

# THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR



## Backgrounder # 17

### Summer Operations Northwest of Baghdad: Denying Sanctuary to Al-Qaeda in Iraq

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The triangle of territory stretching from Karmah west of Baghdad to Tarmiyah in the north became a sanctuary for al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) beginning in January 2007, when the capital of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) was displaced from Diyala province to Tarmiyah. U.S. forces operating in this area have worked to disrupt AQI activities in the triangle, clear AQI when possible, and develop relationships with legitimate Iraqi Security Forces and tribal elements to provide security to the population. These operations unfolded in three phases: disruption and preparatory operations prior to Operation Phantom Thunder (January to June), disruption and clearing operations during Operation Phantom Thunder (June to August), and clearing and holding operations as part of Operation Phantom Strike (August to December).



Map 1: Area of Operations Northwest of Baghdad; Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping

Prior to summer operations, al-Qaeda in Iraq used this territory to shift fighters and supplies between Anbar, Salah ad-Din, and Diyala provinces, especially as tribal movements began putting pressure on AQI in Anbar province during the winter of 2007. It also used sanctuaries in Karmah and in Tarmiyah to build vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs). These car bombs would then be used in spectacular mass-casualty attacks against Shi'a civilians in order to fuel a sectarian war that would guarantee al-Qaeda a role as a security provider in Sunni

neighborhoods of Baghdad. Finally, the sanctuary in Tarmiyah was used to establish the quasi-legal structures of the Islamic State of Iraq that constitute AQI's political program. As a result, the triangle contained a multitude of enemy targets: commanders, associates, facilitators, bomb-makers, foot soldiers, financiers, and religious "leaders."

The physical and human terrain of the triangle was central to its role as a sanctuary area and transit route for al-Qaeda. It is mostly desert, with dry wadis and isolated roads linking both sides. Lake Thar Thar has little activity, with a long coastline ideal for concealing transit and weapons caches. In linking Anbar and Salah ad-Din provinces, it provided a transit route that allowed al-Qaeda fighters to avoid transiting Baghdad itself and the large coalition presence located on the west side of the city. The triangle is sparsely populated, with a few small villages located to the north near Lake Thar Thar and most residents concentrated near Karmah and Tarmiyah. This distribution allowed al-Qaeda to conceal operations in rural areas and villages where coalition forces patrolled infrequently, if ever.

### **Disruption and Preparatory Operations in the Northwestern Belt Prior to Phantom Thunder**

From the beginning of Operation Fardh al-Qanoon in February 2007 through the beginning of Operation Phantom Thunder on June 15th, U.S. forces tried to contest AQI control of the triangle. U.S. forces operating in and around Karmah conducted a number of preparatory operations in April and May prior to the launch of Phantom Thunder. An al-Qaeda military emir was killed northwest of the city in an operation on April 20<sup>th</sup>, and in a series of intelligence-driven raids, al-Qaeda associates and financial facilitators were targeted in Karma in early May, including a group responsible for the construction of chlorine VBIEDs.<sup>1</sup> Later in the month, US forces discovered an AQI torture house linked to a kidnapping ring in Karmah itself.<sup>2</sup>

Although General Odierno later identified the area stretching north from Karmah to Lake Thar Thar and east to Taji as a "known al-Qaeda transit route," it was left largely uncontested until the arrival of the 13<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) in late May and the launch of Operation Phantom Thunder.<sup>3</sup>

Further to the east in Taji and Tarmiyah, U.S. forces conducted a variety of preparatory operations prior to Phantom Thunder. U.S. forces established a combat outpost in Tarmiyah in February, which was attacked shortly thereafter by al-Qaeda in a coordinated attack using both a VBIED and small arms fire.<sup>4</sup> U.S. forces detained a senior AQI leader in Tarmiyah in April in an intelligence driven raid.<sup>5</sup> This was followed by a series of raids just prior to Phantom Thunder that targeted an AQI financial emir, an associate of the AQI religious emir in Tarmiyah, and close associates of AQI leaders, including one associate of Umar al-Baghdadi, a.k.a. Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq.<sup>6</sup>

## Disruption and Clearing Operations in the Northwestern Belt During Phantom Thunder

Operation Phantom Thunder, launched on June 15<sup>th</sup>, was a corps-level operation designed to secure the capital city of Baghdad by simultaneously applying pressure to al-Qaeda elements that had found sanctuary in the so-called “Baghdad Belts.” This operation sought to deny Al-Qaeda the ability to transit areas around the city and build VBIEDs for attacks inside Baghdad.

As part of Phantom Thunder, General Odierno sought to deny Al-Qaeda use of the safe havens north and west of the Baghdad, particularly the sparsely inhabited area south of Lake Thar Thar that links Karmah with Taji and Tarmiyah to the northeast. The 13<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit, and its principal combat arm, the Battalion Landing Team (BLT) 3/1 Marines, was deployed into this area where it established a “patient and persistent” presence. According to Col. Sam Mundy, the commander of the 13<sup>th</sup> MEU, the unit began conducting active presence patrols, as well as larger sweep operations like China Shop I and II and Pegasus Bridge, in order to find and destroy al-Qaeda weapons caches.<sup>7</sup> It began engaging with local tribal leaders, as well as opening up transit lines from Karmah to Taji that had previously been closed to legitimate commercial traffic.<sup>8</sup> These operations destroyed an AQI IED factory on the outskirts of Karmah in early July, apparently greatly inhibiting Al-Qaeda’s ability to emplace IEDs in the Fallujah/Karmah/Baghdad corridor.<sup>9</sup>

These clearing operations were carried out concurrently with a series of precision operations targeting senior AQI figures near Karmah, probably by U.S. special operations forces. On June 15<sup>th</sup>, a raid in Karmah targeted an individual suspected of providing false documents to al-Qaeda, along with eight of his associates.<sup>10</sup> On June 21<sup>st</sup>, special operations forces targeted the Al-Qaeda emir in Karmah, capturing his deputy and eight other associates.<sup>11</sup> A week later, raids northeast of Karmah netted four suspected AQI targets, including one suspected of close ties to the AQI emir for eastern Anbar province.<sup>12</sup>



Photo 1: 3/1 Marines Conducting Patrols North of Karmah in June;  
Lance Cpl. T. M. Stewman

Iraqi security forces, working with U.S. advisors, targeted a suspected terrorist training camp northeast of Karmah in mid-July, detaining seven.<sup>13</sup> This was followed by a series of raids by U.S. forces, including four in Karmah on July 30<sup>th</sup> targeting a suspected AQI financier and AQI weapons caches.<sup>14</sup> Several days later, possibly based on intelligence from the July 30<sup>th</sup> raid, coalition forces targeted senior AQI leaders north of Karmah near Lake Thar Thar, killing two and detaining four.<sup>15</sup>

Although al-Qaeda murdered eleven women and children in the Karmah area in a single massacre in mid-July, probably in order to intimidate local residents and demonstrate its continued relevance, Col. Mundy assessed that US forces had successfully set the conditions for success in the Karmah/Lake Thar Thar area by denying Al-Qaeda sanctuary and dismantling the al-Qaeda infrastructure for building and delivering IEDs and VBIEDs.<sup>16</sup> This would later be reflected in the diminished pace of combat operations, and the transfer of responsibility to elements of the Iraqi Army.

The battlespace from Taji north to Tarmiyah had been contested, unlike the Lake Thar Thar region, but Al-Qaeda forces proved to be much more deeply entrenched in these areas. In late May, the 4<sup>th</sup> SBCT, 2<sup>nd</sup> ID, established itself at Camp Taji, and deployed the 4-9 Stryker Infantry (“Manchus”) under the command of Lt. Col. Bill Prior, to Tarmiyah. Prior to the arrival of the 4-9 Stryker Infantry, the US maintained a minimal force presence in Tarmiyah, apparently at the company-level supported by the brigade at Camp Taji. As previously noted, Tarmiyah became a stronghold for Al-Qaeda after the ISI, al-Qaeda in Iraq’s nominal political front, relocated from Diyala province. Al-Qaeda had developed significant infrastructure in and around Tarmiyah by the time Phantom Thunder kicked off in mid-June.

Tarmiyah was especially vulnerable because the sector lies at the seam of three provinces. “[W]e are currently in the confluence of three provinces: Baghdad, Salahuddin and western Diyala,” explained Colonel Lehr. “[O]ur forces were arrayed here for a specific purpose....[O]ne of the purposes of the surge was to be able to amass enough combat power to take control of Baghdad from the extremists and also to place combat forces out in the belts that supported the extremist activity going on in Baghdad. We were a key element in what is referred to as the northern belt, and that's why they placed us in a position that maybe is a bit counterintuitive, because it's not aligned with a particular province. We had several...governance boundaries in our area, but that [determination to position the brigade in the Tarmiyah] was specifically enemy focused.”<sup>17</sup>

U.S. forces, including the 4-9<sup>th</sup> IN and probably a contingent of US special operations forces, conducted operations from June through August aimed at dismantling the al-Qaeda infrastructure in Tarmiyah. The 4-9<sup>th</sup> IN positioned its companies, and in some cases, even platoons, in combat outposts across the town, setting the stage for raids by conventional and Special Forces against AQI targets. These operations targeted specific, known al-Qaeda associates or al-Qaeda figures, each operation generating intelligence to drive subsequent operations.

The 4-9<sup>th</sup> IN and the special operations forces began at the base of the al-Qaeda infrastructure and worked their way up the network. Each raid helped U.S. forces develop better information about the structure and disposition of al-Qaeda forces in Tarmiyah. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, US forces detained three suspects on west of Tarmiyah for “links to terrorist leaders.”<sup>18</sup> This was followed by raids on insurgent safe houses west of Taji and west of Tarmiyah on June 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, targeting al-Qaeda associates and an individual involved in facilitating the entry of foreign fighters into Iraq.<sup>19</sup> A week later, a raid west of Tarmiyah, likely by special operations forces, captured a close associate of the suspected AQI military commander for Tarmiyah.<sup>20</sup>

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, U.S. forces conducted search operations west of Tarmiyah for an AQI cell leader, detaining two suspects for links to the cell.<sup>21</sup> This was followed by raids west of Taji, targeting an individual suspected of selling rockets and armored vests to al-Qaeda in Iraq.<sup>22</sup> On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, probably based on intelligence from a raid the week before, U.S. forces targeted the Al-Qaeda in Iraq military commander for Tarmiyah west of town, killing him and detaining seven others.<sup>23</sup>

On the basis of intelligence gathered in these raids, U.S. forces targeted an associate of AQI in Tarmiyah on July 5<sup>th</sup>, followed by air strikes against an AQI weapons cache and AQI “compound” on the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>24</sup> On the 10<sup>th</sup>, U.S. forces began another round of raids targeting associates of a senior AQI leader involved in weapons procurement and distribution.<sup>25</sup> These operations lead to the direct targeting of this AQI weapons facilitator on the 13<sup>th</sup>, followed by the detainment of two suspects with links to AQI’s religious emir in the area.<sup>26</sup> Additional raids west of Taji detained eight, including an AQI operative involved in coordinating suicide attacks and weapons smuggling.<sup>27</sup>

U.S. forces continued to put pressure on al-Qaeda operatives in late July, in particular those involved in weapons smuggling and the construction of VBIED devices. On the 17<sup>th</sup>, coalition forces, likely special operations forces, killed three and detained two in an operation targeting another AQI weapons facilitator southwest of Tarmiyah.<sup>28</sup> On the 24<sup>th</sup>, three synchronized raids west of Taji targeted AQI operatives associated with senior leadership, detaining twenty for links to hijackings and weapons trafficking.<sup>29</sup> This led to a raid on the 25<sup>th</sup>, detaining 10 for links to an AQI cell leader in Tarmiyah responsible for coordinating car bomb attacks in Baghdad, followed by synchronized operations on the 26<sup>th</sup> that detained the AQI car bomb cell leader himself west of Taji.<sup>30</sup>

These precision operations were also accompanied by efforts to dismantle the Islamic State of Iraq itself, and empower the legitimate government security forces. In mid-July, the 4-9<sup>th</sup> began efforts to recruit residents of Tarmiyah for the local police force, according to MND-B Deputy CG John Campbell, although it proved difficult given the al-Qaeda presence in the area.<sup>31</sup> US forces also targeted the infrastructure of AQI’s illegal court system in Tarmiyah, responsible for some of the most vicious abuses perpetrated against the residents of the town. As part of this effort, on July 28<sup>th</sup>, two synchronized raids in Tarmiyah netted senior AQI figures with links to the emir of the northern belts, including an AQI judge and his advisor.<sup>32</sup>

By early August, U.S. forces had developed sufficient situational awareness that they began closing in on the al-Qaeda emir for the Northern Belts. On July 29<sup>th</sup>, south of Tarmiyah, U.S. ground forces detained three in an operation targeting an AQI cell leader.<sup>33</sup> On the 30<sup>th</sup>, another raid targeted AQI elements in Tarmiyah itself; U.S. forces detained 10 suspects and killed five when they called in close air support to destroy a fortified insurgent position in a house.<sup>34</sup> A close associate of the AQI emir for Baghdad was captured along with another operative in Tarmiyah proper two days later.<sup>35</sup> Building on these operations, US forces launched a coordinated series of raids north and west of town, capturing three with links to the emir for the northern belts. Raids south of town the same day captured several more associates of the emir, who likely provided the intelligence that supported an August 3rd raid on four associates of the AQI religious emir in Tarmiyah.<sup>36</sup>

U.S. forces closed the gap between August 5<sup>th</sup> and August 7<sup>th</sup>, in a flurry of operations that detained associates of the emir, and then close associates, and then finally killed the emir of the northern belts himself on August 7<sup>th</sup> when US forces called in close air support to destroy a house he was hiding in.<sup>37</sup> This was a solid kill; the emir's network was involved in "extortion, kidnappings, training female suicide bombers, and car bomb attacks using chlorine," as well as VBIED attacks within Baghdad. Two days later, US forces kept up the pressure by capturing the AQI military emir for southern Tarmiyah, followed by the detention of six AQI operatives involved in the Baghdad car bombing network.<sup>38</sup>

### **Clearing and Holding Operations in the Northwestern Belt During Phantom Strike**

Following the conclusion of Operation Phantom Thunder, Multi-National Corps-Iraq launched Operation Phantom Strike, aimed at disrupting both Sunni and Shi'a extremists and preventing them from re-establishing sanctuaries that existed prior to Phantom Thunder. General Odierno described his conception of Phantom Strike, shortly after that Corps offensive began on August 13:

"This week, we launched Operation Phantom Strike, a series of targeted operations designed to intensify pursuit of extremist elements across Iraq. With the elimination of safe havens and support zones due to Phantom Thunder, al Qaeda and Shi'a extremists have been forced into ever-shrinking areas, and it is my intent to pursue and disrupt their operations...However, our Phantom Strike operations are not limited just to these areas. Over the coming weeks, we plan to conduct quick strike raids against remaining extremist sanctuaries and staging areas, carry out precision targeting operations against extremist leadership and focus missions to counter the extremists' lethal accelerants of choice, the IED and the vehicle-borne IED. We will continue to hunt down their leadership, deny them safe haven, disrupt their supply lines and significantly reduce their capability to operate in Iraq."<sup>39</sup>

Operations north and west of Baghdad during this period focused on two objectives: securing Karmah while transferring security responsibilities to the Iraqi Army and clearing the Tarmiyah area of remaining al-Qaeda infrastructure.

## **Karmah**

U.S. operations against al-Qaeda in Karmah during Phantom Thunder dealt a heavy blow to the organization; by mid-August, US forces began focusing on the integration of Iraqi Security Forces into operations in the Karmah area.<sup>40</sup> The 3/3 Marines from RCT-6 took responsibility for Karmah proper in July, while the 13<sup>th</sup> MEU and the 3/1 Marines began focusing on the integration of Iraqi Army units into their operations southeast of Lake Thar Thar so that they could hand over responsibility at the end of their deployment. The 13<sup>th</sup> MEU began preparations in early September to deploy out of Iraq, and handed over responsibility for the desert north of Karmah to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi Army Division. This battle space is now split between Iraqi Security Forces and the 3/3 Marines in the town of Karmah itself.<sup>41</sup>

There were several tactical engagements in the Karmah/Thar Thar area as part of Phantom Strike. On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, Iraqi Army scouts with U.S. Special Forces support conducted an air assault against an al-Qaeda facility near Karmah, destroying a safe house and a weapons cache.<sup>42</sup> A week later, Marines from RCT-6 killed 12 armed al-Qaeda terrorists by calling in close air support (CAS) against their vehicles near Karmah.<sup>43</sup> Operations in late September netted several suspected AQI operatives in the town, but no one of particular importance within the organization.<sup>44</sup>

At the beginning of Phantom Thunder in June, the area stretching from Karmah north to Lake Thar Thar was a known sanctuary for al-Qaeda in Iraq, used for the purposes of constructing and directing VBIEDs against targets in eastern Anbar and in Baghdad itself. By the end of August, U.S. operations in this area had successfully denied al-Qaeda use of this sanctuary. Of particular concern, however, is the ability of the 2<sup>nd</sup> BDE, 1<sup>st</sup> IA to hold the territory south of Lake Thar Thar and prevent Al-Qaeda reinfiltration into the area. On October 11<sup>th</sup>, U.S. ground troops, in pursuit of senior al-Qaeda leaders in the Lake Thar Thar region, called in close air support to destroy a target building from which they had received fire. The airstrike killed fifteen terrorists, but also resulted in the death of fifteen civilians who were located in the building.<sup>45</sup> The success of Operation Phantom Strike depends upon the ability of U.S. and Iraqi forces to prevent the movement of al-Qaeda forces from sanctuary to sanctuary around Baghdad. The reestablishment of an al-Qaeda sanctuary south of Lake Thar Thar would pose a serious problem, but as Anbar has been denied to al-Qaeda, the utility of the Thar Thar transit route has fallen dramatically.

## **Tarmiyah**

Unlike Karmah, Tarmiyah was not cleared as part of Operation Phantom Thunder. While U.S. conventional and special operations forces were successful in killing or capturing significant elements of AQI in Tarmiyah during this time period, the organization proved resilient enough to fortify entire areas of town, rigging entire houses for command detonation and shooting at U.S. forces from fighting positions in mosques.<sup>46</sup> As part of Operation Phantom Strike, U.S. forces continued a campaign of daily targeted kill/capture raids to disrupt the ability of AQI in Tarmiyah to launch SVBIED attacks in Baghdad.

These raids targeted a variety of low-level and high-level figures, continuing the pattern of operations set in June, July, and early August. An AQI cell leader, responsible for advising senior al-Qaeda figures, was killed along with 13 other terrorists in an air strike east of Tarmiyah on August 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>47</sup> Ali Latif Ibrahim Hamad al-Falahi, a.k.a. Abu Ibrahim, responsible for overseeing terrorist operations in the northern belts and “coordinating VBIED attacks in Baghdad” was killed in an operation on August 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>48</sup> An operation on August 24<sup>th</sup> captured a senior operative of Abu Ibrahim’s car bomb network.<sup>49</sup> On August 29<sup>th</sup>, U.S. forces captured the replacement al-Qaeda emir for the northern belts, followed a day later by an operation that killed Abu Sahib, the al-Qaeda military emir in Tarmiyah.<sup>50</sup> On the 31<sup>st</sup>, U.S. forces killed Abu Yaqub al-Masri, an inner circle AQI leader with close ties to Abu Ayyub al-Masri.<sup>51</sup> On September 4<sup>th</sup>, U.S. forces captured Mu’ayyad ‘Ali Husayn Sulayman al-Bayyati, a.k.a. Abu Wathiq, believed to be involved in the original establishment of AQI in Tarmiyah.<sup>52</sup> According to detainee reporting, Abu Wathiq went so far as to torture two twelve year-old boys, burning them and beating them, because he suspected they were spies.<sup>53</sup>

These targeted raids were accompanied by several multi-day, coordinated operations conducted by the 4-9 Stryker Infantry in mid-September, aimed at “tightening security in the northern belts.” The first operation, Operation Head Hunter, ran from September 7<sup>th</sup> to September 10<sup>th</sup>, clearing twenty tactical objectives within the city and seizing over 20,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate, an oxidizing agent that when mixed with a fuel like diesel or kerosene can serve as the explosive element of a car bomb.<sup>54</sup> U.S. forces also seized audio-visual production equipment, along with extremist propaganda.<sup>55</sup> The second coordinated operation, running from September 16<sup>th</sup> to September 17<sup>th</sup>, seized another 20,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate.<sup>56</sup> These seizures came on shortly after the seizure of 24,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate in early September.<sup>57</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 9<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army also participated in these operations.<sup>58</sup>



Photo 2: 4-9 Stryker Infantry enter a suspected insurgent house in Tarmiyah as part of Operation Head Hunter, Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007; Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Scott Taylor

While it is impossible to estimate al-Qaeda’s pre-existing stocks of ammonium nitrate, and therefore difficult to estimate directly how these seizures affected al-Qaeda’s ability to construct VBIEDs, 64,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate constitutes a major find. For reference purposes,



the truck bomb that destroyed the Alfred Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 was built using ammonium nitrate and fuel oil. Estimates placed the size of the device at approximately 4,000 pounds.<sup>59</sup> Given that ammonium nitrate and fuel oil are mixed so that ammonium nitrate constitutes 94% of the total mix by weight, this means that these caches could have been used to build a minimum of sixteen equivalent-seized devices.<sup>60</sup>

These operations did not constitute clearing operations, per se, and it is unlikely that a single U.S. battalion would be sufficient for the purpose. They did, however, create the security conditions necessary for the beginning of a tribal awakening in Tarmiyah. US forces had attempted to recruit local residents for the police forces as early as June, but these efforts bore little success, as the security conditions prevented residents from cooperating without fear of retaliation from al-Qaeda. As in Baqubah or Fallujah or Ramadi, al-Qaeda was vicious, arbitrary, and cruel in its treatment of the residents of Tarmiyah. It established an illegal Sharia court and executed those accused of spying or apostasy.<sup>61</sup> One of the high-value targets seized in September, Abu Wathiq, was known to pull residents out of their cars on the street, accuse them of being Shi'a, and execute them on the spot.<sup>62</sup> This generated enormous resentment amongst the residents of Tarmiyah, and by early September, some of al-Qaeda's local allies had already begun to turn against it.<sup>63</sup>



Photo 3: Citizens waiting to volunteer for security forces as part of the Tarmiyah Awakening, Sept. 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007; 4<sup>th</sup> SBCT, 2<sup>nd</sup> ID photographer

Operation Head Hunter set the stage for the beginning of the Awakening movement in Tarmiyah on September 12<sup>th</sup>. Run by a tribal council headed by Imad Said Jasim, the Awakening encouraged residents to volunteer for a new provisional security group known as the Critical Infrastructure Security Contract Force.<sup>64</sup> Over 1,200 men volunteered over the course of two days. They were provided with reflective belts to mark their new status, and the Iraqi Army furnished them with weapons.<sup>65</sup> Similar developments elsewhere in Iraq have led to improvements in the security situation and Lt. Col. Bill Prior, the 4-9 Stryker Infantry commander, was optimistic about these developments. "The success is not measured in how many bad guys were killed or captured," Prior said. "Success will be measured in how the people react now that they're gone."<sup>66</sup>

“The brigade has done well in routing out the extremists...,” Col. Lehr stated in mid-October. “I believe at the tactical level the surge is accomplishing what it's supposed to. We have pushed the enemy out of the northern belt. I mean, I don't want to paint the picture that it's, you know, a stroll in the park. No, it's still a dangerous environment, but it is significantly more secure than it was just a month or two ago.”<sup>67</sup>

U.S. forces continued to conduct frequent kill/capture raids around Tarmiyah in October and November targeting AQI cell leaders and operatives involved in the construction and delivery of VBIEDs.<sup>68</sup> Given the low-level status of these targets, it appears that the combination of high-volume raids in July and August and conventional operations in September dealt al-Qaeda a serious blow in Tarmiyah. The organization now longer holds territory in the city, and it has lost a key sanctuary for conducting operations against targets in Baghdad. Perhaps more importantly, the spread of the Awakening to Tarmiyah creates a framework for denying this area to AQI in the future.

## Conclusions

U.S. operations in the triangle linking Karmah, Lake Thar Thar, and Tarmiyah have stripped AQI of an important sanctuary. The tribal movements have pushed AQI out of Anbar, and U.S. operations in Baghdad and Diyala have forced al-Qaeda to the north, securing the towns and cities along the Tigris River Valley. These tribal movements and U.S. operations will become increasingly important to confining al-Qaeda to rural areas in northern Iraq, where its capacity to launch mass casualty attacks in Baghdad will be more limited. In order to regain access to Baghdad, al-Qaeda will likely try to reinfiltate southward along the Tigris. This phenomenon has already been observed on the east side of the river in Diyala Province, where al-Qaeda in Iraq has tried to move down from strongholds north and east of Khalis towards the Tigris and then south towards Baghdad.<sup>69</sup> AQI will likely attempt the same thing on the west side of the river through Tarmiyah and Taji. The Tarmiyah Awakening and its U.S. partners therefore hold a key defensive position for preventing future al-Qaeda operations in the capital.

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<sup>1</sup> Multi-National Force – Iraq Press Release. “11 Suspected Terrorists Detained.” May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Multi-National Force – Iraq Press Release. “12 Iraqi Hostages Freed in Follow-on Operation.” May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense Special Briefing with Multi National Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, June 22, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> US Central Command Press Release. “Update on Tarmiyah Attack: MND-B Troops Fight Off Insurgents, Detain Seven in Wake of Onslaught.” February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Multi-National Force – Iraq Press Release. “Ironhorse Troops Take Down Suspected Al-Qaeda Leader.” April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Defense American Forces Information Service. “Four Terrorists Killed, 30 Suspects Detained in Overnight Raids.” May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007; “12 Detained in Raids; Suicide Bombers Killed in Iraq Ops.” June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007; “Coalition Forces Kill, Detain Terrorists.” June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007; Multi-National Force – Iraq Press Release. “Coalition Forces Target Al-Qaeda Leaders, Detain 25 Suspects.” June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Hurt, Sgt. Andy. “BLT 3/1 wraps up CHINA SHOP II.” 13<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit. July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007; Hurt, Sgt. Andy. “3/1 brings successful conclusion to Operation PEGASUS BRIDGE.” 13<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit. August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Multi-National Force - Iraq Press Conference. Col. Sam Mundy, Commander, 13<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit. July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Defense American Forces Information Service. “Coalition, Iraqi Forces Taking Fight to Enemy.” July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Defense American Forces Information Service. “Iraqi, Coalition Forces Capture Terrorist Leaders.” June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Defense American Forces Information Service. “Iraq Operations Kill, Capture Scores of Terrorists.” June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> US Central Command Press Release. “3 Terrorists Killed, 26 Suspects Detained in Coalition Raids.” June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> US Central Command Press Release. “Al-Qaeda Cell Leader Killed, Seven Insurgents Detained Near Karmah.” July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Defense American Forces Information Service. “Coalition Raids Kill Five Terrorists in Iraq.” July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> US Central Command Press Release. “Two Alleged Al-Qaeda Emirs, 20 Other Suspects Captured; Four Terrorists Killed.” August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Multi-National Force Iraq Press Conference. Col. Sam Mundy, Commander, 13<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit. July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007; Multi-National Force Iraq Press Release. “Statement from Multi-National Force Iraq Condemning Murder in Karmah.” July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable with Colonel Jon Lehr, Commander, 4<sup>th</sup> Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, Multi-National Division North. Topic: Update on Military Operations in Diyala Province. Moderator: Jack Holt, Chief of New Media Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs. Wednesday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Multi-National Force – Iraq Press Release. “Coalition Raids Target Al-Qaeda; One Terrorist Killed, 15 Suspects Detained.” June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Department of Defense American Forces Information Service. “Iraq Operations Kill Capture, Scores of Terrorists.” June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007; US Central Command Press Release. “MND-B Soldiers Detain 18 in Raids.” June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007; Department of Defense American Forces Information Service. “Coalition Forces Continue Heightened Operations in Iraq.” June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Department of Defense American Forces Information Service. “Iran-Tied Terrorist, Other Suspects Nabbed in Iraq Raids.” June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

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<sup>21</sup> Department of Defense American Forces Information Service. "Phantom Thunder, Related Operations Continue in Iraq." July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007.

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