



U.S. Army soldiers from 1st Cavalry Division provide security during a humanitarian assistance mission on Haifa Street in Baghdad, Iraq, on February 13, 2007.

U.S. Army photo by Spc. Olanrewaju Akinwunmi

IRAQ REPORT

January 10, 2007 – February 10, 2007

From ‘New Way Forward’ to New Commander

by KIMBERLY KAGAN

This report, the first of a series, describes the purpose, course, and results of coalition military operations between January 10, 2007, when President Bush announced a change in U.S. strategy in Iraq, and February 10, when General David Petraeus replaced General George Casey as overall U.S. commander in Iraq. It describes operations in Baghdad, in the villages and towns around the capital, and in Diyala province to the northeast. All of these operations preceded the Baghdad Security Plan now getting underway. Some of them were aimed at preparing for that operation; others were independent undertakings responding to local opportunities or challenges. This report describes in detail and evaluates significant combat on Haifa Street in Baghdad, and clear-and-control operations south of Baqubah in Diyala province, placing these operations within the overall strategic context of the struggle. It discusses coalition efforts to disrupt al Qaeda networks in Iraq, the probable effects of those efforts, and the integral relationship between those efforts and efforts to stem sectarian violence. This report also briefly addresses the evidence for at least tacit Iranian support for Sunni insurgents in Diyala. Subsequent editions of the Iraq Report will be published at www.weeklystandard.com and at www.understandingwar.org approximately every two weeks, and will chronicle and analyze ongoing coalition military operations both in Baghdad and throughout Iraq.

INTRODUCTION

On January 10, 2007, President Bush announced that he would commit more American forces to Iraq, particularly to Baghdad, to secure the population of the capital city. This update places the unfolding Baghdad Security Plan, Operation Enforcing the Law, in context by reviewing the military operations that U.S., Coalition, and Iraqi troops conducted in the month before it began. This background information is necessary for understanding the changes that may occur as a result of the Baghdad Security Plan. Only then can we evaluate that plan's effect on Baghdad and Iraq, and its relationship to the larger U.S. mission in Iraq.

To evaluate a military plan, it is necessary to look at the same categories that military planners use to generate it: the mission, the enemy that generated the mission, terrain, the timing of events (including friendly and enemy movement), the available friendly forces, and the civilian population. One must then examine the different options open to commanders and discuss the balances of risk and opportunity. One then evaluates why they have chosen the course of action they have on the basis of the information they have available. Then, one must evaluate

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the execution of the plan. One must examine how the commanders and their units react to contingencies and follow up on operations to achieve their goals.

It is also necessary to evaluate the overall concept of operations – how the organization intends to reach its objectives. Military organizations must set and meet a hierarchical series of objectives that will accomplish the overall goal: tactical objectives, such as destroying a safe haven or holding a piece of terrain; operational objectives, such as securing a city; and strategic objectives, such as establishing a secure and democratic government. These objectives are hierarchical: the tactical objectives must contribute to the operational level objectives, and they in turn must lead to the strategic level objectives. It is not possible simply to focus on strategic objectives or on tactical objectives; one must accomplish tactical missions and operational

missions to achieve strategic success.

This edition of the Iraq Report reviews the nature of the mission, the concept of operations, the enemy, the terrain, the timing of events, and some aspects of the civilian population during early 2007. It demonstrates how events in the provinces and in the outskirts of Baghdad influence events in the capital. From open sources, the Iraq Report shows the nature of the al Qaeda network in Iraq, and some aspects of how and where it is now functioning. It discusses some significant military engagements in Diyala Province, in Baghdad, and in Najaf. These operations demonstrate how terrorists bring sectarian violence to a community. They also show different approaches that local commanders have taken to solving the problem of sectarian violence. This Iraq Report shows why some recent military operations have succeeded and others failed.

Insurgencies and counterinsurgencies are

■ From open sources, the Iraq Report shows the nature of the al Qaeda network in Iraq, how terrorists bring sectarian violence to a community, the different approaches that local commanders have taken, and why some recent military operations have succeeded and others failed.

complex. But they are also comprehensible. The fragments of information available in open sources form a cogent, overall pattern that policymakers and other informed observers can understand, just as they can understand any military operation.

*General Casey's
Mission Statement and Intent*

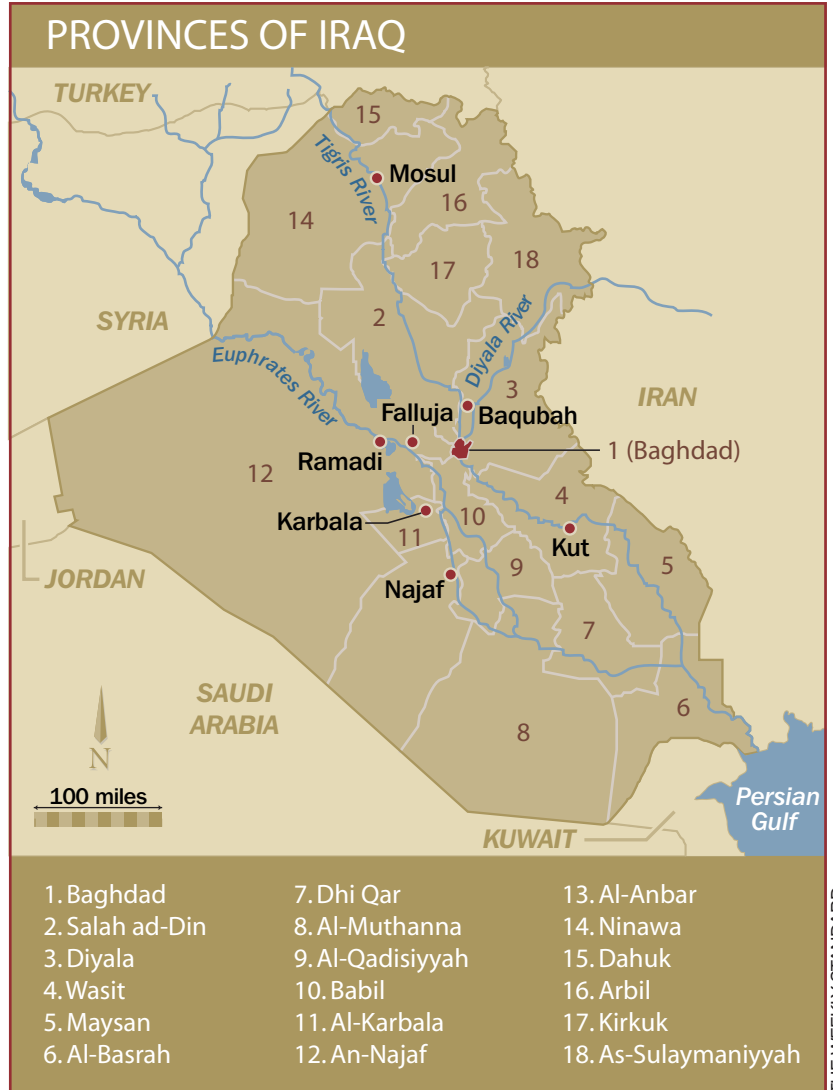
General George Casey remained in command of Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) until February 10. As the top-ranking general in Iraq, General Casey set the mission for coalition forces in Iraq in January and early February: “Since the inauguration of the Iraqi government, MNF-I forces remain in Iraq at the behest of its leaders. Coalition forces are committed to supplementing Iraqi Security Forces in ongoing operations – and striking at al Qaeda in Iraq in particular – but increasingly are focused on helping build and train the ISF with the eventual goal of leaving Iraq able to secure its streets, its borders and its citizenry without Coalition help.”¹

*Concept of Operations /
Operational Design*

The pattern of operations in January and early February supported this mission. In early January and February, American, Coalition, and Iraqi forces throughout Iraq engaged in coordinated raids and strikes in order to disrupt terrorist, insurgent, and militia networks. They killed or captured terrorists, destroyed enemy safe-havens, and oversaw controlled detonations of weapons caches. U.S. troops supplemented Iraqi Security Forces which requested assistance. They also trained Iraqi forces.

American forces were particularly active during this period within Baghdad and in the belt of cities and towns that surrounds the capital

(from Falluja south and east to Mahmudiyah, Iskandariyah, Salman Pak, north to Balad Ruz and Baqubah, west to Tikrit and Balad and thence back to Falluja). Most of these towns are within one or two hours’ drive of Baghdad—easy



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commuting distance for businessmen and insurgents. Operations in Baghdad focused on clearing out significant insurgent strongholds and attempting to turn cleared areas over to Iraqi forces. Operations around Baghdad focused on disrupting insurgent networks that had established bases and built up weapons caches in towns and villages all around the capital. These networks move weapons and fighters along various routes from these bases to attack targets

in Baghdad, Falluja, Baqubah, and elsewhere. Coalition operations focused on disrupting these networks by clearing out these bases. In some cases, U.S. forces remained behind after the clearing operations to keep the insurgents out. Most, but not all, of these operations were part of a larger effort to create the preconditions for the success of the Baghdad Security Plan, but they were not part of that plan, which was not yet operative during the period covered by this report. This period also saw operations in Anbar Province, in the north (Ninewah and Salah-ad-Din provinces), and to the south. These operations will be considered in subsequent reports.

*Operations Outside of Baghdad:
Disrupting Terrorist Networks*

U.S. forces use their intelligence assets to identify insurgents and IEDs directly targeted at coalition forces, but they also use intelligence to develop an image of how the insurgent group functions. They then identify particular “nodes” in the network that seem to enable a disproportionate number of other insurgents to function: leaders, weapons caches, safe havens, or assembly points. Units leave their base for one or several days, cordon and search an area, or otherwise take control of a location in order to seize people or information. Alternatively, they destroy important, identified enemy sites. They then return to their base. In subsequent operations, they may exploit the intelligence that they collect.

Many of the military operations in Iraq in January followed this pattern. MNF-I Press releases describe such activities weekly in various neighborhoods and suburbs of Baghdad. Beyond the capital, such targeted raids occurred in Tarmiya (series of raids, January 6-8); Risalah (January 14); Balad (January 12); al-Haswah (January 13); near Samarra (week of January 13); Jazeera (outside Ramadi, January 17); Falluja, Tikrit, North Karmah and the vicinity of eastern Balad (January 21, apparently coordinated).

These raids aimed to disrupt the ways that insurgents conduct their activities. Some insurgent groups rely heavily on particular

leaders to function. Insurgents rely on particular locations in order to move and meet freely to plan operations, transport goods, and store them. Insurgents assemble car bombs and other explosive devices in “safe” areas. Other insurgents transport them to the locations where they will be used, and still others emplace them so that they will harm friendly forces or civilians. Car bombs, truck bombs, and other IEDs do not usually originate in the locality where they explode.

But some of these raids are actually part of larger operations (although it is not always immediately apparent from media coverage or press releases when this is the case). MNF-I reported a raid outside of Balad Ruz on January 11. This raid was not a single incident, but was one part of a well-planned, ten-day clearing operation involving 1,000 U.S. and Iraqi soldiers. The operations around Balad Ruz are worth attention because they illustrate the links between terrorism and sectarian violence in Iraq. They also demonstrate how kinetic counterinsurgency operations can unfold successfully in rural areas, and how security can be a necessary prerequisite for economic and political development. The events in Balad Ruz also show the links between terrorism in the cities and countryside of Iraq.

Terrorism and Sectarian Violence in Balad Ruz: Clearing Rural Villages

A large, Wahhabist terrorist group with links to al Qaeda has been operating in the southern outskirts of Balad Ruz, a town of roughly 80,000 in Diyala Province. Diyala has long been an insurgent stronghold. U.S. forces killed al Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al Zarqawi near Baqubah, the provincial capital, on June 8, 2006. Balad Ruz is located about an hour’s drive north of Baghdad and about 35 miles east of Baqubah. The main road to the north and east of Baqubah goes through Muqadiyah, and the main road south of Baqubah goes to northern Baghdad. U.S. forces are stationed at Muqadiyah and Baqubah, and so traveling from one to the other is not always

easy. Balad Ruz sits upon the secondary roads that link Muqdadiah with Baqubah and southeastern Baghdad. Terrorists use this secondary road to circumvent U.S. forces.

Balad Ruz is well-located for terrorists for other reasons. The road from Baqubah to Balad Ruz ends at Mandali, the last town before the mountainous Iranian border, 24 miles west of Balad Ruz. Mandali is not a border crossing, but a secondary road runs from Mandali to the major border crossing at Khanaqin, 48 miles north. And a road without an authorized point of entry crosses the Iraq-Iran border 24 miles north of Mandali. So it is possible to travel from the Iranian border to Balad Ruz with a quick drive or a 2-3 day walk (with or without a donkey). The road from Mandali continues south to Kut.

The Wahhabists in this area have been inciting sectarian violence in Balad Ruz and Baqubah. The Council, as they called themselves, issued judgments (a common practice of Sunni Islamist groups when they can control an area, and one of the first means they use to assert the supremacy of Sharia law as they interpret it – and, thereby, demonstrate their own domination), and they were tied to al Qaeda and to Zarqawi.² In November, they kidnapped several families from local Shiite tribes, and killed all the men – thirty-nine civilians.³ They also perpetrated attacks almost daily on the people of Balad Ruz, Iraqi forces, and coalition forces. They frightened the local residents in the town and outlying lands where they established their safe-havens. Many left the area, while the remainder complied with the terrorists' demands out of sympathy or fear.⁴ Consequently, the terrorists turned the tiny villages south of Balad Ruz, once predominantly Shiite, into almost exclusively Sunni habitations.⁵ As the terrorists perpetrated violence there, merchants closed their shops in Balad Ruz.⁶

The 5th Squadron of the 73rd Cavalry

Regiment (3rd BCT, 1st Cavalry Division) was conducting reconnaissance on 12 November just south of Balad Ruz. The 5-73 discovered a weapons cache in thick date palm groves and irrigation canals.⁷ At that time, well-trained enemies defended the stockpiles, and the U.S. forces fought them for four days. When they had defeated the enemy, the U.S. forces returned to their base and developed intelligence about the enemy, which was unusual. It did not behave like other insurgent groups, which often detonate weapons remotely, flee when U.S. forces make contact, and return only when they leave.⁸

The 3rd BCT, 1st Cavalry Division conducted deliberate, small-scale raids and air assaults (the movement of infantry soldiers into combat by helicopter) during the next six weeks in order to establish and identify patterns of enemy behavior. The enemy became predictable by moving south whenever it was attacked from the north. These raids also drove the enemy into what it thought was a safe-haven or good defensive position.⁹ The terrorists massed their forces in sparsely populated agricultural areas, rather than in the population center in Balad

Ruz. The inhabitants live in tiny villages, grow wheat, and herd sheep. The terrain is criss-crossed with irrigation canals and ditches.¹⁰ The enemy was well organized and well prepared to fight. They developed a complex system of signals, fortified irrigation ditches and dug spider holes in them, used motorcycles to move through the canals, and fought in squads (small formations of 9-11 soldiers operating together—the squad is the smallest unit in most armies).¹¹ Enemy fighters physically separated themselves from the population, making it possible for U.S. forces to conduct major combat operations without harming civilians, which is normally a difficult problem in a counterinsurgency environment. Even so U.S. forces dropped leaflets to inform the villagers that they would soon be arriving in

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force, to ensure that the civilian population knew that military forces were coming and what their intentions were.¹²

On January 4, the 3rd BCT, 1st Cavalry Division launched Operation Turki Bowl (named after Turki Village, the southernmost objective), along with the 5th Iraqi Army Division. Air assault operations closed off the southern escape routes, while maneuver forces began to clear the agricultural villages from the north.¹³ The enemy destroyed bridges and placed obstacles on the roads in order to slow forward movement and divert vehicles toward explosives. Forward elements of the enemy sent up a smoke signal to indicate that U.S. and Iraqi forces had arrived. And U.S. and Iraqi forces did not find any military-age men in the villages it cleared on the first day of operations.¹⁴ Likewise, they found few young or middle-aged men in their house-to-house searches on subsequent days.¹⁵ According to one detained witness, insurgents fled into the irrigation canals on motorcycles as soon as they heard U.S. helicopters.¹⁶

During operations, U.S. forces spotted some bands of men on motorcycles driving through the canals, and called in artillery or close air support.¹⁷ Masked men also used the vehicles regularly to inform inhabitants about which roads the group had mined, and indeed, the insurgents continued to mine return routes after American vehicles passed through in their forward sweep.¹⁸ U.S. and Iraqi forces ultimately found concealed motorcycles, in addition to arms caches.¹⁹ During the operation, other villagers informed the ground forces about weapons caches, escape routes, and safe havens.²⁰

After several days, some of the men returned home to the villages. Troops discovered and questioned a group of seven and another of nine on two farms – suggesting that a few squads or their remnants had returned. U.S. soldiers found no evidence against them. They also detained a group of fifteen men in Turki Village for illegal possession of heavy weapons, including an Iranian-made machine gun.²¹

The operation concluded on January 13. U.S. and Iraqi forces killed 100 insurgents and detained 50 others during Operation Turki Bowl,

though the enemy never fought as intensely as it had in November. Coalition troops discovered 25 weapons caches, which contained armaments that would sustain a large terrorist network: 1,172 Katyusha rockets, 1,039 rocket propelled grenades, 171 TOW anti-tank missiles, machine guns, and anti-tank mines.²² The insurgents were well-prepared to defend their position against infantry and vehicle assaults. And they were apparently perpetrating violence and supplying weapons as far west as Baqubah.²³

Following combat operations, the U.S. and Iraqi forces built a combat outpost where they each stationed a company permanently to patrol the area. Their mission is to provide security for the area, so that insurgents do not return.²⁴ Shopkeepers in Balad Ruz have reopened for business. The mayor of Balad Ruz has allocated attention and local resources to the area, which had not been governed effectively by the town. The governor of Diyala visited Balad Ruz, and he and the mayor have compiled a plan to get the money from Baghdad that they need for reconstruction and economic growth.²⁵ The hope is that displaced residents will be able to return to this area.

In subsequent patrols, the Iraqi and U.S. companies discovered another substantial weapons cache.²⁶ The network has not regrouped locally. A suicide bomber attacked a group of civilians in Balad Ruz during the Ashura holiday, as they made the religious procession to their mosque. He killed twenty and wounded sixty people in this attack designed to kill and inspire fear in local Shiites, undermining their confidence in the otherwise improving security situation.²⁷ On February 1, the day after the attacks, local civic leaders and tribal sheiks nevertheless met with the governor of Diyala Province and the commanders of the Iraqi Army and Police in the region to discuss the security situation and reconstruction. Local citizens also attended the meeting.²⁸

U.S. and Iraqi forces have been operating in Baqubah and Muqdadiyah to follow up on their successes in Balad Ruz. On February 21, Iraqi border police found a large cache of weapons east of Balad Ruz in Mandali, a town on the border with Iran. The cache contained anti-personnel

mines, mortar rounds, ammunition, and a rocket-propelled grenade.²⁹ Mandali is a remote town, and the roads to and from it lead west to Balad Ruz (and thence to Baqubah and Baghdad), or else to Iranian border-crossings.

Placing a weapons cache in Mandali makes sense only if fighters are moving across the Iran-Iraq border. The Iranian region to the east of this border is remote and sparsely inhabited. Mandali is located at 380 feet above sea level. Immediately to its east across the border, mountains rise steeply to 3,000 foot peaks that continue well into Iran. The level fields of Diyala province, in contrast, are only an hour from Baghdad. They are vexed by violence. One must deduce from the evidence that fighters are moving weapons from the Iranian side of the border to Iraq.

Weapons may be coming through the border crossing Khanaqin or along the trail that reaches Mandali. Coalition forces raided an alleged foreign fighter facilitator site near Khanaqin in early December, and killed one terrorist who opened small arms fire at a U.S. aircraft returning from the mission.³⁰ A concealed bomb exploded in Khanaqin during the Ashura ceremonies, killing and wounding civilians in that town (the population of which is predominantly Shiite Kurdish) just an hour before the one in Balad Ruz.³¹ Together, this evidence suggests that Sunni foreign fighters have a network that operates between Iran and the towns of Khanaqin, Mandali, Balad Ruz, and Baqubah.

Operation Turki Bowl helps highlight the nature of sectarian violence in Iraq. Sunni and Shiite families were living together in rural villages outside of Balad Ruz without violence and sectarian killing. The al Qaeda-linked insurgent group moved into the desolate, rural area because it was not governed effectively from Balad Ruz, nor patrolled by U.S. or Iraqi forces, and because it offered excellent cover and concealment. The insurgents sparked a Shiite exodus from the area by kidnapping Shiite families and executing the young men. This terrorist act not only conveyed the horrible symbolic message of sectarian violence. It also deprived the Shiite families of the men who could defend them from further violence. The local Sunni population collaborated

with the terrorists largely because they feared them. Some young men fought with the terrorists, whether willingly or through intimidation. When U.S. and Iraqi forces arrived in the tiny villages and searched from house to house, the locals provided them information about weapons caches and insurgent activity. In Balad Ruz, sectarian violence and collaboration with terrorists occurred because strong terrorists were physically present. When coalition forces removed the terrorists, the violence stopped, refugees began to return, and political and economic processes began anew.

This operation and others like it around the belt of villages and cities around Baghdad were designed to have an effect beyond the immediate local area. Caches of weapons as large as those found near Balad Ruz could also have supplied major insurgent activities in Baqubah and in Baghdad. Simply eliminating these caches would not, achieve larger effects without the Baghdad Security Plan. Eliminating them as coalition forces prepare to clear and retain large areas of Iraq's capital deprives the enemy of some resources that he would otherwise use to defeat the Baghdad Security Plan. Although not a part of that plan, which had not yet begun when Operation Turki Bowl was underway, these operations are part of an effort to establish the preconditions for the success of the BSP.

Patrols and Raids to Oust Insurgents and Stabilize Baghdad

Haifa Street – Typical and Atypical

In January, units inside of Baghdad conducted a variety of patrols and raids to disrupt insurgent activity and stabilize Iraq's capital city, but these were not part of Operation Enforcing the Law, the Baghdad Security Plan begun on February 13.³²

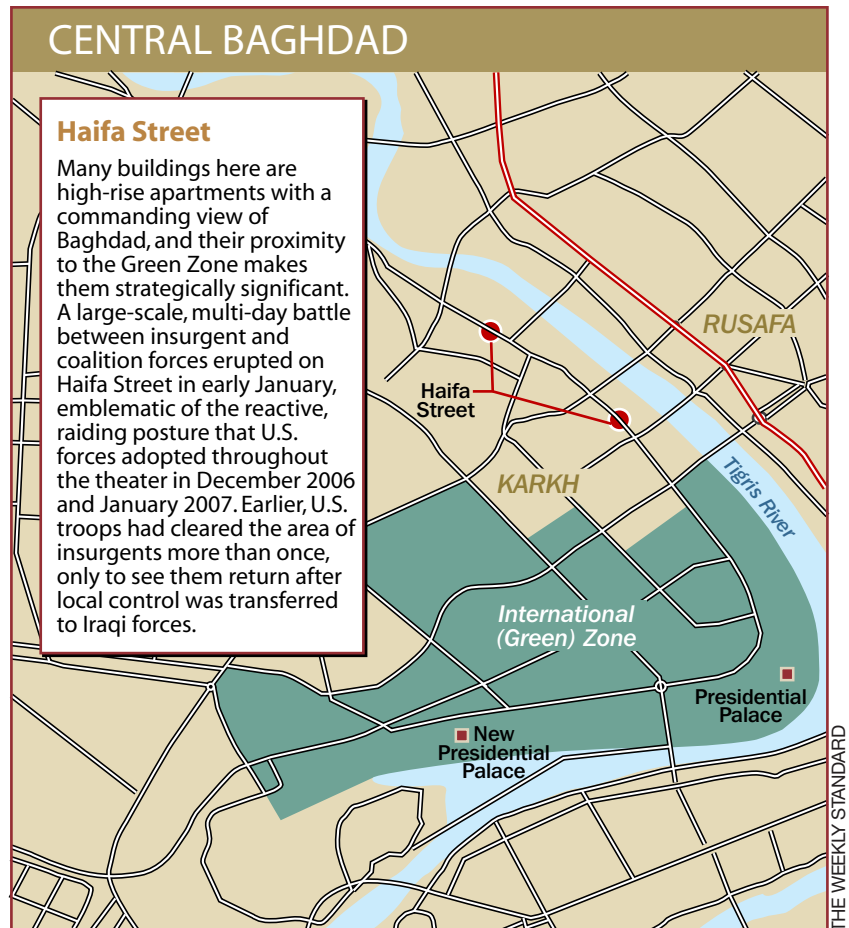
Some raids, like the fight along Haifa Street in the Karkh neighborhood of Baghdad, were reactions to requests by Iraqi Security Forces who could not handle the violence in their areas of operation without American help. A large-

scale, multi-day battle between insurgent and coalition forces erupted on Haifa Street in early January. The Haifa Street battle was atypical of joint U.S.-Iraqi engagements in December and January – and indeed, insurgent engagements – in scale and duration. But in some ways, the Haifa Street battle shows the parameters that guided coalition commanders last month, when they addressed a difficult security problem in Baghdad. Haifa Street also received significant media attention that did not place the battle clearly within the larger context of the challenges in Iraq and coalition plans and operations. It is therefore worth reviewing in some detail.

Haifa Street runs for two to three miles through central Baghdad along the west bank of the snaking Tigris River. Many of its buildings are high-rise apartments, some twenty-stories high.³³ Because of their central location and height, their commanding view of Baghdad, and their proximity to the Green Zone, the buildings on Haifa Street are dominant urban terrain, and highly defensible.³⁴ By the beginning of 2005, insurgents were using Haifa Street as a safe-haven. In spring 2005, the 1st battalion of the 9th Cavalry Regiment (part of the 4th BCT of the 1st Cavalry Division) cleared the neighborhood, conducted presence-patrols along with Iraqi forces, and repaired damage that they caused to the roads during combat. They departed, and left Iraqi forces in charge.³⁵ Some Shiite families fleeing Khadimiyah, to the north of Karkh, moved into residences on Haifa Street. They were “protected” by a leading member of the Jaysh al-Mahdi who operated in the vicinity of Haifa Street until he was arrested. Sunni insurgents then returned to the Haifa Street area from other neighborhoods and victimized the Shiite refugees inhabiting the buildings.³⁶ U.S. forces are attested patrolling the area in mid-October 2006. Even then, Haifa Street was marked by violence. Snipers shot at

U.S. forces from rooftops and threw grenades at them from the high-rises.³⁷

On Saturday, January 6, 2007, Iraqi troops on patrol discovered a fake checkpoint in the neighborhood, manned by insurgents. The Iraqi forces killed thirty insurgents on that



day.³⁸ That night, the insurgents dumped in the neighborhood twenty-seven corpses of Shiites whom they had executed.³⁹ On Sunday January 7, an insurgent sniper killed two Iraqi security guards at a neighborhood mosque where he was hiding. On Monday, January 8, “gunmen roamed the streets, distributing leaflets threatening to kill anyone who might enter the area.”⁴⁰ When the Iraqi unit in the area attempted to oust the insurgents from their stronghold later that day, two of their soldiers were killed in action. The Iraqi unit then called in American forces to help them clear out the insurgents’ safe-haven.⁴¹

The American reinforcements, the 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, (part of the 3rd Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division, equipped with Stryker light armored vehicles), had been operating as a strike force in early January, going to hotspots and temporarily improving local force ratios. On January 3, 2007, before the Haifa Street battle, elements of that unit continued Operation Arrowhead Strike III, in and around the Hurriyah neighborhood, in the Khadimiyah district in northwestern Baghdad. They conducted “clear and control” operations “in order to disrupt terrorist and militia activity and enable control and retention by coalition and Iraqi security forces.”⁴² It is not clear from open-source data whether their move to Haifa Street disrupted Operation Arrowhead Strike III, or whether they had completed that mission when they went to Haifa Street.

The 1-23 Infantry Battalion moved out of its assembly area at 3:30 a.m. on Tuesday, January 9. Two hours later, it had joined with the Iraqi forces around Tala’a Square, on the north end of Haifa Street and in the center of the neighborhood, occupied buildings, and began rounding up suspects.⁴³ Approximately 1,000 U.S. and Iraqi troops were in the area.⁴⁴ At 7:00 a.m., the insurgents began firing on U.S. and Iraqi troops and their vehicles from sniper positions on the roofs and the doorways of buildings. They also coordinated their mortar fire, indicating a high degree of training and cohesiveness. And they continued to fight, rather than running away from American forces, as the enemy typically had done, surprising American forces. U.S. and Iraqi forces had not cordoned off the area before or during the fight. The insurgents occupied positions in successive buildings, and moved effectively from building to building as the American and Iraqi forces went from one to the next.⁴⁵ The battalion from the Stryker Brigade called for close air support from Apache helicopters and F-18s, which targeted the snipers on the building roofs until roughly noon.⁴⁶ On the ground, the U.S. battalion remained engaged for eleven hours.⁴⁷ They patrolled the area after dark with their heavy vehicles, and Iraqi soldiers took positions on the rooftops.⁴⁸ No U.S. troops were killed in action.

They killed fifty-one insurgents, and captured 21, including several foreign fighters.⁴⁹

The Iraqi unit remained in the neighborhood, but the Stryker battalion had left the area by one week later. The First Cavalry Division had taken responsibility for patrolling Haifa Street by January 16.⁵⁰ Conflicting and unreliable witness reports do not allow one to determine whether and how often American troops patrolled the area.⁵¹ Insurgents had reinfilitrated the area by 23 January, just two weeks after the 1-23 Infantry Battalion initially confronted them, according to intelligence reports mentioned by a spokesman for Prime Minister Maliki.⁵² The 1-23 Infantry therefore returned to clear the area of insurgents once again.⁵³ Operation Tomahawk Strike 11, as it was called (after the Tomahawks, the nickname of the 1-23 Infantry Battalion), began when that battalion entered the area from the south at 2:00 a.m. on 24 January. They were ultimately joined by Iraqi forces and by elements of the 2nd BCT of the 1st Cavalry Division.⁵⁴ Their mission was “aimed at rapidly isolating insurgents and gaining control of this key central Baghdad location.... Reducing sectarian violence is vital in transferring security responsibilities to the Iraqi security forces and provides a safer living environment for Iraqi residents,” according to officials.⁵⁵ Together, the units brought infantry, Strykers, and Bradleys (more heavily armored fighting vehicles than the Strykers, with tracks rather than wheels) into the fight. Americans moved from building to building. An enemy in a Shiite neighborhood on the east side of the Tigris River shelled them with mortars, and snipers opposed them from covered positions on street level and from the windows of buildings.⁵⁶ They identified a major weapons cache at Karkh High School, cordoned off the area, and allowed only pedestrian traffic on Haifa Street.⁵⁷

According to Iraqi officials, the engagement on 24 January was not part of the Baghdad Security Plan. Rather it was meant to “prepare the way for a more concerted effort to clear out and hold troubled neighborhoods.”⁵⁸ Like the operations in the Baghdad suburbs, the fight for Haifa Street was an effort to create the preconditions for the success of the BSP by denying the insurgents

bases and safe havens from which to disrupt that operation when it began.

By February 1, 2007, the 1st of the 23rd Infantry Battalion had left Haifa Street again, and elements of the 6th Iraqi Army Division were patrolling that sector.⁵⁹

The battles on Haifa Street illustrate a pattern of U.S. and Iraqi Army engagements in Baghdad. U.S. forces cleared the area of insurgents in 2005, and then turned the area over to Iraqi troops. The year of sectarian violence destabilized the area, allowing Shiite militiamen to gain some control over the neighborhood. The Iraqi soldiers were able to patrol the area, though obviously not without challenge. Sunni militants moved in, took over the stronghold, and tried to establish control over the area. The Iraqi unit responded first in the emergency. But it did not think that it had the capability to clear the area of insurgents without American assistance. From the difficulty that American forces had, that judgment was surely correct. The Iraqis called for and received American help within 24 hours.

But U.S. forces did not remain in sufficient numbers to retain the area. Rather, Iraqi troops stayed behind. American troops may have patrolled the area after the fight, but it took less than two weeks for insurgents to reoccupy the area. When U.S. forces had flowed elsewhere, the insurgents re-entered the neighborhood.

It may be significant that this second enemy had a stronghold across the Tigris River, in a Shiite neighborhood, and that commanders identified ending sectarian violence as a priority there. But this is a speculation from the evidence, rather than a firm conclusion.

The Stryker Brigade, which has different vehicles and capabilities from other U.S. units, did not have a bounded area of operations (AO) in Baghdad.⁶⁰ Rather, in this time period, it responded to problems throughout the Baghdad AO whenever it was needed. From the Haifa Street fight, we see that it had the ability to clear a small but difficult area. It did not remain to control and retain areas, nor did other American forces. Rather, they left Iraqis behind, exposing the neighborhood to insurgents after it withdrew. The solution is probably not to pin down Stryker

units, which are more mobile than others, but rather to keep other units in areas to prevent the enemy from moving and operating freely.

Haifa Street is emblematic of the reactive, raiding posture that U.S. forces adopted throughout the theater in December 2006 and January 2007. When intelligence – whether Iraqi or U.S. or Coalition – pinpointed a major insurgent stronghold, U.S. forces raided it to capture insurgents and deprive them of a safe haven. Once again, such activities are unlikely to produce large-scale effects by themselves, or even when combined into a broader raiding program. They can, however, weaken enemy forces in preparation for significant clear-and-control operations to follow. It is unclear whether this was the objective of American operations on Haifa Street, but it is likely to be the most important result.

Setting the conditions for the Baghdad Security Plan

The second battle on Haifa Street, therefore, fits into two patterns. In some ways, it was a reaction to the failure of U.S. forces to hold the neighborhood after January 9. It was also a high-profile preliminary operation that set the conditions for the Baghdad Security Plan.

Weapons Caches

In January and early February, much of the reported activity in Baghdad focused on identifying weapons caches and destroying insurgent safe-havens in and around the city. Some of these operations were ongoing, and others apparently aimed to set the conditions for beginning the Baghdad Security Plan.

The units assigned to Multi-National Division-Baghdad (MND-Baghdad) conducted 34 operations at company level or higher, including 7,400 patrols, from February 3-9, 2007.⁶¹ Many of these were joint U.S. and Iraqi patrols. Patrols are detachments of units sent out by their commanders to secure the unit or harass the enemy.⁶² Patrols were searching for weapons in

areas where insurgents were known to operate.⁶³ According to Brigadier General John Campbell, the deputy commander of MND-Baghdad, the location and mission of operations are likely to shift as the Baghdad Security Plan is implemented.⁶⁴

MND-Baghdad units discovered and destroyed sixty weapons caches between 3 and 9 February. The searches by two RSTA Squadrons (reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition units) and one Stryker Brigade outside of Baghdad found huge stockpiles. Soldiers from one U.S. squadron, partnered with one Iraqi Army battalion, discovered more than 400 mortar rounds northeast of the capital. Soldiers from another U.S. squadron, similarly partnered with the Iraqi Army, discovered multiple weapons caches in Yusufiyah, south of Baghdad, including one that contained over 1,100 high-explosive mortar rounds. And those from a third U.S. Brigade Combat Team, partnered with an Iraqi Brigade, conducted raids and seized a variety of weapons and munitions.⁶⁵ Military officials said that operations in Arab Jabour, south of the capital, “target[ed] local al-Qaida terrorists” who were making car bombs or supplying the component parts for such devices. Troops also discovered rocket propelled grenades and a truck-mounted rocket launcher, as well as small arms.⁶⁶ In a village west of Baghdad, operations by U.S. and Iraqi soldiers destroyed a building used by terrorists as a sniper position, where they also suspected weapons were being stored. These events occurred on February 9, 2007.⁶⁷

These weapons stockpiles show the extent to which enemies have built up their capabilities, but also where: an unspecified area northeast of the capital; south of Baghdad in the mostly Sunni suburb called Arab Jabour⁶⁸ and in Mahmudiyah; and in the west of Baghdad. The locations of these weapons caches are not random.

In early January, aides to Iraq’s Prime Minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, identified the areas surrounding Baghdad as safe-havens for Sunni insurgents who stockpile and manufacture the car bombs and other explosives that terrorists use in the central areas of Baghdad.⁶⁹ Baghdad is surrounded by farmland and other

rural terrain. There are many impoverished villages on its outskirts, and larger settlements beyond them. Fighters can follow several lines of communication (roads and rivers) from these cities, through these villages, and into, through, and out of Baghdad.⁷⁰ The caches at Arab Jabour and Mahmudiyah suggest that fighters move into and out of the city along the southern highways, picking up weapons at the major stockpiles. The enemy may then place the weapons in smaller caches, from which they can place explosives on routes that U.S. troops move along.⁷¹ Alternatively, enemy operatives transport the weapons to Baghdad. Likewise, they move along the northern highways from Baqubah to Baghdad, and foment sectarian violence in both cities.⁷² Caches located in western Baghdad may supply insurgent activities in Baghdad or Falluja (just an hour to its west by car), and an insurgent network links both cities.⁷³ Consequently, U.S. forces have been stationed along the major lines of communication (roads and rivers) into and out of Baghdad.⁷⁴

Terrorist Networks Ringing Southern and Western Baghdad: al Qaeda and Car Bombs

Car and truck bombs are the hallmark weapons of al Qaeda, and coalition attempts to stop car-bombing rings can illustrate where al Qaeda operates in and around Baghdad, and throughout Iraq.

Arab Jabour has been a haven for al Qaeda operatives for some time. This predominantly Sunni suburb lies to the south of Baghdad, stretching through rural areas along the west bank of the Tigris River, lined with date palms.⁷⁵ The U.S. has captured and killed several high-value al Qaeda leaders there – a military emir (as al Qaeda calls its commanders) and a cell leader for that neighborhood – sometime before December 2006.⁷⁶ The 4th BCT, 25th Infantry Division, has been encountering well-trained and organized enemies there, who coordinate fire in a disciplined way.⁷⁷ Arab Jabour sits astride major lines of communication into Baghdad – the Tigris, and the road that runs along it into central Baghdad – connecting the suburb easily

with the violent neighborhoods of Doura and Rusafa. The latter has been targeted recently as a center of car-bomb manufacturing in Baghdad.⁷⁸ Coalition forces conducted an airstrike on Arab-Jabour on February 2, 2007, targeting leaders of a major car- and truck-bomb making cell.⁷⁹ Ground forces called in another airstrike on a building in that neighborhood on February 8, 2007, after estimating that there were seven terrorists belonging to the vehicle bombing network inside.⁸⁰ These activities permitted coalition forces to find the weapons caches there.

The roads out of Arab Jabour link to Mahmudiyah, due south of Baghdad, and Salman Pak, to its southeast along the Tigris. Terrorist operatives have been captured in Salman Pak this winter, where they were storing arms in a mosque.⁸¹ U.S. and Iraqi forces found a major car-bomb manufacturing site there in mid-February.⁸² And a hostage taking in the same incident also suggests, but does not prove, an al Qaeda footprint in that town.⁸³

Mahmudiyah, a town less than fifteen miles south of Baghdad, was a safe-haven for al Qaeda terrorists and other insurgent groups two years ago, and beheadings regularly occurred there. Now, a U.S. Forward Operating Base (FOB) protects it. Its market has recently reopened, and it is thriving. The U.S. units in Mahmudiyah also monitor traffic moving along the highway that leaves Baghdad directly to the south (known to U.S. forces as Main Supply Route Tampa—one of the principal roads linking American forces in Iraq to their logistics bases in Kuwait).⁸⁴

Al Qaeda terrorists are still using smaller safe-havens outside of Mahmudiyah, particularly in Yusufiyah, a small town to its northwest (and about twenty miles southwest of Baghdad). The Yusufiyah power plant was once a major al Qaeda stronghold.⁸⁵ Yusufiyah still has an important position on the lines of communication to Baghdad's south and west. It is possible to

travel down the Euphrates River from Falluja to Yusufiyah, and from there to follow roads that join Route Tampa (as U.S. forces call it) to the north or south of Mahmudiyah.⁸⁶ A road just outside of Mahmudiyah links Yusufiyah, to its northwest, with Salman Pak, to its east.

U.S. forces have been working to prevent al Qaeda from re-establishing a large safe-haven in Yusufiyah, and from traveling through that town to Baghdad. Terrorists threatened to kill local inhabitants in November, trying to displace them from the town. The 4th Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment "Polar Bears," (from the 2nd BCT, 10th Mountain Division), have been patrolling the city since early November.⁸⁷ In December, Iraqi Army Special Forces and coalition advisors killed and captured terrorists in Yusufiyah linked to murder and kidnapping.⁸⁸ In early January, combat operations around Yusufiyah were undertaken by a battalion of Iraqi army soldiers, paired with a troop from 1st Squadron, 89th Cavalry Regiment, (from the 2nd BCT, 10th Mountain Division). They detained 82 terrorist suspects

involved in a car-bomb making network.⁸⁹ An air assault three miles to the northwest of Yusufiyah captured six suspected terrorists.⁹⁰ U.S. troops again found major and minor weapons caches in and around Yusufiyah in early February, including a huge stockpile of mortars designed to be used as IEDs rather than indirect fire weapons.⁹¹

The sectarian violence in Yusufiyah was, as in Balad Ruz, imported by terrorists. And indeed, some sectarian violence is exported by terrorists moving from Baghdad to its south, or along the southern beltway: a number of people were kidnapped at gunpoint in Shiite village 47 miles south of Baghdad in Imam [Ebrahim], and eleven were shot.⁹² Imam Ebrahim sits on a secondary road that connects Route Tampa (south of Mahmudiyah and Iskandariyah) with the road along the Tigris that links Salman Pak and Kut.

■ Mahmudiyah, a town less than fifteen miles south of Baghdad, was a safe-haven for al Qaeda terrorists and other insurgent groups two years ago, and beheadings regularly occurred there. Now, a U.S. Forward Operating Base (FOB) protects it. Its market has recently reopened, and it is thriving.

The events in Balad Ruz illustrate how al Qaeda operated east of Baqubah and north of Baghdad. A series of raids from January 6-8 targeted al Qaeda operatives in Tarmiyah, located on the Tigris River – and a major highway to Baghdad – near the junction of Salah-ad-Din, Baghdad, and Diyala provinces. Coalition forces found six major weapons caches near Tarmiyah. Terrorists repeatedly attempted to remove the weapons from the caches during the operation, and they exchanged fire with coalition forces.⁹³

Future editions of the Iraq Report will describe extensive multi-national military operations in the other sectors of the theater, MND-West (Anbar), MND-North (Nineweh, Salah-ad-Din, and Diyala, of which only the latter was discussed here), MND-South East (Karbala, Kut, and Hillah), and MND-Central-South (including Basra, Amarah, and Nasiriyah). As we have seen, operations in these areas may alter the flow of insurgents and their supplies into and out of Baghdad, as well as the provincial cities in their own sectors.

*The Enemy and the Impending Surge:
Adaptation in Baghdad in January
and early February*

Various enemies in Iraq perpetrate the violence there: al Qaeda, Ansar-al-Islam, and other Sunni extremists; former Baath regime elements and other Sunni malcontents; Jaysh al-Mahdi, the Sadrist militia; the Badr Corps; other Shiite militias; and local vigilantes. These enemies adapt to U.S., Coalition, and Iraqi forces. Military planners trace enemy behavior to identify typical patterns and exceptions. Some of the enemy's exceptional behavior in January seems to pertain to the impending surge of U.S. forces. Holidays and anniversaries provided occasions for spectacular attacks to promote sectarian violence, particularly around the Shiite religious holiday of Ashura, the holiest day of which fell on January 31.

Helicopters

Insurgents shot down six U.S. helicopters between January 20 and February 9, as part

of a concerted strategy. Military intelligence documents report that al Qaeda in Mesopotamia advocated attacking aircraft in late 2006, and is responsible for three of the crashes.⁹⁴ Insurgents have increased attacks on U.S. helicopters since August.⁹⁵ Major General James E. Simmons suggested the enemy was using helicopter attacks in response to the unfolding Baghdad Security Plan, in order to generate “strategic effects.”⁹⁶ He did not specify what those “strategic effects” were. But one may speculate that insurgents are attacking helicopters in an effort to break the will of the United States to fight.

Experiences in the Soviet-Afghan War form a significant part of al Qaeda's military thought. In 1985, Soviet forces in Afghanistan launched a series of significant operations designed to bring a basic level of security to the country. These operations relied much more heavily on the use of helicopters both to transport Soviet infantry and to support that infantry with mobile firepower (since the terrain in Afghanistan made the use of tanks, artillery, and armored personnel carriers difficult). The United States supplied the Afghan *mujahideen* with Stinger surface-to-air missiles, with which they began to bring down numerous Soviet helicopters and even the occasional transport aircraft. Soviet pilots began to refuse to fly combat missions in contested areas, and the Soviet offensive ground to a halt. It seems very likely that some among the insurgents in Iraq are attempting to replicate this success against the U.S. This attempt is not likely to succeed, however, because the terrain and other conditions of the struggle in Iraq are so different from those that allowed the *mujahideen* to succeed in Afghanistan. It remains unclear, moreover, to what extent the insurgents in Iraq are using new weapons or simply new tactics in their efforts to shoot down U.S. helicopters.

Spectacular Attacks

Shelling and roadside bombs targeted Shiite neighborhoods, such as Adhamiya and Khadimiyyah, in Baghdad during the culminating day of Ashura.⁹⁷ But the most spectacular attacks occurred against the civilians in procession in Balad Ruz (described above) and in Najaf.

A large group of heavily-armed fighters prepared a defensive position in the palm groves outside of Najaf during Ashura, apparently planning to assassinate Shiite leaders such as Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, pilgrims traveling to and from Karbala, and holy sites such as the Imam Ali mosque. The group claimed that the Twelfth Imam, whom Shiites believe has been hidden since the ninth century and will return, was present among them.⁹⁸ When the fighters attacked a police checkpoint, Iraqi forces responded. Local leaders planned an attack on the encampment the following morning. Forces from Iraq's 8th Army Division in Babil province assisted the police in Najaf, in a province where security has been transferred from Coalition to Iraqi Security Forces. When the battle protracted, U.S. helicopters and tanks from Baghdad joined the Iraqi forces. The fighters shot down one of the helicopters.⁹⁹ The battle lasted for fifteen hours. Iraqi and Coalition forces killed approximately 250 gunmen.¹⁰⁰ Locals dispute the identity of the fighters, some claiming that they were foreign Sunni fighters, others that they were Iraqi fighters, and still others that they were splinter Shiites.¹⁰¹

The next Iraq Report will examine the reaction of the Shiite militias, especially those in Baghdad, to the security plan.

Assessment and Conclusions

In January, General Casey relied on targeted raids throughout the theater, supplemented by intermittent patrols of urban territory. Whenever possible, Iraqi forces conducted the raids or patrols, and they called for reinforcement by U.S. forces when they could not resolve problems on the ground.

General Casey's statements and actions suggest that he believed U.S. units were present in country not to end the insurgency or al Qaeda's involvement in it, but rather to train the Iraqis to fight the insurgents themselves. Unit commanders at the brigade level and below repeatedly state that their goal was training the Iraqis to conduct a counterinsurgency. Few stated that their mission was defeating

the insurgency, securing the population, or ending sectarian violence. Nevertheless, most operational summaries relate the number of insurgents killed and captured, and the number of weapons seized. These patterns suggest that subordinate officers believed that higher commands assessed them based upon these raiding metrics, despite the apparent focus on training Iraqi Security Forces. There appears, therefore, to have been some tension in the purpose of American military operations in Iraq between the desire to kill insurgents and seize weapons caches and the stated aim of training Iraqis and transitioning to Iraqi control. It is unclear whether General Casey believed that attriting the insurgents' personnel and equipment would facilitate the transition or that such operations provided opportunities to train Iraqi forces or both. In any case, the numbers of "trained and ready" Iraqi Security Forces and of the number of killed and captured enemy fighters or the amount of seized enemy hardware are indirect and unreliable measures of success. They measure inputs—the amount of energy we and the Iraqis are putting into the project—rather than outputs—the increasing or decreasing security and stability of Iraq.

It is extremely difficult to measure the effectiveness of efforts to disrupt terrorist networks through raids and strikes, moreover. Certainly, U.S. forces gain important intelligence this way. They remove high-profile figures in insurgent movements. And they reduce the quantity of weapons and explosives that some insurgents have available. When the number of troops is limited, raiding the nodes of an insurgent network allows the counterinsurgent to use his forces economically and disproportionately. But raids cannot capture or destroy all insurgents or all nodes of their network. They do not eliminate all weapons in such a heavily-armed country. And raids do not prevent some of the extrajudicial killings (torture and executions) that constitute sectarian violence.

The United States does not have enough forces in Iraq to defeat the insurgency through raids and strikes. These types of military

operations cannot eliminate the entire network of terrorists or weapons caches faster than they regenerate. Targeted raids do not work well in dense urban areas where an active insurgency exists. Intermittent patrolling allows insurgents quickly to move into neighborhoods when patrols are absent. The Haifa Street battles show how quickly insurgents can move into a security vacuum in a Baghdad neighborhood if forces are not present constantly. The insurgents returned less than two weeks after a fierce battle with American forces that lasted for eleven hours.

The operations in Balad Ruz used targeted raids as a way of gathering intelligence about the enemy's behavior. Then, units there physically secured the area outside the village to deny the enemy a safe-haven and communications routes. The sparse population density and the thoroughness of the operation have precluded the enemy from regenerating itself in this area as quickly.

Eliminating large weapons caches and known insurgent strongholds in the Baghdad beltway helped set the conditions for the Baghdad Security Plan to unfold more safely. But it is difficult to see any path by which targeted raids and strikes would end the insurgency without an area security plan. In January, the Iraqi Army conducted patrols to show their presence, and U.S. troops accompanied them intermittently. Patrols that show the physical presence of forces in an area are not the same as establishing area security. Units on intermittent patrols do not establish close relationships with the local population that are essential for generating useful intelligence, and the intermittent nature of patrols creates the opportunity for insurgents to regenerate their organizations.

The American officers involved in the Haifa Street mission reported that their mission was to clear and control the area. But these "clear-and-control" operations proceeded very quickly and ended with a planned withdrawal. Army doctrine defines "clear" as "a tactical mission task that requires the commander to remove all enemy forces and eliminate organized resistance in an assigned area." And it defines "control" as "a tactical mission task that requires the

commander to maintain physical influence over a specified area to prevent its use by an enemy."¹⁰² These tasks require time and physical presence. As the Haifa street battles did not accomplish these tasks (eliminate organized resistance and prevent the enemy from returning), they were not "clear-and-control" missions so much as raids, which are operations, "usually small scale, involving a swift penetration of hostile territory to secure information, confuse the enemy, or to destroy installations. [Raids end] with a planned withdrawal upon completion of the assigned mission."¹⁰³ Those following the war in Iraq should not accept at face value the terms ascribed to particular military operations. Raids and patrols are different from clear-and-control operations, and the differences are apparent from the nature and duration of the operation, whatever label military spokesmen attach to the undertaking.

Proposals that U.S. forces remain responsible for fighting al Qaeda in Iraq, while Iraqi forces fight the sectarian violence, ignore the synergy of these two problems, moreover. The process by which al Qaeda inserted itself in the villages south of Balad Ruz illustrates the difficulty of trying to separate these intertwined problems. The mostly Shiite agricultural community in Balad Ruz lived alongside a Sunni population. Al Qaeda entered the area, kidnapped Shiite families, and executed the men. Most Shiite families left the area. The Sunni families that remained behind collaborated with al Qaeda to some extent, because the terrorists frightened them. They recruited almost all the young, local, Sunni men into their operations. Some of the locals were probably ideologically committed, but most were participating because peer pressure and survival required complicity. This conclusion stems from the fact that many of the young village men returned, unarmed, to their homes when the terrorists had been killed or driven off, and violence did not resume. Iraqi forces would not patrol the area alone, because the operatives were too well trained and organized. When U.S. troops arrived in force, they cleared the area with a skillful operation, and were able to kill or drive

off the terrorists. The sectarian violence in the area then fell dramatically. Only the constant operations of the American unit in the area before Operation Turki Bowl, however, allowed U.S. forces to develop the intelligence necessary to clear out this terrorist threat, and to see past the sectarian violence to the underlying cause of the problem—al Qaeda. U.S. forces that do not address the problem of sectarian violence will also fail to detect many al Qaeda operatives and key nodes of the terrorist network. There is no way to separate fighting the terrorists in Iraq from attacking the problem of sectarian violence there.

Iran and Iraq

Recent controversies over Iranian involvement in Iraq have focused on the forensic evidence of weapons – whether their manufacture indicates an Iranian source. The current discussions

ignore the patterns of human movement and weapons caches along the border that the open source evidence displays. Fighters or facilitators and weapons were apparently moving over the Iran-Iraq border in Diyala province in the winter months of 2006-2007. These facilitators and fighters seemed to support Sunni Islamists in Diyala who were attacking Shiite inhabitants of the province, rather than protecting Shiite locals. It is not clear whether the Iranian government supported these fighters or facilitators, or even whether these fighters and facilitators originated in Iran or crossed Iran from Pakistan or Afghanistan, with or without Teheran's active assistance. This report does not trace events in the south, and so does not draw conclusions about Iranian involvement there, but it is clear that Sunni terrorists in Diyala have been drawing support from across the Iranian border. The Iraq Report will follow up on these issues in the future. ■

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