

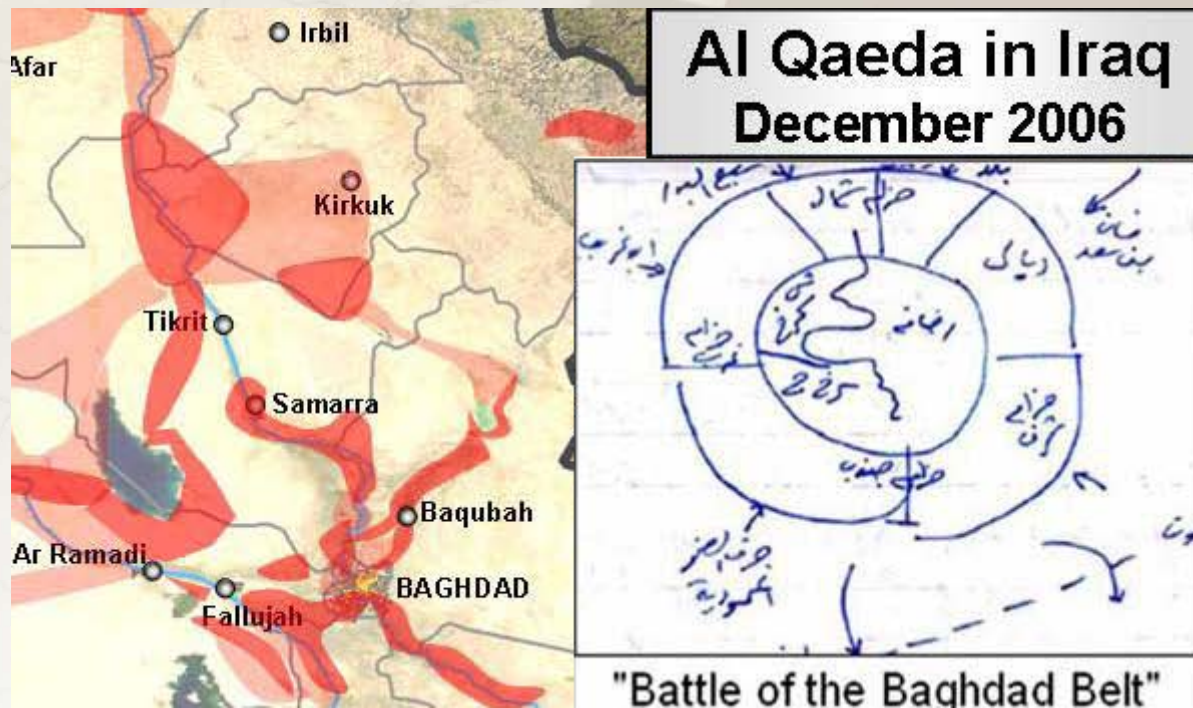
Backgrounder #28

Multi-National Division – Center’s Operations during the 2007-2008 Troop Surge

Farook Ahmed, Researcher, Institute for the Study of War

Introduction

Prior to June 2007, there was minimal Coalition presence in the suburban “belts” that ring Baghdad. As a result, by December 2006, al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) had sanctuary in the Tigris, Euphrates and Diyala river valleys north and south of Baghdad. AQI was in control of a relatively small section of West Baghdad. Insurgents used the areas south of Baghdad, particularly the area of Arab Jabour, as supporting nodes to build improvised explosive devices (IEDs), Vehicle-Borne IEDs (VBIEDs - car and truck bombs) and then move them into Baghdad. Captured documents show that the group’s strategy was to control those areas and then project its power into Baghdad with the ultimate goal of overtaking the city.¹



In 2007, with a mandate to secure the population of Baghdad, Coalition planners recognized that the security of Baghdad required that al-Qaeda in Iraq and other extremist groups be permanently

¹ Courtesy MNF-I. Note: Pink areas indicate areas where AQI was able to move while red areas indicate where AQI was able to operate. The map to the right was captured from al-Qaeda in Iraq and shows the group’s strategy of using belts outside Baghdad to project violence into the city.

ejected from “the belts” and replaced by legitimate and effective representatives of the Government of Iraq. To that end, Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNF-I) used the Troop Surge to deploy a division with five brigades to the southern Baghdad belts. Multi-National Division – Center (MND-C) finished deploying its combat forces to areas south and east of Baghdad in early June of 2007 with a mission to block “accelerants of violence” like fighters, money, and weapons from entering into the capital.² To accomplish this mission, Coalition and Iraqi forces would need to dig up insurgent networks and support bases that were sending in those accelerants of violence. Without this, al-Qaeda would be able to reconstitute too easily and would be in a position to undermine any attempts to stabilize the capital.³

To effectively clear, hold, and retain the Baghdad Belts, MND-C Soldiers would need to develop relationships with the local Iraqi population, who often knew who insurgents were and where their weapons were planted, but were intimidated into non-cooperation with the Coalition and Iraqi government. MND-C had a further goal, which was to prevent the sort of sectarian violence that had spiraled out of control in 2006. To accomplish these goals, MND-C would need to successfully apply the United States’ newly-formulated counter-insurgency doctrine. Coalition forces were aided in these operations by continued improvements in the local Iraqi Security Forces and benefited from unexpected support in the form of the Sunni rejection of al-Qaeda in Iraq through so-called “Awakening” movements.⁴



Arguably the most important of MND-C was the area covered by the 2nd Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division. That brigade has been responsible for the immediate southeast of Baghdad between Highway 8 (called “Main Supply Route Tampa” by the Coalition) and the west bank of the Tigris River. This area includes Arab Jabour, which was a former Sunni Ba’athist stronghold in a largely rural area that al-Qaeda in Iraq was able to use as a sanctuary. The lack of a coalition presence in these areas gave AQI an extended period of time to dig itself

² Map By Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping. NOTE: Areas of operation have been approximated and may not be exactly accurate.

in to Arab Jabour. This made the move into that area essentially a jump into uncharted waters to establish a foothold and build a presence from scratch. The move into Arab Jabour contrasted with MND-C's moves into the Euphrates River Valley, where there was an existing presence that required expansion.⁵

AQI employed sophisticated defensive belts of IEDs as well as the difficult terrain in order to hold out against Coalition offensives.⁶ Though the successive offensives led AQI to lose much of its operational capabilities in Arab Jabour, the AQI node was dug in well enough to survive for an extended period of time before finally being defeated in February 2008.

Another important area in the belts has been the areas immediately east of Baghdad, known as the Mada'in Qada. This area of operations was under the mantle of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team of the 3rd Infantry Division and lies between the east bank of the Tigris and the southern bank of the Diyala River. An important population center in this area is the town of Salman Pak, which served as another AQI stronghold that supported the Arab Jabour node. AQI used defensive belts of IEDs in Salman Pak along similar lines to Arab Jabour. As in Arab Jabour, this was made possible because of the minimal Coalition presence in the area prior to the Surge; before the 3-3 moved in, 72 Coalition Soldiers were responsible for the Mada'in Qada's entire population of the 1.2 million Iraqis.⁷

In addition to the strong Sunni insurgent presence in Salman Pak, the Mada'in Qada has a 70% Shi'a majority. The towns of Nahrwan and Jisr Diyala, which lie closer to East Baghdad, are primarily Shi'a areas. These areas saw Shi'a criminal and militia activity, which meant that Coalition operations in this area of operations have been oriented against both Shi'a and Sunni extremist groups.⁸

Beyond these two areas, the Coalition also deployed a brigade (the 3rd Brigade of the 101st Airborne) southwest of Baghdad and another brigade (the 4th Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division) in North Babil along the east bank of the Euphrates River, centered in the city of Iskandariyah. These areas are mixed between Sunni and Shi'a Arabs, with a relatively larger Sunni population as one goes north of Iskandariyah. The 4-3 also operates against Shi'a extremists, which are generally found further South in Babil province.⁹

A brigade comprised of Soldiers from the Republic of Georgia and a small contingent from El Salvador was deployed to the city of Kut to improve control along the Iranian border.¹⁰ That brigade set up checkpoints, but never discovered any incoming traffic of Iranian weapons. This brigade later contributed to offensive operations by sending a battalion to backfill positions in the areas further north in the Mada'in Qada for the 3-3's recent push South along the Tigris River into Salman Pak.¹¹

Finally, MND-C's ground forces were also augmented by a Combat Aviation Brigade, which was used extensively as a force multiplier for both Coalition Soldiers and Iraqi Security Forces. This group's air assets include attack helicopters to reconnoiter and engage enemies as well as transport helicopters to conduct air assault missions and medical evacuation (Medevac) missions. In a somewhat unusual turn of events, the Combat Aviation Brigade took the lead in planning

and executing the division-wide Operation Marne Husky.¹²

Coalition operations degraded the capability of extremist groups to carry out attacks by two-thirds as of November, 2007.¹³ By March 2008, Coalition operations have successfully cleared the AQI strongholds in the Tigris River valley immediately south of Baghdad, including Arab Jabour and Salman Pak. As operations in those areas shifted towards reconstruction and development, there are plans for further clearing operations in the areas of the Euphrates River Valley.¹⁴ Given that the population of belts was largely ceded to extremist groups prior to MND-C's deployment, this represents a useful case study for the application of American counter-insurgency doctrine.

Enemy System in the Southern Belts

AQI

Over the past two years, Coalition forces conducted a number of clearing operations in South Baghdad. The South Baghdad neighborhood of Doura was a focus for clearing under Operations Together Forward I and II. After those clearing operations concluded and the troops involved went to clear other areas, AQI was able to filter back into that neighborhood from its sanctuaries in the Baghdad belts. This strongly suggested that Coalition and Iraqi forces did not have enough forces to hold those areas successfully after they were cleared. Indeed, this insufficient force density was a major impetus behind the increased force levels brought on by the Troop Surge.

Under the Fardh al-Qanoon offensive in 2007, U.S. commanders concentrated their forces in Doura to decisively clear AQI from the area. From January 2007, the Coalition increased its presence from one battalion two battalions. By July, there were five battalions participating in clearing operations in Doura. Since that time, U.S. forces have maintained a presence of three to four battalions, which have held the area and prevented reinfiltration by AQI or Shi'a militias. These clearing operations in Doura were reinforced by operations in the southern belt and worked to dismantle the al-Qaeda stronghold in southern Baghdad.¹⁵

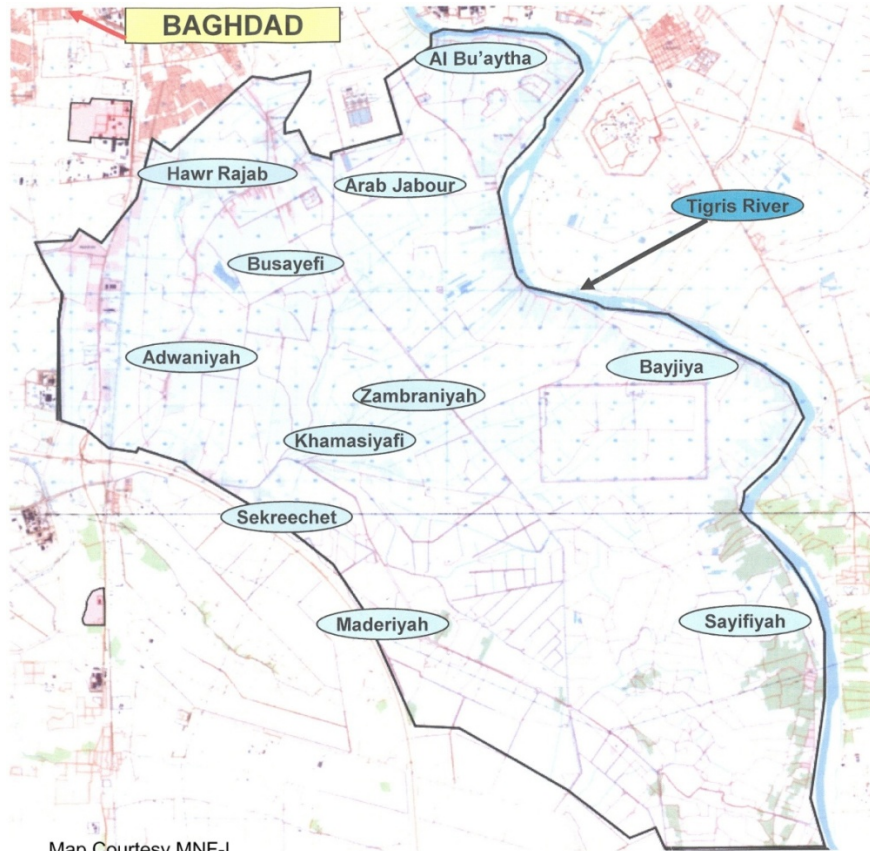
AQI in the 2-3's AO

AQI's ability to weather Coalition attempts to clear Doura would likely not have been possible were it not for its sanctuaries in Hawr Rajab and Arab Jabour. The village of Hawr Rajab is situated immediately south of Baghdad proper, east of Highway 8. The surrounding area of the same name is composed mainly of farmland. To the north, Hawr Rajab borders the Abu Disheer neighborhood of the Rasheed Security District. The population of Hawr Rajab is overwhelmingly Sunni.¹⁶

The small villages that comprise Arab Jabour are located just east of Hawr Rajab. Karb de Gla in Rasheed neighbors to the north. According to Lt. Colonel Ken Adgie, the commander of the 1-30 Infantry Regiment currently responsible for Arab Jabour, "The terrain is defined by thick palm groves; lots of canals, both large, wide ones and smaller ones; and then dirty, dusty roads."¹⁷

Unlike the Rasheed district, the population of Arab Jabour is very homogenous. Roughly 99.8 percent of the population is Sunni, 95 percent of which comes from the al-Jaburi tribe.¹⁸

In the years following the 2003 invasion, the Sunni insurgency flourished in these areas in the absence of a sustained U.S. force presence. By October 2006, when the 1-40 Cavalry arrived in Hawr Rajab and Arab Jabour, these areas were tightly controlled by AQI. The terrain worked to al-Qaeda's advantage and the abundance of fertilizer offered a supply of chemicals that could be used for home-made explosives (HME). What is more, the dense palm groves offered AQI numerous hiding places for weapons caches.



Map Courtesy MNF-I

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Arab Jabour, in particular, became critical insurgent support zone, where al-Qaeda could assemble and stockpile vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIEDs), IEDs, and other munitions, which could then be easily transported into Doura.¹⁹ Because the 1-40 was responsible for such a large and hostile area, the unit was limited in its ability to target AQI safe havens. Major operations to dismantle these insurgent networks didn't begin until the arrival of the 1-30 Infantry Battalion in June 2007. At that time, the 1-30 assumed responsibility for Arab Jabour, while the 1-40th remained responsible for Hawr Rajab.

³ Map of the area of operations for the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division.

According to the brigade commander, Col. Terry Farrell, al-Qaeda in Iraq was able to use Arab Jabour as a safe haven to place its weapons caches and build its bomb-making factories. The area was a critical hub that pushed weapons, bombs and fighters into Baghdad. AQI reinforced this hub by relying on defensive belts of IEDs that were emplaced to prevent Coalition or Iraqi Security Forces from encroaching on this vital location.²⁰

Furthermore, AQI had a very sophisticated command and control network in the area that was “on the scale of a conventional military force.”²¹ In Arab Jabour, AQI worked in cells, with some direct action cells that would engage in fighting as well as command-and-control (C2) cells and indirect cells. Lines of communication would run between cells in Arab Jabour west to Hawr Rajab and down Sayafiyah.²²

Al-Qaeda was able to move into this area to begin with because the region is very simple with an agrarian economy and a 99.5% Sunni Arab population that was originally sympathetic to Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist ideology. This combined with the absence of any real Coalition presence to make it easy for al-Qaeda to blend in with the population, intimidate local residents and instill a climate of fear.²³

The enemy in Arab Jabour was cognizant of how important its command and control network and the lines of communication it used to link with its support networks. It sought to defend these critical assets by using defensive belts of IEDs.²⁴ The area was difficult for Coalition forces to encroach upon, as AQI’s long-term uncontested presence allowed it the necessary time to emplace a complex network of deep-buried IEDs, house-borne IEDs, and weapons caches to slow any Coalition advance. Deep-buried IED’s present a greater threat to Coalition Soldiers than surface-laid IEDs, as they are harder to find and more able to destroy vehicles.²⁵

As Coalition operations cleared existing deep-buried IEDs and made it so that AQI would not have the significant time necessary to plant new ones, Coalition forces increasingly encountered surface-laid anti-personnel IEDs, which pose less of a threat.²⁶ Beyond the defensive belts, Coalition efforts were hindered by the large amount of canals that irrigate Arab Jabour; the canals create bottlenecks. This made it easier for insurgents to anticipate patrol and assault routes and to defend those bottlenecks with IEDs. Coalition planners relied on intelligence from locals as well as airpower to find and clear suspected IEDs while minimizing the risk to Soldiers.²⁷

According to Colonel Ferrell, by mid-June of 2007, when the 2nd Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division moved into Arab Jabour, AQI had approximately 300 fighters manning the network in this area. Notably, al-Qaeda did not have any foreign fighter presence in Arab Jabour; the network in this area was made up of local Iraqis who were connected to the larger network and were using AQI’s name and its tactics and procedures to terrorize locals into acquiescence.²⁸

AQI Lines of Communication between Arab Jabour and other areas

The al-Qaeda in Iraq network in Arab Jabour was connected to the AQI network in the Doura neighborhood of southern Baghdad.²⁹ AQI would funnel those weapons into Doura for use

against Shi'a militias. AQI was able to rely on roads as well as the Tigris River to push its weapons and personnel into Baghdad.³⁰

In addition to enabling AQI operations inside Baghdad, these avenues would also allow AQI's cells in Baghdad to reinforce any cells in Arab Jabour that would come under attack. As a result, it became a major priority for Coalition operations to shut the lines of communication and transportation between AQI's nodes in Arab Jabour and Doura in particular.³¹ Beyond cutting off resources for AQI in Baghdad, this would prevent insurgents from attacking Coalition forces as they continued to push south and southeast to AQI assets further down the Tigris River Valley.³²

Just as the AQI node in Arab Jabour was connected to southern Baghdad, the node Arab Jabour received support from Salman Pak to the East. Hawr Rajab is closer to Baghdad than Arab Jabour, but is not as much of a Sunni stronghold. Salman Pak lies just across the Tigris River in the 3rd BCT, 3rd ID's area of operations. Members from those two nodes would cross the river using boats.³³ With the surge of forces into Baghdad and the belts, al-Qaeda became largely incapable of using boats on the Tigris River to bring weapons into Baghdad and was limited to crossing back and forth between its hub in Arab Jabour and supporting node in Salman Pak. Coalition operations would focus on stopping this movement to further isolate the different AQ cells.³⁴

AQI in the Mada'in Qada

Across the Tigris, there is a different dynamic from that in the 2-3's AO. This area is predominantly Shi'a except for a few small Sunni enclaves, and lies closer to the Iranian border. That is why Coalition forces in this area have been confronted by combination of Sunni extremists, Shi'a extremists and Persian influence.³⁵ The Sunni enclaves in this area are generally located just to the east of the Tigris River. Because of the limited Coalition presence in this area, before the 3-3 deployed the Sunni extremists were able to establish themselves in Salman Pak as well as in smaller population centers outside the town like Durai'ya, Qanas, and al-Laj, which are located in an area known as "the fish bowl."³⁶

As far as the Sunni extremist threat, it was primarily al-Qaeda in Iraq with some presence of foreign fighters. These cells generally supported AQI's hub in Arab Jabour and were relatively limited in their depth and scope. There was also a presence of Jaysh al-Islami (JAI - The Islamic Army, which combines Iraqi nationalism with radical Sunni beliefs).

Coalition leaders assessed that JAI had more limited goals from AQI and that if the Coalition and Government of Iraq would be able to deliver essential goods and services into the area and grant some degree of legitimacy to the group's leadership, JAI would drop its support for the insurgency. This would in turn isolate AQI. As in other areas of the country, the Coalition assessed that the AQI cells in this area were irreconcilable and could only be dealt with using force.³⁷ This followed the Coalition's larger strategy of isolating and attacking "irreconcilable" insurgents by making deals with "reconcilable" elements. Very often, the reconciled insurgents

would provide valuable intelligence on the hard-core insurgents, facilitating the roll-up of entire networks.

AQI Regrouping

As Coalition operation pushed AQI out of its safe havens in Arab Jabour, the remnants of the group moved further south into the area of Zambraniya. MND-C coordinated its operations on both sides of the Tigris River to limit the AQI's capability to shift out of Arab Jabour into Salman Pak and vice versa. This coordinated action squeezed AQI's by limiting its potential courses of action while offensive operations undercut the group's capabilities and resources.³⁸

Coalition planners predicted that some AQI fighters would attempt to regroup even further away from Baghdad in Sayifiyah as well as in the Samarra Jungle, which lie in the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division's area of operations.³⁹ AQI has some smaller cells in this area. These cells were primarily oriented towards producing somewhat primitive IEDs, though their operational capability has waned during the past six months.⁴⁰ Additionally, AQI appears to be attempting to reconstitute itself further down the east bank of the Tigris River Valley after having been pushed out of Salman Pak; the village of al-Suweira appears is now considered an AQI stronghold.⁴¹ MND-C would later address this development with Operation Marne Grand Slam

Shi'a Extremists

Hawr Rajab

Because the 2-3's area of operations is overwhelmingly Sunni, there was a minimal Shi'a extremist threat. Prior to the 2-3's deployment, a small cell of Shi'a extremists would occasionally come south from al-Rashid (which lies West of Doura) into the town of Hawr Rajab in response to Sunni attacks from that area into the Abu Disheer neighborhood, which lies south of Doura.⁴² This was presumably under the auspices of protecting the Shi'a population.⁴³ This Shi'a extremist movement into Hawr Rajab was enabled by the vacuum that previously existed in the area of operations and was quickly brought under control by the Coalition presence.⁴⁴ It was limited by Coalition force presence.

Mada'in Qada

A much more significant Shi'a extremist threat emanated from the areas further east, which had a population of 1.2 million people, 70% of whom are Shi'a Arabs. Shi'a extremists associated with Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM – the Mahdi Army) have operated from Jisr Diyala and Nahwan. The Shi'a groups in the Mada'in Qada do not appear to have been extremely sophisticated or deeply-entrenched. Their attacks were generally not very effective and their operational capabilities have degraded over time.⁴⁵ These groups have apparently received support from Iran, as they have used sophisticated copper-plate explosively formed penetrator IEDs (known as "EFPs") as well as RPG-7 rocket propelled grenades and 107 mm rockets that

have often been found with Iranian markings. Coalition forces have captured individuals who have confirmed this connection between local Shi'a extremists and Iran after questioning.⁴⁶

These Shi'a extremists were connected with Shi'a militias in Baghdad. This became clear when one high-value target named Yasir Salam (known as "the rocket man") came from Baghdad to train local Shi'a groups in the use of rockets against Coalition forces.⁴⁷ This connection ran both ways, as Shi'a networks in the Mada'in Qada would push weapons and other accelerants of violence to their cells in Baghdad.

Both Sunni and Shi'a extremists in the Mada'in Qada primarily sought to make sure that these lines of communication would stay open. They did not contest Coalition efforts to secure population centers in the area as much as they contested Coalition efforts to close their supply routes into Baghdad through roads or through riverine traffic. Shi'a extremists would respond to Coalition patrols with rocket fire as well as EFPs, while Sunni groups would try to protect their routes using deep-buried IEDs.⁴⁸

Nahrwan and Jisr Diyala

The Shi'a extremist network in Jisr Diyala represented a bigger threat to the Coalition than Nahrwan did. Jisr Diyala lies right on the outskirts of East Baghdad, which is a stronghold for JAM and was used directly to push accelerants into Baghdad. Shi'a extremists used the al-Kut highway (called "Alternate Supply Route Detroit" by the Coalition) to funnel EFPs, rockets, and RPGs into Jisr Diyala and then over the Jisr Diyala and Rustamiyah Bridges into East Baghdad.⁴⁹ This was a more important area for Shi'a extremists and they contested it more vigorously than Nahrwan. Conversely, there was less violence in Nahrwan, which lies further away. Colonel Wayne Grigsby, the commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team of the 3rd ID assessed that Nahrwan was a "vacation spot" that JAM members would use as a rear area to conceal themselves, rest, and plan future operations.⁵⁰

Despite this extremist presence, there was no violence in the city itself. Indeed, Coalition forces were only alerted to the extremists in Nahrwan after mistakes on the extremists' parts provided intelligence drove operations that provided further intelligence for more operations. This process continued as Coalition rolled up the extremist network in Nahrwan and established a Patrol Base and JAM decided to move out of the area.⁵¹

Shi'a extremist groups in the Mada'in Qada have a working relationship with one another. Despite exercising command over their respective militia groups and their personal rivalries, JAM's commander in Nahrwan would coordinate actions with the commander in Jisr Diyala. The Coalition's successes in Nahrwan therefore reinforced its successes in Jisr Diyala to a degree.⁵²

In these areas, much of JAM relied on Iran not only for its weaponry but also for training in how to use those weapons – namely EFPs, rockets, and RPG-7s. Those weapons would transit Iran through al-Kut, which was the impetus behind deploying the Georgian brigade to that city. In

addition to these groups, other extremists that did not have the wherewithal (money and contacts) were in a position where they were forced to rely on their own capabilities to operate.⁵³

Relationship with Diyala

The dividing line between MND-C and Multi-National Division – North (MND-N) cuts through the Shi'a extremist system, leaving a seam that both Sunni and Shi'a groups are able to exploit to gain sanctuary. The 4-2 operates north of the 3-3 in Diyala province. This would not necessarily be a problem, except that the 3-3 has focused its operations in the southern areas of its AO while the 4-2 has focused in its northern areas. Neither of the brigades (nor the Iraqi Security Forces in the area, for that matter) has the capability to project sufficient forces to do anything more than conduct disrupting operations in this area.⁵⁴

Five Cities

In the Euphrates River Valley, there is a combination of Shi'a criminal and extremist groups, including both JAM and Badr Corps. These groups operate in the area of Karbala as well as in Hillah, where they come into conflict with the Iraqi army and police.⁵⁵ As one goes further south – notably in Karbala, Hillah, and al-Kut there is a larger JAM militia presence that relies on population intimidation as well as a Special Groups presence that uses indirect fire from rockets and mortars as well as explosively-formed penetrator (EFP) IEDs. Much of this violence is inter-Shi'a violence and is oriented against the Iraqi Security Forces rather than the Coalition.⁵⁶

Coalition Operations to Secure the Southern Belts of Baghdad

Coalition Operations in the MND-C began on the division level with Operation Marne Fortitude I, which sought to establish security as part of the “Clear” and “Hold” portions of the larger counter-insurgency campaign. Marne Fortitude I was focused on kinetic operations to uproot al-Qaeda in Iraq as well as Shi'a extremist groups. MND-C undertook a series of month-long operations that focused efforts on clearing insurgent groups from specific areas, focusing primarily on the AQI system in the Tigris River Valley. Other operations targeted Shi'a extremists east of Baghdad as well as in the Euphrates River Valley. Both MND-C's strategy of deploying its forces and its operational orientation were centered on defeating the AQI network in and around Baghdad.

In its first year, MND-C operations killed or captured about 6,000 insurgents while establishing 54 patrol bases. These bases pushed MND-C soldiers out of their large fortified Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) and made it so that 75 percent of MND-C soldiers were living with the Iraqi people.⁵⁷ This delivered security to the Iraqi population, which made them more willing to cooperate with the Government of Iraq and provide critical intelligence on insurgent networks.

Because MND-C is limited in its scope and resources, it does not have the ability to project further southwards into its area of operations – particularly the Najaf and Karbala areas – to take on Shi'a extremist networks. This is largely because MND-C was focused on al-Qaeda in Iraq and AQI is unable to threaten Baghdad's security from those mostly-Shi'a areas. Coalition MiTTs, PRTs and Special Forces do operate further south, but they do not carry out the sorts of full-spectrum COIN efforts that are necessary to secure those populations. MND-C's Combat Aviation Brigade will occasionally deploy its assets to support those efforts as well as Iraqi Security Forces in those areas when they need additional support.⁵⁸

Coalition efforts to bring security to the population in the belts were augmented by a Sons of Iraq (previously called "Concerned Local Citizens") program that mushroomed in size to 40,000 members in 200 groups who man 2,000 checkpoints in approximately six months.⁵⁹ These mostly-Sunni forces – approximately 60% of whom were either insurgent members or sympathizers – functioned as auxiliary police forces; they helped to maintain security by establishing checkpoints to monitor traffic and by turning in weapons caches and suspected insurgents to Coalition and Iraqi Forces. In addition to providing security, the Sons of Iraq (SoI) program also served to decrease the pool of unemployed men who could fall prey to insurgent offers of employment. The Coalition plans for approximately 20% of the SoI to eventually transition into full-time employment with the Iraqi Security Forces, with the majority moving into the Iraqi Police.

Beyond physical security, MND-C made great efforts to foster both Sunni-Shi'a reconciliation as well as inter-Shi'a reconciliation between ISCI and OMS.⁶⁰ Sunni-Shi'a reconciliation appears to have been bolstered by the SoI program; though 60% of Sons of Iraq groups are Sunni, 20% are mixed between Sunni and Shi'a, while the remainder are Shi'a. Inter-Shi'a reconciliation seems to have been harder to come by, though there have been reductions in violence as a result of Muqtada al-Sadr's declaration of a ceasefire.

Multi-National Division – Center shifted gears into Operation Marne Fortitude II in January 2008. Marne Fortitude II recognized the improvements in security and the changed the focus of operations away from Fortitude I's kinetics towards non-lethal lines of operation like economic development and improved governance and infrastructure as well as the continued development of the local Iraqi Security Forces.⁶¹

The Tigris River Valley

2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division

Mission

The 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division ("Spartan Brigade") operates in the areas immediately Southeast of Baghdad, including Arab Jabour. This was the 20th and final surge brigade combat team to deploy. The brigade includes an infantry battalion, 1-30 Infantry, which operates along the Tigris. Upon its deployment, the brigade also had the 1-40 Cavalry, which operated from the west in areas that include Hawr Rajab.⁶² Until the 2-3 moved into place, however, the 1-40 battalion was essentially responsible for the 2-3's entire area of operations. In reality, the 1-40 was able to project minimal presence out of its main base of operations and the

2nd Brigade essentially had to fight its way in to control the territory when it was introduced on June 16th 2007.

Coalition leaders determined that it was “critical” to have firm control Hawr Rajab, Arab Jabour, and al-Bu’aytha in particular, in order to block accelerants from entering Baghdad.⁶³ Those areas are immediately adjacent to the capital. The 2-3 applied the Coalition’s counter-insurgency strategy to move its soldiers into the population and deliver security to the locals. Coalition planners expected that once the population trusted that they would be protected by the Coalition, they would be more forthcoming with intelligence on the insurgents operating in their midst. This was a marked departure from the old strategy, which had Coalition Soldiers operating from large, secure Forward Operation Bases (FOBs) and then conducting patrols among the population.⁶⁴

After deploying, the brigade fought through AQI’s network of defensive belts. The 2-3 worked methodically from east to west, starting in Adwaniyah, Hawr Rajab, Al Bu’aytha, and Arab Jabour, in order to control the northern edge of areas of operations and establish a foothold. The brigade pushed southwards along the Tigris, down to Sayifiyah and moved west into Zambraniyah.⁶⁵ The brigade has taken pains to ensure that it retains all areas that it moves into and has made sure not to clear any areas that it cannot hold. To that end, the brigade has made efforts to construct patrol bases and start up Sons of Iraq programs.

This strategy has ultimately proven successful, as the 2-3 successfully removed AQI’s operational capability and declared itself in total control of its area of operations as of February 2008, with the conclusion of Operation Marne Thunderbolt. With the defeat of the insurgent networks in their former strongholds, the 2-3 shifted its focus towards reconstruction, governance, and developing local Iraqi Security Forces.⁶⁶

Operation Marne Torch I

When the 2-3 deployed, MND-C immediately began a major offensive with the goal of establishing a presence into the Tigris River Valley. This was under Operation Phantom Thunder, the country-wide offensive that sought to establish control over areas that were previously under insurgent control.

Operation Marne Torch particularly sought to establish a presence on both sides of the Tigris River and disrupt AQI from moving improvised explosive devices into Baghdad.⁶⁷ Because the Coalition forces were able to applying pressure on both sides of the river, AQI insurgents were unable to fall back to sanctuaries across the river in the way they would be able to if the Coalition would focus its efforts on one side. Those insurgents had no choice except to be killed, captured, or leave the area altogether.⁶⁸

Operation Marne Torch I coupled 2,000 Coalition Soldiers with 1,000 members of the Iraqi Security Forces to clear 1,152 buildings, kill 83 insurgents, capture 278 more, unearth 51 weapons caches, and destroy 51 boats.⁶⁹ It was important to destroy boats as insurgents would use them to transport weapons, fighters and money into Baghdad.⁷⁰

Coalition efforts in MND-C were supplemented by the capture of a high level al-Qaeda in Iraq cell leader who “reportedly targeted Coalition Forces, distributed mortars, organized and ordered vehicle-borne improvised explosive device attacks... [and operated] out of the Karh district of Baghdad, along with Mahmudiyah and the Arab Jabour districts.”⁷¹ Another raid killed Emir al-Jabouri, an AQI military emir who headed a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) cell that was responsible for attacks in and around Baghdad.⁷²

Combat operations in Marne Torch I relied heavily upon the Division’s Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) to conduct air assault operations as well as to gather intelligence on enemy activities, safe houses, IED sites, and cache locations and then to engage targets. As a result, the CAB was responsible for over 70% of the insurgents killed during Marne Torch I.⁷³ MND-C relied on its combat aviation assets because insurgents had effectively mined the terrain using IEDs. If Coalition forces would attempt to clear through that terrain on the ground, it would allow insurgents too much time to react. According to Colonel Dan Ball, the mobility afforded by combat aviation assets allowed ground troops to move faster. This made it so that the Coalition Forces could “get inside the enemy’s decision cycle, so that we can stop them and trap them and destroy them with our air assault operations and our attack helicopters.”⁷⁴

Marne Husky

After establishing a foothold with Operation Marne Torch, Coalition forces sought to consolidate their gains. For MND-C, this meant that its forces would hold and then retain territories gained in the Tigris and Euphrates River Valleys. Coalition planners kept in mind the fact that their area of operations’ proximity to Iraq’s biggest highway as well as the Tigris River meant that it would be very easy for AQI cells to reinfiltate cleared areas.⁷⁵

MND-C began this phase of operations with Operation Marne Husky in the Tigris River Valley from August through September 2007. Marne Husky involved a series of targeted raids and strikes further South in the Baghdad belts that were designed to keep off balance those insurgents who had fled the previous offensives into Arab Jabour and Salman Pak.⁷⁶ These missions were intelligence-driven and resulted in 80 insurgents captured and 43 killed.⁷⁷

This Operation was conceptually different from most other Coalition operations because it was led by the Division’s Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB). Essentially, Coalition forces were dispersed among numerous patrol bases and were spread too thinly to clear and hold new territories. Coalition commanders ensured that they could retain their recent gains while ensuring that AQI would not be able to reconstitute itself by coupling the CAB with a battalion of ground troops for eight different air assaults over 45 days under Marne Husky.⁷⁸

While Marne Husky was very kinetic in its focus, it was successful in allowing Coalition forces to consolidate their gains, particularly in the areas just south of Baghdad. The influx of AQI insurgents after Marne Torch I brought an even more radical strain of extremist ideology to Hawr Rajab. By early July, residents of Hawr Rajab had grown tired of AQI’s ruthless practices. That month, two sheikhs reached out to U.S. forces, hoping to form a security alliance that would expel al-Qaeda from Hawr Rajab.⁷⁹ Throughout August, Soldiers from the 1-30 and the newly-

formed Concerned Local Citizens group fought together to wrest control of the area from al-Qaeda's hands.⁸⁰ These were the first such groups to be recruited in the Baghdad belts.⁸¹

Operation Marne Torch II

In mid-September, the main effort in MND-C shifted to Hawr Rajab. U.S. forces fought to control Hawr Rajab in September and October in order to stabilize Arab Jabour and to tamp down the violence in Baghdad proper by weakening the regions that supplied weapons and fighters to al Qaeda in Dora. This fight continued into mid-September.⁸² By September 15, when Operation Marne Torch II began, al-Qaeda networks were severely fragmented and fledgling CLC movements were helping deliver improved security to Hawr Rajab and Arab Jabour.

MND-C kicked off Marne Torch II in mid-September 2007. This operation saw the 1-30 push further south in Arab Jabour along the west bank of the Tigris River. Coalition Soldiers were able to successfully kill or capture about 250 insurgents, three of whom were high-value individuals. Furthermore, Coalition forces uncovered 30 IEDs, unearthed over 40 caches, and destroyed 12 boats that were being used to coordinate insurgent activities across the Tigris River.⁸³ Marne Torch II was supported by tips from over 700 Sons of Iraq from the Arab Jabour area who independently found 17 of the caches that the Coalition removed from the area. Colonel Terry Ferrell stated that Sons of Iraq "were significant to the operation; working along beside us, giving us information."⁸⁴

Furthermore, under Marne Torch II, the 1-30 successfully established Patrol Base Hawkes further south in Arab Jabour. That allowed the Coalition to increase its reach within the battlespace further south and southeast into former AQI sanctuaries. After establishing the patrol base, the Coalition controlled more of the terrain and was in a position to deliver security to more of the population. This increased the momentum against AQI in Arab Jabour, as more Iraqis felt secure enough to come forward and volunteer for the Sons of Iraq program.⁸⁵ According to Colonel Ferrell, Marne Torch II dealt a "significant blow" to al Qaeda and reduced its ability to form direct-action cells while also degrading the group's command and control and support cells. At this point, however, AQI was not destroyed.⁸⁶ That destruction would come four months later, with Operation Marne Thunderbolt.

Sons of Iraq

The Coalition was only able to begin forming its Sons of Iraq program in the 2nd BCT's area of operations in September 2007. Three months later, by December, the program had yielded five separate groups of 1,200 Sunni tribesmen who had turned against the insurgency. By January, with the onset of Operation Marne Thunderbolt, the Sons of Iraq program had expanded to a total of 3,200 members who were operating in eight groups.⁸⁷

These forces were essential in maintaining control over those areas cleared during Operations Marne Torch I and II. From the end of Marne Torch II in mid-October until mid-January, SoI served as auxiliary police forces and augmented Coalition and Iraqi Security Force efforts to hold and build those territories, bringing a dramatic reduction in violence in the northern parts of the area of operations. This enabled the Coalition to begin transitioning some of its efforts to

non-kinetic lines of operations like economic reconstruction and political development. By December, the 2-3 established a new patrol base in Hawr Rajab and took strides to turn that town into a “model community” in the realms of security and governance.⁸⁸

Operation Marne Thunderbolt

In early January 2008, the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division began Operation Marne Thunderbolt, which aimed to destroy the remnants of AQI’s infrastructure in the southern areas of Arab Jabour. For this operation, the 2nd Brigade received the 5/7 Cavalry Battalion from MNF-W, which increased its ability to concentrate its forces and push further to the southeast.⁸⁹

On three occasions during Marne Thunderbolt, Coalition aircraft undertook major bombing attacks to destroy suspected IEDs before large numbers of Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces moved into areas previously under AQI’s control.⁹⁰ Many of these suspected IED locations were pinpointed using advice from Sons of Iraq.⁹¹ According to Dr. David Kilcullen, Coalition forces had to rely heavily on artillery and air support as well as area denial fires because under ideal circumstances, the 2nd Brigade would have received support from a full brigade instead of a single battalion to meet its objectives in Marne Thunderbolt.⁹² Despite the imperfect circumstances, by the end of Marne Thunderbolt in February 2008, Coalition Forces owned all of the terrain in the entire area of operations down to Sayifiyah.⁹³

As Coalition Forces pushed further Southwest, they were greatly aided by the momentum of the Sons of Iraq program. According to Colonel Ferrell, during these operations Coalition Forces did not have to recruit SoI, as citizens would meet Coalition patrols as they moved towards towns and volunteer. Indeed, prior to the Coalition’s push southeast of Arab Jabour, tribal leaders would come out those towns and ask for the Coalition forces to move into their areas and tell them the numbers of people in their town who would like to volunteer to join the SoI. On some days, this would be on the scale of 100-300 SoI volunteers for the SoI emerging in a single day.⁹⁴

The Sons of Iraq program was designed to be temporary in nature, and operations in the 2nd Brigade’s operating environment show these changes in action. As Coalition forces pushed through Arab Jabour and into the Sayifiyah region, approximately 1,500 SoI members came forward to serve in 10 groups. At the same time as those new SoI were being brought on board, the 2nd Brigade moved to transition some of the SoI who had been recruited previously Al Bu’aytha and Hawr Rajab. These forces were no longer needed to the degree that they had been needed before, as those areas had improved security and no longer faced the same threat from AQI.⁹⁵

Role of Iraqi Security Forces

Coalition operations in the Arab Jabour region were largely complemented by an Iraqi Army battalion of that was operating further west in the area of operations. For much of 2007, that battalion essentially operated in the western areas of the operating environment, along Highway 8 through to Zambraniya, which lies in the center of the area of operations.⁹⁶ That battalion showed its capabilities during Operation Marne Thunderbolt, where it often served in a lead role

and did so successfully. That battalion showed its ability to cooperate directly with the local Sons of Iraq groups to remove IEDs as well as repatriating internally displaced persons.⁹⁷

A major deficiency in ISF in the area of operations was the complete lack of Iraqi Police anywhere in the area of operations. As a result, the Coalition had to rely heavily on its SoI groups and had to build from scratch police capacity in those areas formerly controlled by AQI, including Hawr Rajab, Arab Jabour, Al Bu'aytha, Adwaniyah, and Sayifiyah.⁹⁸ This is critical, as those are the areas where remnants of the group may try to reassert their control if and when Coalition forces draw down from the belts. The Brigade has a goal to establish three police stations with approximately 1,500 police officers. Additionally, the Coalition may add a National Police battalion in the area of Sayifiyah.⁹⁹

The Sons of Iraq program is very useful in this case, as it keeps insurgents from taking advantage of the window between the initial clearing operations and the time when the Iraqi Police are fully functional. The 2nd Brigade has a goal to establish the Iraqi Security Forces and develop their capabilities to the point where Coalition forces would move into a tactical overwatch role and allow Iraqis to begin assuming primary responsibility for security in the area of operations.¹⁰⁰ The increased ISF capabilities and maintenance of security will allow the 2nd Brigade to shift its focus even further towards development and governance.

Governance

When the 2nd Brigade first moved into its area of operations, it discovered that while its area of operations is part of the Mahmudiya qada, Hawr Rajab, Arab Jabour, and areas further south in the area of operations had no representation anywhere.¹⁰¹ As with its attempts to bring security, the Coalition was starting from scratch in trying to deliver governance to the citizens in its operating environment. As Coalition operations would clear an area and work with tribal leaders to establish Sons of Iraq groups for the purposes of security, the next step would be to establish a local council and bring governance.

This strategy brought a governance center to Arab Jabour and a local council to Hawr Rajab, areas that were both AQI strongholds with no Iraqi government or Coalition presence only a few months prior. Members of both councils have received training in Baghdad and are being recognized by the Rashid district government. The next step for them is to receive official recognition and then to have a seat in the district government. The same thing is moving over. The 2nd Brigade hopes to replicate this painstaking process in areas that have been cleared more recently as well as in the smaller communities that litter the area of operations.¹⁰²

Economic Development

Another major issue along the non-kinetic lines of operation is the region's economic development. Just as with Coalition efforts to deliver security to this area of operations, economic development is moving from north to south. Colonel Farrell anticipates that the first step of economic rejuvenation will see shopkeepers reopen their businesses as security returns to smaller towns. To that end, the Coalition has helped locals to form agricultural unions and has assisted the rejuvenation of local poultry farms. A major step will be to reconnect the water and

electricity flows in the area of operations to Mahmudiya's infrastructure so that that farmers can move back to their fields.¹⁰³

This economic improvement is bringing political dividends, as it requires the local councils to cooperate with the qada leadership in Mahmudiyah and for the qada to deliver political goods to the locals. Indeed, leaders of the various committees, the Mayor of Mahmudiyah, and the Governor of Baghdad have come to these former AQI strongholds and have sent repairmen and equipment to improve the local infrastructure. This has empowered the local population to a degree that was impossible only a few months before.¹⁰⁴

Coming Challenges

The 2nd Brigade successfully cleared its area of operations of a major insurgent presence and has brought security to the local population. This, however, was only the first step. Now, the Coalition must develop local Iraqi Security Forces and have them take ownership of the area of operations as the Surge draws down. A major step in this front will be the transitioning of a portion of the Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi Police with the remainder moving into other forms of employment. This transition will require cooperation at all levels of the Iraqi government, which has been slow in coming. Beyond security, the 2nd Brigade's development efforts aim to make it so that the local leadership provides water, electricity, medical care, and responsive governance to the population.¹⁰⁵

3rd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division

Overview

Prior to the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division's arrival, 72 soldiers were responsible for the entirety of the Mada'in Qada and its 1.2 million residents. Those Soldiers lived on a base in Rustamiyah and commuted across the Tigris River into the area of operations to conduct patrols. This essentially meant that population of the entire area was ceded to the insurgents, which left the Coalition forces in the dark as far as gaining intelligence on insurgent members.¹⁰⁶

By February, the 3-3's 3,500 soldiers operated in the Mada'in Qada from one forward operating base, two patrol bases, four combat outposts and three joint security sites; this postured the force such that the 3-3's Soldiers were living and working in all of the population centers within the area of operations.¹⁰⁷

As the 3-3's area of operations was home to both Sunni and Shi'a extremist networks, the brigade had a somewhat different fight than the 2-3. The 3-3's operations tended to focus on one opponent or the other. Again, the Sunni extremist network in this area operated from Salman Pak, while the Shi'a network operated from Jisr Diyala and Nahrwan. Coalition operations were able to remove the AQI's sanctuary in Salman Pak and disrupted its operational capabilities early on, though it would not be until the conclusion of Operation Marne Grand Slam in mid-March 2008 that al-Qaeda would be eliminated from the area.

Operations against AQI

Operation Marne Torch

The 3-3 began its operations against al-Qaeda in Iraq with Operation Marne Torch in June. Just as the 2-3, the 3-3 operated in a pattern whereby it would consolidate its gains before moving forward with renewed offensive operations. Operation Marne Husky kept the enemy off balance and the 3-3 continued carrying out such operations in support of the effort against AQI, which was primarily centered in and around Arab Jabour. The 3-3's synchronized its efforts to apply pressure on insurgent elements, magnifying the impact on Sunni insurgent network in the area.¹⁰⁸

Colonel Wayne Grigsby, Commander of the 3-3, recognized that there AQI was able to pose significant threat by using indirect fire such as mortar and rocket attacks. As a result, Colonel Grigsby was forced to rely upon over 1800 "terrain denial fire" missions. In such cases, Coalition artillery, mortar, attack helicopter units would fire into places that were known points of origin for extremist mortar and rocket attacks. These attacks were effective in limiting AQI's ability to use indirect fire against Coalition Forces.¹⁰⁹ Despite their effectiveness, "terrain denial fires" are generally less than ideal because they are more likely to result in unintended casualties. That Colonel Grigsby was forced to rely so heavily on these tactics suggests that his troop strength – while substantially greater than his predecessors – was not ideal for the mission at hand. This was exacerbated by the fact that the 3-3 was mission one of its battalions, the 1-10 Field Artillery, as that unit had been sent to Camp Bucca Detention Center to conduct security operations.¹¹⁰

During Operation Marne Torch, the 2-3, 3-3 and combat aviation brigade worked together along both sides of the Tigris River Valley, limiting AQI's ability to fall back and weather the offensive. Because of the Shi'a populations further south, AQI was limited in its ability to withdraw and was forced to the south and west. The 2-3 and 3-3 coordinated their efforts in the consolidation phase as well, by constructing patrol bases that complemented one another to be able to better control the area.¹¹¹

A major focus of Operation Marne Torch was interdicting AQI's line of communication across the Tigris River. The emir of the Mada'in Qada informed Coalition Forces that there were no fish in the Tigris River and that all of the boat traffic on the river was Sunni extremist traffic. Coalition forces attacked this line of communication, destroying 161 "Little Jon" boats over six months.¹¹² This isolated the AQI cell in Salman Pak and limited that cell's ability to contribute to AQI operations in Arab Jabour as well as in Baghdad.¹¹³

Marne Husky

Following Operation Marne Torch I, the 3-3 consolidated its gains and worked to disrupt AQI in Salman Pak and in the "Fish Bowl" area that is near it, where it believed Sunni extremists had fallen back. Colonel Grigsby's brigade conducted approximately 15 air assaults into those areas, netting 125 insurgents killed and captured over six months. Like the 2-3, the 3-3 needed a period of time to consolidate its gains because it did not have the numbers of troops necessary to hold territory but could only disrupt safe havens. Part of the reason for this was that the 3-3 was simultaneously conducting operations against Shi'a extremists in Jisr Diyala as well as Operation

New Jersey Turnpike to train the local Iraqi National Police to establish checkpoints in order to secure the major roadways inside the operating environment. These other operations limited the capability of the 3-3 to project further south into its area of operations in the short term, but by improving the NP's capability and securing the roadways within the area, the 3-3 was able to push further southwards.¹¹⁴

The 3-3 continued its disruption and consolidation efforts against the AQI cell in Salman Pak, engaging in smaller-scale actions like Operation Zelig Sunrise, which was one of four two-day operations that was designed to isolate and clear Salman Pak. Zelig Sunrise, for its part, resulted in 13 insurgents killed and 20 IEDs discovered.¹¹⁵ This disruption had an effect, as Salman Pak's security, economy, and governance steadily improved as AQI was unable to assert control over the population.¹¹⁶

As the 3-3 conducted these operations, it integrated a battalion of soldiers from the Republic of Georgia into its brigade. These soldiers were emplaced in already-cleared areas that freed up US Soldiers of the 1-15 Infantry to push for a final offensive into Salman Pak.¹¹⁷

Marne Grand Slam.

Operation Marne Grand Slam began in mid-February and was the 3-3's final offensive against AQI in the area of Salman Pak. Marne Grand Slam resulted in 35 insurgents killed or captured, 15 weapons caches discovered, and the remnants of al-Qaeda in Iraq being forced from Salman Pak.¹¹⁸ With the success of Operation Marne Thunderbolt in the month prior, this marked a major victory against AQI's system to support its network in southern Baghdad.

These operations were facilitated by cooperation with many of the 6,500 Sons of Iraq who work in the 3-3's area of operations. With the improvements in security, the 3-3 began to transition away from the SoI program. On March 16, 391 of those SoI shifted to academies so that they could become Iraqi Police officers. The brigade has plans for 600 SoI to transition to the Civilian Conservation Corps.¹¹⁹

Operation Marne Grand Slam saw the 3-3 transition to more non-kinetic lines, particularly governance and economics. A major accomplishment with Marne Grand Slam was that Salman Pak opened a governance center in Mada'in Qada so that the mayor could govern in the area; this was impossible for the three years prior due to the security situation. As much of the fight against AQI in the Salman Pak region is over, the 3-3 will begin to cooperate with an Iraqi Army brigade that will soon move into the area and assume many of the area's security responsibilities.¹²⁰ While a small number of Sunni extremists remain outside of Salman Pak, the 3-3 continues to pursue them and they are not able to do much in the way of carrying out operations.¹²¹

Operations Against Shi'a Extremists

Overview

In addition to its mission to defeat the Sunni extremist network in Salman Pak, the 3-3 was also tasked with the mission of defeating the Shi'a extremist network based in Nahrwan and Jisr Diyala that was responsible for pushing weapons into Baghdad. Prior to its deployment, the

limited amount of troops in the 3-3's area of operations meant that Coalition Forces were not in a position to do anything more than carry out disrupting operations. Upon its deployment, the 3-3 was immediately able to take control over the Rustamiyah bridge and assert some control over the traffic going from the east into Baghdad. Shortly thereafter, the brigade began to assert control over population centers, begin a Sons of Iraq program, and degrade enemy capabilities.¹²²

Operation Marne Anvil

After undertaking Marne Torch and establishing itself in the Tigris River Valley, the 3-3 turned its focus to Shi'a extremist groups when it started Operation Marne Anvil in October 2007. The 3rd HBCT of the 3rd ID sought to undermine Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) groups in Mada'in Qada in operations that were supported by 900 members of the Iraqi National Police and 3,900 Sons of Iraq.

As part of Marne Anvil, the 1-10th Field Artillery battalion (1-10 FA), which had been supporting detainee operations at Camp Bucca, moved into Nahrwan. The 1-10 FA established Patrol Base Salie in Nahrwan, working to disconnect Shi'a extremists in that town from the rest of the network.¹²³ These operations successfully removed six key leaders from the Shi'a extremist cell in Nahrwan which had a noticeable effect on the organization. The 3-3 received intelligence that the locals had generally turned against the group and that members of the extremist group were deserting.¹²⁴ The brigade's ability to draw on intelligence assets allowed it to capture so many extremist leaders that second- and third-tier leaders did not want to assume command in Nahrwan. As a result, Col. Grigsby says, the Shi'a extremist networks in those areas are "completely disrupted."¹²⁵

Separately, the 3rd HBCT began taking steps to clear Jisr Diyala. Upon the 3-3's deployment, that town was infiltrated with Shi'a extremists who used the town to control the Jisr Diyala Bridge and the Rustamiyah Bridge and move into Baghdad. The 3-3 moved a battalion into Jisr Diyala and conducted intelligence-driven operations to clear those insurgents from the area. The 3-3 built Combat Outpost Cache North and South outside the city, which it followed up with a Joint Security Station where the 3-3's Soldiers could work together with National Police and local Iraqi Police officers.¹²⁶ These tactics yielded significant results, with many of the brigade's 24 captured high-value targets coming from Jisr Diyala.¹²⁷

The 3-3's operations against the Shi'a extremist networks in Jisr Diyala and Nahrwan combined with the effects of Muqtada al-Sadr's cease fire to significantly reduce the threat of Shi'a extremist groups in the area of operations. At present, there are rogue elements who are occasionally able to deploy EFPs, but Colonel Grigsby does not believe that they pose a significant problem to the Mada'in Qada.¹²⁸ This has remained the case even after Shi'a extremist violence increased in March 2008.¹²⁹

Sons of Iraq and Iraqi Security Forces

The 3-3 benefited greatly from intelligence gleaned through its Sons of Iraq program, which it began developing in August 2007. The Sons of Iraq program has operated primarily – though not exclusively – in Sunni areas and has generally been used in clearing operations against al-Qaeda in Iraq. Indeed, the program began after a Sheikh who was a former Iraqi Army Colonel was attacked by an AQI suicide bomber at his house.¹³⁰ Within 4 months, the program grew to approximately 4,000 Sons of Iraq who were manning 80 checkpoints within the area of operations.¹³¹ In addition to their production of intelligence, the Sons of Iraq secured neighborhoods and infrastructure in order to free up Coalition and Iraqi National Police members to conduct offensive operations against AQI and Shi'a extremist networks.¹³²

An important issue for the Mada'in Qada (as it is around Iraq) will be to integrate the Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi Security Forces. Colonel Grigsby estimates that 30-40% of the SoI in the Mada'in Qada would like to join the Iraqi Security Forces. Those SoI that do not join the Iraqi Security Forces are slated to find other forms of employment, such as public works groups, or else to receive vocational training so that they remain employed and are not tempted to join armed militias or insurgent groups.¹³³

This transition will require cooperation with the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, which is responsible for recruiting, training, and administering the police forces.¹³⁴ The goal for the area is to increase the local Iraqi Police in the Mada'in Qada from 900 by 50% in a short period of time. In addition to those 900 local policemen, there are two Iraqi National Police brigades operating in the area around Nahrwan; these forces will become less necessary as the insurgent presence wanes and the local populations require security forces to maintain law and order.¹³⁵

Governance and Economic Development

The 3-3 has undertaken operations to improve local governance, particularly in Jisr Diyala. Coalition commanders worked with the local government to provide more water and improve the provision of public goods and essential services. The fact that several local Sons of Iraq groups (with both Sunni and Shi'a members) operate in conjunction with the Iraqi National Police groups has created connections between tribal leaders and the Iraqi government and has also taken steps to foster reconciliation between local Sunni and Shi'a Iraqis.¹³⁶

As far as economic development, the 3-3 has taken steps to improve the local infrastructure. The brigade is taking steps to improve roads and build water pumps to serve the local agricultural economy (80 percent of the Mada'in Qada's economy is agricultural).¹³⁷ Indeed, water projects make up over 50% of the 3-3's reconstruction activities. Many of these projects were planned by the local government and only required some assistance from the Coalition.¹³⁸

Unlike the area around Arab Jabour, there was a functioning local government in the Mada'in Qada, complete with a mayor and local councils. The largest issue related to governance was in Salman Pak, which was originally the seat of government for the Mada'in Qada. Because of the security situation in Salman Pak, its council was closed and it was disconnected from the district government. Furthermore, the seat of government was moved to Jisr Diyala and the Iraqis living near Salman Pak were disenfranchised.¹³⁹

Colonel Grigsby took steps with the provincial governor to reopen and fund the Salman Pak council, create slots in the Mada'in Qada council for that town, and construct a government center in Salman Pak so that the seat of government could return there. Finally, the 3-3 has assisted the Mada'in Qada government in re-establishing its connections to the provincial government and then to the national government.¹⁴⁰

Coming Challenges

For the Mada'in Qada, there is a lingering issue with small pockets of insurgents and extremist groups operating in the seam between the Mada'in Qada and the 4-2's area of operation further north. These groups do not seem to be operationally capable of projecting force to other areas at present, though. The major issues in the future will be non-kinetic; Coalition forces will need to continue to increase the numbers and capabilities of the local Iraqi Security Forces, oversee the transition of the Sons of Iraq into other forms of employment, develop governance capacity and foster economic growth.¹⁴¹

Euphrates River Valley

Overview

Another major component of Coalition operations in MND-C has been to control the areas east of the Euphrates River in the vicinity of Highway 8. This is the purview of the 4th BCT, 3rd ID, which is based out of Iskandariyah at FOB Kalsu. The 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne also contributes to security in these areas North of the 4-3. Previously, the 4th BCT, 25th ID was responsible for the 4-3's area of operations and the 2nd BCT, 10th MTN was responsible for the 3-101's area of operations.

The areas in the Euphrates River Valley are mixed between Sunni and Shi'a, with the proportion of Shi'a increasing as one moves south. In Mahmudiya Qada, which is home to the 3-101, the population is 75% Sunni and 25% Shi'a.¹⁴² Further south, in the 4-3's area of operations, Shi'a Arabs comprise a relatively greater amount in population. Beyond that is the Five Cities area, which is almost entirely Shi'a. Unsurprisingly, Sunni extremists operate more in the north and the Shi'a extremist networks are more relevant the further south.

Enemy System

The areas around Highway 8 that lie south of Arab Jabour are mixed between Sunni and Shi'a populations, which means that this area lies on a sectarian fault line. Generally, al-Qaeda in Iraq had been able to operate in Iskandariyah, Mahmudiya, and the areas between Highway 8 and the Euphrates River. Additionally, there is an AQI cell that operates west of Karbala that is connected to the group's networks in al-Anbar province.

Shi'a militias projected from areas further south, particularly Karbala and Hillah, through Highway 8 and into Baghdad. It does not appear, however, that either Sunni or Shi'a groups attempted to hold this area or use it as a base of operations in the way that both groups used areas further east in the Tigris River Valley. Instead, this area seems to have served as a thoroughfare for accelerant traffic into Baghdad.¹⁴³ As such, MND-C placed the 3-101 and 4-3 along Highway 8 with the mission of maintaining security over this strategically vital route and to interdict accelerants of violence into Baghdad.

Sunni Extremists

According to MNF-I, the AQI network in this area was connected to the group's operations in eastern Anbar as well as western Baghdad, but it was not directly connected to the network that operated in the Tigris River Valley.¹⁴⁴ The areas immediately south of Baghdad were heavily contested through September 2007; the 2-10 suffered 60 killed in action as well as 300 wounded soldiers over its 15 month tour while enduring 106 attacks per week. There was an AQI sanctuary that served as a factory for car bombs that were then sent into Baghdad that was based fifteen miles southwest of Baghdad and west of the Euphrates River in the villages of Owesat and al-Betra¹⁴⁵

After sustained offensive operations as well as a very successful Sons of Iraq program, violence has largely subsided in this area. From November 2007 through March 2008, the 3-101 encountered an average of 12 attacks per week – a decrease of nearly 90% – while suffering one killed and nineteen wounded. It is therefore evident that the threat of insurgent violence against the Coalition in these areas has all but disappeared. Indeed, Colonel Caraccilo states that while the Coalition is concerned with the potential for AQI to return to the area, he does not believe that the population will tolerate an extremist Sunni presence in the future.¹⁴⁶

Further south, there was a cell of approximately 30 al-Qaeda in Iraq fighters operating in Northwest Babil in areas west of Iskandariyah, notably the towns of Khidr and Jurf al-Sakhr.¹⁴⁷ It is unclear how this group was connected to the rest of the AQI network, but it does not appear to have been a major hub along the lines of Arab Jabour or Salman Pak. On the whole, because the area is largely urbanized, split between Sunnis and Shi'a, and was never ceded to the enemy in the way that Arab Jabour and Salman Pak had been, AQI never had an opportunity to fully control the Euphrates River Valley.

Besides the Euphrates Valley system, the eastern end of the 4-3's area of operations extends to the southern Tigris River Valley. As AQI was pushed out of Arab Jabour and Salman Pak, approximately 30 fighters were believed to be attempting to regroup further south, in the area between the Samarra Jungle and the town of Suwayra. The 8th Iraqi Army Division is primarily responsible for security in this area, but it receives operational assistance from the 4-3 through Military Transition Teams as well as intelligence and logistical support for larger operations.¹⁴⁸

Shi'a Extremists

Besides the threat of Sunni groups that are attempting to fight Coalition forces, there is a fault line in the towns of Iskandariyah and Mahmudiyah, which are split between Sunni and Shi'a Arabs. These areas experienced substantial sectarian violence prior to the Surge, though this threat appears to have waned over the past year.¹⁴⁹ There were some exceptions, like the suicide attack that occurred during Arbayeen, but unlike in 2006, sectarian attacks did not lead to retributions or spiraling violence. Besides the sectarian issue, Iskandariyah contains a large industrial complex and sits on Highway 8, which makes it a strategically vital territory.¹⁵⁰

In areas closer to Baghdad, the Shi'a extremist presence has generally been localized. These groups engage in criminal, Mafioso-type activity more so than insurgent activity. Most of the violence in that area is between small rival Shi'a criminal groups.¹⁵¹ Additionally, because Mahmudiyah lies on Highway 8, senior Shi'a extremist leaders try to transit through that area on their way to Baghdad.¹⁵² Iranian-backed Special Groups associated with Shi'a extremists have used the Highway 8 corridor – particularly Mahmudiya – as a line of communication between Baghdad and areas further south in Iraq.¹⁵³

Conversely, further south, in areas like Hillah and Karbala, there is a presence of Shi'a militias as well as Special Groups that attempt to use those areas as operating bases. The 4-3 does not operate much further South than Musayyib, which puts that area under the purview of the 8th

Iraqi Army Division. Coalition Forces do participate in Military Transition Teams and have contingency plans for operations into Shi'a-dominated areas like Karbala, Najaf and Hillah.¹⁵⁴

Coalition Operations

Operation Marne Avalanche

Immediately after undertaking Marne Torch, MND-C began Operation Marne Avalanche, which had a similar concept but focused on enemy networks in Iskandariyah, Musayyib, and Mahmudiya.¹⁵⁵ Like Marne Torch, Marne Avalanche was a month-long operation that focused on the areas adjacent to Baghdad in order to stop accelerants from moving into the capital, effectively cutting off insurgents further north from safe havens to the south.¹⁵⁶ This operation differed, however, in that it focused on both Sunni and Shi'a extremist activities whereas Marne Torch focused entirely on AQI.

Operation Marne Avalanche enlisted the support of 5,000 Coalition and 3,500 Iraqi Soldiers and disrupted both Shi'a and Sunni insurgent activities in the area around Iskandariya. The 4-25 (which would later be replaced by the 4-3) led this operation and focused on AQI sanctuaries in Jurf as-Sakhir and an area known as the "Fish Farms." Prior to Marne Avalanche, Jurf as-Sakhir has been heavily contested by insurgents, as well as Iraqi forces and US soldiers. For example, the local Iraqi police station had been destroyed and reconstructed three times before being attacked and damaged a fourth time just before the start of the operation.¹⁵⁷

By the end of the operation, Jurf as-Sakhir moved to a period of calm with nearly two months without attacks. That compares very favorably to six months prior, when there was at least one attack per day. A company commander from the 4-25 who was stationed in Jurf as-Sakhir stated, "This operation marks 50 days in Jurf As Sukhr with no attacks, as compared to six months ago... The drop in violence is a testament to the Paratroopers and Iraqi Security Forces who have embraced the Joint Security Station concept and who have trained and fought side by side."¹⁵⁸

Like Operation Marne Torch I, Marne Avalanche relied heavily on combat aviation assets. In this case, however, instead of using helicopters to attack insurgents, the 4-25 went on many air assault operations to interdict and capture insurgents. Compared to Marne Torch, Marne Avalanche did not result in many insurgents killed, but it did successfully interdict the flow of accelerants into Baghdad.¹⁵⁹ A reason for this difference may have been that al-Qaeda in Iraq was not dug in to the same degree or with the same numbers as it had been in the Tigris River Valley. By the end of the Marne Avalanche, Coalition Soldiers had killed 16 insurgents and captured 110 more, including eight cell leaders while firmly establishing control over Jurf as-Sakhir and disrupting insurgent activities.¹⁶⁰

Notable success stories involved the capture of a JAM rocket cell leader and 10 members of that cell as well as a separate JAM company commander and five cell members by members of the 4-25 in raids around Mussayyib.¹⁶¹ The company commander and his cell were known to use EFPs against Coalition and Iraqi forces and engaged in homicide in order to intimidate the population into submission.¹⁶²

Like Marne Torch in the Tigris River Valley, Marne Avalanche did not destroy the insurgent network in the area. Rather, it changed the nature of the fight against the insurgents by driving them out of their primary safe havens and putting them on the defensive. Both operations forced insurgent groups to run and shifted tactical momentum in the Coalition's favor.¹⁶³ Marne Avalanche brought in the first Sons of Iraq programs to the area, which the 2-10 and 4-25 used to firmly establish control over their areas of operation before moving on to further division-wide operations.

Operation Marne Courageous

After a consolidation period of approximately three months, during which time MND-C was focusing on operations in the Tigris, the Division turned its focus back to the Euphrates River Valley with Operation Marne Courageous. The operation kicked off on November 15, 2007, with the 3-101 joining with air assets to conduct an air assault into the Sunni villages of Owesat and al-Betra, both of which were AQI sanctuaries that were home to al-Qaeda VBIED factories. A separate motivating factor for the mission was to recover two soldiers from the 2-10 who were believed captured by those AQI cells.¹⁶⁴

Owesat and al-Betra are on the west side of the Euphrates River, adjacent to al-Anbar province, fifteen miles southwest of Baghdad.¹⁶⁵ For this operation, the 3-101 (which replaced the 2-10 one month prior) was supported by the 1st BCT, 3rd ID, which was based in Ramadi, as well as a Marine Reconnaissance platoon, Iraqi Army soldiers, and seventy members of a Sons of Iraq group.¹⁶⁶ The operation received additional support from the Air Force, which heavily bombarded an island in the Euphrates River that could have been used by AQI as an escape route or else as a location in which remaining members could regroup.¹⁶⁷ Such "terrain denial" strategies also preceded major operations in the Tigris River Valley as well and were similarly successful.

Marne Courageous essentially aimed to clear AQI members from their former safe haven and then establish a more permanent Coalition presence to ensure that those insurgents would not be able to return.¹⁶⁸ In order to secure the population in this area, the 3-101 built a patrol base to house a Company that would live among the people and built a bridge across the Euphrates to support that Company.¹⁶⁹ This would enable Coalition forces to develop a Sons of Iraq program that would increase visibility and help prevent AQI reinfiltration or even transit through what used to be a sanctuary connecting AQI networks in al-Anbar to those in the Euphrates River Valley.¹⁷⁰

After Marne Courageous violence decreased dramatically in the area that used to be known as the "Triangle of Death" despite the persistence of Shi'a extremist groups.¹⁷¹ The 3-101 saw attacks plummet from an average of 106 to an average twelve attacks per week. Furthermore, many of those attacks are a result of Coalition forces encountering old IEDs that were laid months or even years earlier. Other IEDs are often surface-laid, emplaced hastily and are ineffective.

Operation Marne Roundup

MND-C immediately followed Marne Courageous with Operation Marne Roundup, which began on December 15. Marne Roundup paired the 4-3 with Iraqi Army forces and focused on a town called Khidr, which is located west of Iskandariyah. The operation sought to drive out approximately 30 AQI members and arms smugglers from the area around Iskandariyah.¹⁷² The mission was to remove sanctuaries in and around Iskandariyah. To seize the town, the 4-3 established blocking positions to prevent the extremists from escaping and then attempted to capture or kill enemies as they fled the area. To hold the territory and ensure that insurgents would not be able to infiltrate the territory, the 4-3 immediately constructed a new security outpost, Patrol Base Kelsey. After that, the brigade began to develop Sons of Iraq programs with the aim of securing all of the major roads leading in to and out from Iskandariyah. A further goal of the mission was to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Iraqi Police and Army in standing up to AQI and then in delivering services to the population.¹⁷³

Operation Marne Roundup led Coalition forces to kill 18 extremists and capture 25 more. Additionally, the 4-3 found and cleared 51 IEDs as well as 43 weapons caches.¹⁷⁴ During Marne Roundup, Soldiers of the 4-3 discovered a network of tunnels that had been used by AQI for weapons storage as well as to connect disparate fighting positions in the area northwest of Iskandariyah.¹⁷⁵ In addition to clearing Khidr, Marne Roundup allowed Coalition forces to secure and begin reconstruction efforts in the town of Jurf al-Sakhr, which had been an extremist hotbed.¹⁷⁶

After Marne Roundup, the threat of sectarian violence in the area deteriorated. During the Shi'a Arbayeen religious pilgrimage to Karbala, the Iraqi Security Forces successfully secured 9 million pilgrims from all over Iraq. During this pilgrimage, there was one apparent AQI suicide attack in Iskandariyah, but other than that there was no remarkable violence even though the area had once been an AQI hotbed. Importantly, the Iraqi Security Forces took the lead in planning and executing their plan to secure the population.¹⁷⁷

Operation Marne Rugged

As violence decreased in the Euphrates River Valley and MND-C began to focus on events in the Tigris River Valley. After Operations Marne Thunderbolt and Marne Grand Slam pushed AQI out of its strongholds in the Tigris River Valley, MND-C undertook Operation Marne Rugged, which anticipated that approximately 30 AQI fighters would attempt to regroup further south from their original bases, particularly in the Tigris River Valley between the Samaraa jungle and Suwayra. One battalion of the 4-3 projected eastwards from its main area of operations in the Euphrates River Valley to support two Iraqi Army battalions in order to clear the area, develop governance programs, and continue to secure the Tigris River Valley.¹⁷⁸ Though this mission is currently ongoing, the successful establishment of a base and the relative lack of violence in the area suggest that it has been successful in keeping Sunni extremists from reestablishing themselves.

Sons of Iraq and Iraqi Security Forces

Much of MND-C's success in the Euphrates River Valley is a result of its expansive Sons of Iraq Program as well as the effectiveness of the local Iraqi Security Forces, particularly the Iraqi Army. For its part, the 3-101 has spread its forces over 19 locations. In addition to nearly 16,000 Sons of Iraq manning 780 checkpoints, the Iraqi Army mans 84 battle positions and there are 2,000 local Iraqi Police as well as patrol police guarding the roads.¹⁷⁹ In addition to the 88% decrease in violence, the enemy's level of disruption is made clear by the fact that from the time that the 3-101 deployed in early November 2007 through the end of March 2008, it suffered one killed in action and nineteen wounded.¹⁸⁰

Notably, many of those Sons of Iraq were former Iraqi Army officers who likely supported the insurgency in its earlier days. Of those SoI, over 3,000 were screened and approved to be integrated into the local police forces.¹⁸¹ This helps explain why the Sunni extremist presence in the area appears to have been defeated, with only the Shi'a extremist network remaining.¹⁸²

Similarly, the 4-3's efforts have been supported by its cooperation with Iraqi Forces. In fact, the brigade is partnered with every brigade of the 8th IA. The 4-3's forces are spread over fifteen positions, including five patrol bases that have coalition forces working with the Iraqi army and three joint security stations that have coalition forces working with Iraqi police as well as several Military Transition Teams and an NCO training academy.¹⁸³ Additionally, the 4-3 has benefited from 10,500 both Sunni and Shi'a Sons of Iraq that man 552 checkpoints.¹⁸⁴

Despite the apparent success of the Iraqi Police in Operation Marne Avalanche, some of the gains against Shi'a extremist groups would be undermined with the December 2007 assassination of Brigadier General Qais al-Mamouri, who headed the Babil police and was reputed to be very effective in combating both Sunni and Shi'a extremist groups.¹⁸⁵ The fighting that broke out in March 2008 made it clear that Special Groups and JAM were using the Highway 8 corridor in Babil Province as a major thoroughfare running between Baghdad and areas south of Hillah. This would later require the Iraqi Police to yield to the Iraqi Army in order to secure Mahmudiyah.¹⁸⁶ This mirrors actions in other places where Iraqi Army forces have performed better than Iraqi Police.

Governance and Economic Development

In addition to the support that they give to the Iraqi Security Forces, Coalition forces have engaged in development in and around their areas. Whereas the Tigris River Valley is almost totally agrarian in its economy, the Highway 8 corridor is home to several urbanized areas. As a result, instead of merely providing water, Coalition Forces have engaged in developing vocational-technical schools and developing both private and state-owned enterprises to improve the local economy.¹⁸⁷ This is beneficial when dealing with issues with the Sons of Iraq, as it is important that they have jobs to return to once the security environment no longer requires their services on checkpoints¹⁸⁸

Unlike the Tigris River Valley, the areas along the Highway 8 corridor have had a persistent Coalition presence and thus did not require the same degree of bottom-up political and economic development to ensure continuing stability.

Coming Challenges

As in the Tigris River Valley, Coalition and Iraqi Forces have effectively attacked the Sunni extremist networks that were so capable of wreaking havoc in Baghdad through 2006. These networks have seen their operational capacity wane and have lost the support of the public. The next step for the Coalition is to continue to help develop governance and the local economy and to ensure that the locals remain loyal to the Iraqi government. Also, Coalition Forces will need to continue to attack the Shi'a extremist groups and Special Groups networks that threaten stability in the area.

Conclusions

Multi-National Division – Center’s operations in the Baghdad Belts show the effects of American counter-insurgency strategy when combined with sufficient force density. In a span less than a year, both MND-C and Multi-National Force – Iraq were able to make decisive gains against al-Qaeda in Iraq. Indeed, the group has been all but eliminated from MND-C’s area of operations. This has no doubt contributed to the increased security seen in Baghdad.



Map of al-Qaeda in Iraq’s Capabilities as of March 2008

Through 2007, MND-C’s operations applied the Army’s counter-insurgency doctrine and took pains not only to secure the population, but also to ensure that it did not clear any more territory than it could hold. This resulted in a methodical push out from Baghdad into the former safe havens. MND-C planners proceeded with a series of operations that focused kinetic operations to clear zones before allowing time to consolidate gains and build capacity in newly-secured territories. This strategy paid great dividends.

A major component of MND-C’s strategy has been its employment of Sons of Iraq programs. These programs have been responsible for a large amount of the actionable intelligence that has flowed to Coalition and Iraqi Forces and has enabled the capture of numerous insurgents and discovery of many weapons caches. The SoI programs were an instance where Coalition forces capitalized upon the split between many former insurgents and insurgent sympathizers and al-

⁴ Courtesy MNF-I. Note: Pink areas indicate areas where AQI was able to move while red areas indicate where AQI was able to operate.

Qaeda in Iraq. This split largely came about because of AQI's incredible brutality that alienated the local population. It would be a mistake to write off the successes of the SoI programs, as they have presented an opportunity for bottom-up reconciliation between formerly-disaffected Sunni Arab populations and the Government of Iraq. It is important that MND-C (indeed, MNF-I) ensure that the Government of Iraq moves more quickly in absorbing an equitable portion of the Sunni Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi Security Forces and to make sure that government funds are made available for to deliver public goods to the local populations.

As Coalition and Iraqi forces have been successful in combating al-Qaeda in Iraq and its infrastructure in around Iraq, there has been a steady increase in violence from Shi'a extremist elements, particularly Iranian-backed Special Groups. This has been the case in MND-C as well. Coalition and Iraqi operations have effectively defeated AQI in the area of operations, but there has been a marked increase in Shi'a extremist activity in the Highway 8 Corridor. Recently, there has been an increase in activity in the area of Mahmudiya as Iraqi Army forces moved in to secure the population and clear out Special Groups caches. Additionally, a major issue with Shi'a extremist groups lies further south in the Five Cities area, particularly in Hillah, Karbala, and al-Kut (Diwaniya and Najaf were previously cleared of Shi'a extremist groups by Iraqi Security Forces). These areas (with exception of al-Kut, which is the province of the Georgian Brigade) are outside of the Coalition's area of operations, leaving much of that issue to the Iraqi Security Forces.

For Multi-National Division – Center, operations within the past year has seen great success in securing Baghdad. One question that remains is whether the Iraqi Security Forces will be able to shoulder the burden in maintaining that security as troops levels decrease within this vital area of operations. Also, it is yet to be seen whether Coalition and Iraqi forces will be as successful in combating Shi'a extremist networks as they have been in fighting AQI over the past year.

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