, indeed, been persistent distractions in Mansour.

Similar attacks included the July 25<sup>th</sup> attack against Iraqi soccer fans, and the fuel tanker explosion on August 1<sup>st</sup>. During the first attack, in July, two suicide car bombs exploded in a crowd soccer fans celebrating the Iraqi soccer team’s win against South

Korea. The attack, which killed fifty and wounded 135, was an attempt to destroy the feeling of unity that emerged from the national victory.<sup>47</sup> Finally, on August 1<sup>st</sup>, a suicide bomber killed fifty people at a Mansour gas station by detonating a fuel tanker. This event occurred the same day that “Iraq’s largest Sunni political faction resigned from Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki’s cabinet,” and was eerily similar to a fuel tanker explosion that occurred in Mansour on December 24, 2004.<sup>48</sup>

Despite these horrific events, U.S. and Iraqi forces have continued to advance incrementally toward restoring order in the district. Of course, the neighborhood is not yet “safe” and many concerns remain. Essential services such as water, trash removal, and electricity are still largely deficient. Sectarian infiltration of the Iraqi police forces is still a destabilizing factor. This issue prompted officials in Ghaziliyah to create a Sunni volunteer police force called the Ghaziliyah Guardians as a counter to the ISF’s pro-Shia conduct.<sup>49</sup> Conversely, eastern Mansour’s Khadra neighborhood chose to solve the sectarian issue by disbanding the police station after officers there “failed to prevent insurgent and criminal activity.”<sup>50</sup>

While ongoing bombings, insufficient services and unprofessional security forces do have the potential to render the Baghdad Security Plan ineffective in Mansour, coalition forces have made vast improvements there. These advances deserve equal attention. Between February and March, U.S. officials cited a “26 percent decline in civilian deaths.”<sup>51</sup> Shops started reopening in April drawing Baghdadis from less secure districts and increasing business by sixty-five percent.<sup>52</sup> In Hateen, the market reopened in June, and, little by little, essential services are being restored.<sup>53</sup>



Col. Ali Al-Obaydi, commander of 2nd Battalion, 5th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division, talks with a local woman in the Hateen Market. The Iraqi battalion commander toured the market in late May in order to find out what was keeping customers away and determined how the a change in security measures for the area could increase commerce. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. Brian McCall, 2nd Battalion, 32nd Field Artillery Regiment)

Given that the final surge units arrived in June, U.S. and Iraqi forces have made serious headway in Mansour. Death squads can no longer maneuver freely, and coalition forces have captured scores of suspected terrorists and their weapons caches. As a result, residents of the district have been able to regain a degree of normalcy and security.

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<sup>3</sup>The New York Times, Monday, January 29, 2007, Damien Cave, The New York Times Company, "The Reach of War."

<sup>4</sup>Late Edition-Final, Sunday, December 31, 2006, Sabrina Tavernise, "Dividing Iraq, Even in Death," p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>The Boston Herald, Wednesday, October 18, 2006, p. 30, Darren Garnick, column: Working Stiff, "Dangerous Times, Dangerous Work," and Mail on Sunday, Sunday, October 1, 2006, James Ashcroft, Night and Day p. 46, "A Survivor's Guide to the Baghdad Taxi Run."

<sup>6</sup>Agence France Presse, Monday, November 13, 2006, "46 Bullet-Riddled Corpses Found in Baghdad."

<sup>7</sup>The New York Times, Sunday, October 2, 2006, Section 1, Column 1, p. 18, Sabrina Tavernise, "Suicide Bomb Kills 14 in Northern Iraq City."

<sup>8</sup>The New York Times, Sunday, October 2, 2006, Section 1, Column 1, p. 18, Sabrina Tavernise, "Suicide Bomb Kills 14 in Northern Iraq City."

<sup>9</sup>Daily News (New York), Friday, October 6, 2006, Richard Sisk, "Fight Delays Rice Arrival in Baghdad."

<sup>10</sup>Agence France Presse, Monday, November 13, 2006, "46 Bullet-Riddled Corpses Found in Baghdad."

<sup>11</sup>The Times (London), Saturday, November 25, 2006, p. 43, Ned Parker and Tom Baldwin, "They Had Been Praying. Then They Were Doused in Petrol and Set Alight," Times Newspapers Limited.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Tuesday, November 28, 2006, "Four Iraqis Killed in Two Car Bomb Explosions."

<sup>15</sup>Sunday Mail, Sunday, December 3, 2006, "Baghdad Market Bombs Kill 43," Scottish Daily Record and Sunday Mail Ltd.

<sup>16</sup>Global News Wire, BBC Monitoring International Reports, Sunday, December 17, 2006, ACC-NO: A200612172D-1348E-GNW, "Gunmen Kidnap "Scores" of Red Crescent Workers in Iraqi Capital," Text of Report by Iraqi Al-Sharqiyah TV on 17 December.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Late Edition, Section A; Column 1; p. 8, Tuesday, February 27, 2007, Damien Cave, "Bombing at Iraqi Ministry Wounds 2 Top Officials."

<sup>19</sup>The International Herald Tribune, The New York Times Company, Saturday, December 23, 2006, p. 1, Sabrina Tavernise, "Sunnis Losing Ground in Baghdad; At Least 10 Districts Have Become Almost Entirely Shiite."

<sup>20</sup>Mail on Sunday, Sunday, December 31, 2006, p. 4, Associated Newspapers Ltd., Glen Owen, "Do Not Be Afraid, He Told Himself: Grisly Footage Shown Around the World to Prove Dictator is Dead Seven Pages of Dramatic Eyewitness Reports, Pictures, and Expert Analysis of Saddam's Execution."

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<sup>22</sup>Late Edition, Section A; Column 6; p. 1, Friday, October 20, 2006, John F. Burns, "U.S. Says Violence in Baghdad Rises, Foiling Campaign."

<sup>23</sup>Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Release No. 20061005-08, Friday, October 6, 2006, Baghdad PAO, "MND-B Soldiers Work With the Ministry of Health to Care for Residents of Ghazaliyah."

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Belfast Telegraph, p. 10, Belfast Telegraph Newspapers Ltd., Friday, January 5, 2007, CTY Edition, “13 Killed in City as Iraq Prepares for Two More Executions,” and Late Edition, The New York Times, Section A, Column 1, p. 10, Friday, January 5, 2007, Marc Santora and Johan Spanner, “Deadly Blasts in Baghdad Leave Gruesome Traces.”

<sup>28</sup>Late Edition, The New York Times, Section A, Column 1, p. 10, Friday, January 5, 2007. Marc Santora and Johan Spanner, “Deadly Blasts in Baghdad Leave Gruesome Traces.”

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>PAP News Wire, Polish Press Agency, Monday, January 8, 2007, “International Affairs.”

<sup>31</sup>Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory, Tuesday, January 16, 2007, 2<sup>nd</sup> BCT, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division PAO, Release No. 20070116-02, “Car Bomb Detonated in Al Mansour.”

<sup>32</sup>Multinational-Corps Iraq, Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory, Release No. 20070123-10, Tuesday, January 23, 2007, “New Combat Outpost Built to Thwart Crime in Ghazaliya,” and Final Edition, The Star Ledger, Newark Morning Ledger Co., p. 6, Sunday, February 18, 2007, James Janega, Chicago Tribune, “Iraqis, Gis Share Outpost in a Sea of Fury.”

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<sup>34</sup>Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory, Release No. 20070206-07, Thursday, February 6, 2007, “Making Streets Safer: Engineers Help Clean Up Ghaziliyah.”

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<sup>37</sup>Agence France Presse, Saturday, July 21, 2007, Jay Deshmukh, “Troops Raid Baghdad Sunni Mosque Complex.”

<sup>38</sup>Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory, Release No. 20070409-10, Monday, April 9, 2007, “Iraqi Army Works to Secure, Clean Up Baghdad’s Yarmouk Neighborhood.”

<sup>39</sup>Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory, Release No. 20070708-21, Monday, July 9, 2007, “Two-day Clearing Operation in Mansour Nets Cache, Community Support.”

<sup>40</sup> [http://www.dvidshub.net/index.php?script=news/news\\_show.php&id=11046](http://www.dvidshub.net/index.php?script=news/news_show.php&id=11046)

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<sup>41</sup> [http://www.dvidshub.net/index.php?script=news/news\\_show.php&id=12195](http://www.dvidshub.net/index.php?script=news/news_show.php&id=12195), “Soldiers Lend a Hand in School, Governance Building Renovations,” 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Brian Cooke, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery.

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<sup>43</sup>Agence France Presse, Tuesday, February 13, 2007, Ammar Karim, “Shell-Shocked Baghdad Wakes to New Bomb.”

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<sup>47</sup>The New York Times, Section A, p. 8, Thursday, July 26, 2007, Richard A. Opiel Jr. and Qais Mizher, “Soccer Victory Lifts Iraqis; Bombs Kill 50 in Baghdad.”

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<sup>49</sup>Time Magazine On-line, Wednesday, September 5, 2007, Charles Crain, “Iraqi Progress: The View From Baghdad,” available from <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1659019,00.html>.

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.



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<sup>53</sup> [http://www.dvidshub.net/index.php?script=news/news\\_show.php&id=10761](http://www.dvidshub.net/index.php?script=news/news_show.php&id=10761), "West Baghdad Market Thrives During Troop Surge," 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Brian Cooke, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery.