

Backgrounder #31

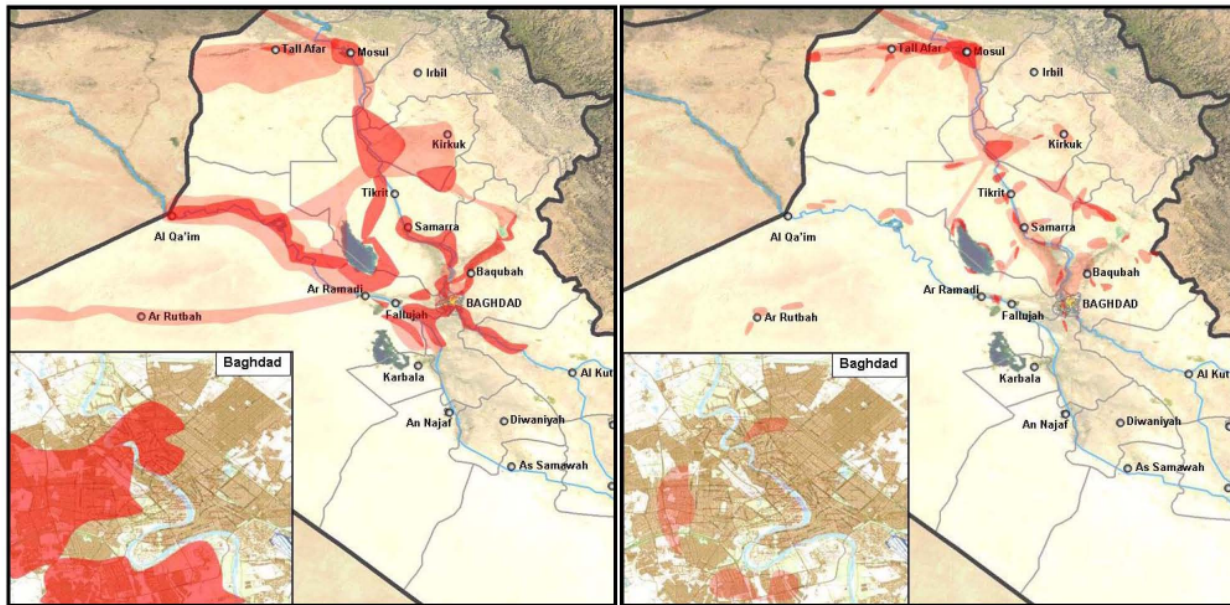
The Fight for Mosul

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On January 23, 2008, a 20,000 pound explosive located in an insurgent weapons cache in a western Mosul neighborhood collapsed a three-story apartment building and several surrounding structures, killing and wounding more than 300 people. The following day the Ninawa provincial police chief, Brigadier General Saleh Mohamed Hassan al-Jiburi, was killed by a suicide bomber while inspecting the carnage of the previous day's attack.¹ In response to these events, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki announced that additional Iraqi Security Forces would be sent to Mosul and that there would be a "decisive" battle against Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).² These events brought Mosul to the forefront of the fight against AQI and other associated insurgent groups in Iraq.

In the past year, the fight against AQI was reshaped by a series of major combat operations under a new counterinsurgency strategy as well as the spread of Sons of Iraq (SoI, previously known as "Concerned Local Citizen") groups and Awakening movements.³ Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces cleared AQI from its former sanctuaries and areas of operation in Anbar province, Baghdad and the surrounding belts, and Diyala province. Though isolated pockets of AQI remain in these areas, the network has largely been pushed north to areas in the Jazeera Desert, along the Hamrin Ridge, Southwest of Kirkuk, in the cities of the upper Tigris River Valley – most importantly, Mosul – and across Ninawa province. Coalition Forces assess that while Baghdad has always been the operational center of gravity for AQI, Mosul is the network's strategic center of gravity – an area of interest that if lost would make AQI's survival very difficult.⁴ Mosul has always been a center for the Sunni insurgency. It is a critical hub for AQI funding and foreign terrorist facilitation; it is also the hinge that connects the west-east line of communication that runs from the Syrian border to the north-south lines that lead to central Iraq.

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AQI and a patchwork of other insurgents are now firmly entrenched in large sections of Mosul, as well as along the road network west of the city from the Syrian border; along the cities of the upper Tigris River Valley; and in the belt of fields, villages, roads, ridges, and valleys that connects these two lines southwest of the city. There are currently three fights being waged in Mosul: Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces are fighting to uproot AQI from the city; they are also fighting to uproot AQI in the more rural areas around the city used as support zones; finally, Arabs and Kurds in northern Iraq are engaged in a larger provincial and regional struggle for land and power. This backgrounder focuses on the fight against AQI, but also addresses the other issues as they relate to the fight for the city of Mosul itself.

The fight for Mosul is sure to be long and difficult as it unfolds over the coming months. What follows is a comprehensive look at the situation in that city, beginning with historical context and then proceeding with details of the contest in Mosul from the beginning of the Iraq War in 2003 to early 2008. The paper then explains the enemy system in Mosul and concludes with a likely strategy for clearing and securing the city.

¹ Map Courtesy Multi-National Force – Iraq. Note that areas in red show where insurgents are capable of carrying out operations while areas in pink show where insurgents are able to transit.

Context and History

Mosul is the second largest city in Iraq with a population of approximately 1.8 million people. It is located 250 miles north of Baghdad along the Tigris River in Ninawa province and constitutes the uppermost tip of the so-called ‘Sunni triangle.’ The Sunni triangle is bounded by Mosul, the cities along the upper Tigris River Valley, and the cities along the middle Euphrates River Valley in Anbar province. At the northern tip of this triangle, Mosul lies on a fault line where various ethnic, religious, sectarian, and tribal groups intersect. The distribution of the city is approximately 70% Sunni Arab, 25% Kurd, and the remaining 5% a mixture of Shi’as, Turcomans, Yazidis and Christians.

Map of Northern Iraq



Map by Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping

As in Baghdad, the Tigris River runs through the center of Mosul, bisecting the city into eastern and western halves. The western half is populated predominantly by Sunni Arabs, while the eastern half is home to a large Kurdish population. As a result of previous Arabization initiatives, many of the newer, outer lying districts on Mosul's eastern and northern edges have large Sunni Arab communities. Sprinkled across the city are small Shi'a, Turcoman, Yezidi, and Christian enclaves. North and east of Mosul, the surrounding villages become increasingly Kurdish; although in villages closer to Mosul, they are mixed with Arab, Christian and Yezidi. The areas south and west of Mosul are largely Arab with a few contested areas, like Sinjar, to the west along the Arab and Kurd fault line.

Tribal structures are also important in Ninawa province. In Ninawa and northern Salah ad Din provinces, there are some 136 different tribal elements of varying size and influence, which are largely subsumed under the two dominant tribes in the region, the Shammar and Jiburi tribes.⁵ The Shammar tribe is very influential in western Ninawa and its membership extends over the border with Syria. Its influence and location have made it an important ally for insurgents based in Mosul and in Syria. At various times, the tribe has both passively and actively assisted insurgents. The Jiburi tribe is very influential from the Mosul area to the south where it extends deep into Salah ad Din province. The Jiburi tribe is more powerful in Salah ad Din than in Mosul, and it exerts much influence along the upper Tigris River Valley lines of communication. The tribal history in Mosul itself has been contentious, but the tribes are generally less influential now than they were in the past. The diversity and history of the city preclude any particular tribe from being dominant.

Before the Iraq War, Mosul was a Ba'ath party stronghold. The city had a long history as a source for the Iraqi Army's officer corps that dated back to the Ottoman Empire. Under the British Mandate in the early twentieth century these officers became important members of the mandate government and formed the core of the new Iraqi Army.⁶ After the British departed Iraq, Sunni Arab military officers continued to be an important factor in Iraq's development.⁷ In 1968, many leaders of the newly empowered Ba'ath regime were Army officers. This connected the central government to the social networks that had supplied Iraq's officer corps, increasing the power of the Sunni Arab families, clans and tribal networks in the northwestern provinces of Iraq.⁸ This dynamic made cities like Mosul and surrounding areas important centers for Ba'ath Party rule.

After Saddam Hussein came to power in 1979, he favored individuals from his family, the al-Bu Nasir tribe, and his hometown of Tikrit. At the same time, he cultivated ties with the Sunni Arab population from cities in the Sunni triangle like Mosul, Samarra, and Ramadi. He recruited people from these Sunni Arab strongholds to lead his security and intelligence services.⁹ Mosul was home to a large Ba'ath Party headquarters and continued to be an

important military center. By some estimates, under Saddam Hussein, Mosul and the surrounding areas contributed over 300,000 residents to the military, security and intelligence services.¹⁰ By 2005, there were still an “estimated 1,100 former flag officers, 2,000 former colonels or lieutenant-colonels, and 4,000 other former officers, plus 103,000 other former soldiers in circulation” in Ninawa province.¹¹ After the fall of Saddam Hussein these officers and soldiers formed the core of the Sunni insurgency in Ninawa.

Mosul’s ethnic balance and history as a Ba’athist and military stronghold help to explain the city and the fight taking place there. Part of the conflict in Mosul is tied into the larger Arab-Kurd competition in northern Iraq because Mosul’s Arabs are fearful of Kurdish expansionism. Even though the current fight for Mosul is not fundamentally ethnically-based, this factor has created a skeptical population that has provided sanctuary to insurgents. Furthermore, many of Mosul’s population of well-trained former military and security personnel have supported the insurgency since the war began because they had the most to lose when Saddam Hussein fell from power. Mosul, therefore, serves as a both a recruiting ground and sanctuary for the insurgency.

From the Early Days of the War through the Battle of Mosul

Under the original plan for the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the U.S. 4th Infantry Division was to enter northern Iraq through Turkey. Turkey, however, did not authorize the United States to open a northern front through Turkish territory. As a result, northern Iraq initially lacked a large combat presence. 2,000 paratroopers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) along with 1,000 U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) worked with several thousand Kurdish peshmerga forces to push south and west from their bases in the Kurdish-controlled region. The primary objectives were to secure Kirkuk and Mosul, and nearby military assets and oil infrastructure. Coalition planners were careful to keep Kurdish political parties and their peshmerga militias from provoking a Turkish invasion or inflaming Arab-Kurdish tensions. The paratroopers from the 173rd ABCT conducted Operation Option North securing Kirkuk, nearby airfields, and the northern oil fields. A few hundred SOF, along with peshmerga forces, first targeted the Ansar al Islam group along the border with Iran to prevent being attacked from behind and then turned toward Mosul in early April.¹²

On April 11, 2003, the Iraqi V Army Corps, responsible for the Green Line demarcating the Kurdish region, surrendered to an SOF contingent north of Mosul clearing the way into the city.¹³ After the fall of Saddam Hussein, Mosul, like other places in Iraq, fell into disorder. The Central Bank and other banks were plundered, the Mosul University library was pillaged, and looters took everything from ambulances to beds and medical equipment from Saddam General Hospital.¹⁴ The general disorder was compounded by the various ethnic fault lines in the city

that the few SOF present could do little to contain. Kurds fought Arabs; pro-Saddam Arabs fought anti-Saddam Arabs; and they all blamed each other for the disorder.¹⁵

The Arab-Kurd fault line proved most problematic. The Sunni Arabs had dominated the Iraqi government and the city of Mosul in Saddam's time and they stood the most to lose from the war in general. In Mosul, the general unease among Sunni Arabs was exacerbated by the widespread presence and activities of Kurdish civilians and militias.¹⁶ Lt. Col. Robert Waltemeyer, commander of the SOF contingent in Mosul, tried desperately to keep the militias outside of the city and contain their activity, but he was ultimately unsuccessful.¹⁷ Armed Kurdish civilians were seen looting banks, stealing cars, forcing Arabs out of homes and flying the yellow flag of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).¹⁸ The KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) – the two largest Kurdish political parties – rushed to establish presences in Mosul relying mainly on their peshmerga militias.¹⁹ These militias secured buildings for use as political party offices (including eventually the former Ba'ath Party headquarters) and set up checkpoints at key points in the center of Mosul as well as on roads leading in and out of the city. Many Arab residents complained of being harassed and arrested by these militias.²⁰ At the same time, journalists on the ground reported that the flow of Kurds from Kurdish cities like Irbil and Dahuk further aggravated these problems.²¹

In the midst of the general disorder in Mosul, former regime elements began to organize themselves into an insurgency. Demonstrators appeared in the streets with pro-Saddam and anti-Kurd banners and Iraqi flags calling for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.²² At various mosques throughout the city, clerics called for unity and opposition to the American presence as former Ba'athists and military personnel met and began to organize for resistance.²³ Higher-level Iraqi generals fled to Tikrit and across the border to Syria, where they continue to organize and support the insurgency. Clashes between American military forces working with Kurdish peshmerga and an embryonic insurgency became increasingly frequent. Toward the end of the first week after U.S. forces arrived in Mosul, 31 Iraqis were killed and another 150 were injured in these confrontations.²⁴ In the most damaging incident, Mashaan al-Jiburi, an allegedly corrupt opposition leader who had been in exile in Syria for years, appeared outside of the local Ba'ath office, where U.S. soldiers were working. He declared himself Mosul's governor, implying that the occupation forces had appointed him. U.S. soldiers came under fire and subsequently returned fire in the ensuing riot, killing a dozen Iraqis and injuring over a dozen more.²⁵

A few days after entering Mosul, elements of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division and the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit reinforced the SOF.²⁶ By the last week of April, forward elements of the 101st Airborne Division arrived under the command of then-Major General David Petraeus. Eventually, the 101st's presence grew to 20,000 soldiers and its responsibility encompassed all of Ninawa province.²⁷ The division was headquartered at the Mosul Airfield

with units also stationed further west at Tal 'Afar and south at the Qayyarah Airfield. Four infantry battalions were responsible for Mosul and were supported by military police (MP), civil affairs (CA), and engineer battalions.²⁸

During its tenure in Mosul, the 101st Airborne Division established security, facilitated the local government's formation, and helped initiate more than 5,000 projects by using funds from the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). Major General Petraeus recognized the problems with Mosul's ethnic balance and its significance for the Ba'ath Party. Hence, he crafted his strategy accordingly. The arrival of a larger American combat force helped diminish the presence and activities of Kurdish militias. As troop strength grew, U.S. forces disarmed and removed peshmerga forces from the city while taking over security checkpoints.²⁹ In addition, 3,000 former police officers were rehired and put through an intensive training program by the division's MP battalion. After training, police officers worked with MPs who were spread out into 14 police stations around the city and with other American military forces that regularly conducted patrols with Iraqi police.³⁰

Major General Petraeus also identified problems associated with what he termed "de-Ba'athification without reconciliation."³¹ Mosul had thousands of level four Ba'athists and above. This included 120 tenured professors at Mosul University, many of whom were educated in the US or the UK. Petraeus sought exceptions to de-ba'athification for those not deemed security threats in order to help integrate Sunnis and former Ba'athists into the new Iraq. The Iraqi Governing Council rejected these exceptions. As Major General Petraeus later reflected: "It was, frankly, situations like that that did make some areas of Iraq—of the Sunni Arab areas—fertile ground for what initially billed itself as the resistance, then was stoked by former regime elements seeking to reverse what had taken place. And, of course, [that] provided fertile grounds for al-Qaeda – Iraq to flourish in as well."³²

Major General Petraeus also worked to establish representative local government. He conducted negotiations with the city's various ethnic and tribal groups convening a caucus to select a mayor and city council. A similar process was instituted on the provincial level to select a governor and provincial council.³³ In both cases, General Petraeus tried to foster a well-balanced government that integrated Kurdish parties without alienating Sunni Arab constituencies. This balance helped form the working relationship between Mosul's various groups that emerged in 2003.

General Petraeus also relied heavily on his CERP funds to establish security and promote the local government. The CERP program grew out of the need for commanders on the ground to disburse relatively small amounts of money quickly in order to help stabilize local areas. Commanders have the authority to spend CERP funds without a centralized process that requires submitting funding requests, which can save months of valuable time. The program was

originally funded by seized regime assets and was later picked up as part of U.S. security and reconstruction expenditures. Funds are used for “the building, repair, reconstitution, and reestablishment of the social and material infrastructure in Iraq.”³⁴ In the seven months after the invasion of Iraq, the 101st Airborne Division used \$57 million dollars to underwrite approximately 5,000 projects including: building or re-building 500 schools and dozens of medical clinics; opening hundreds of kilometers of roads; and putting an irrigation system back into operation.³⁵ In an interview at the time, General Petraeus stated that “money is the most powerful ammunition we have” and that the CERP was critical for keeping Iraqis employed, which provides tangible evidence that the occupation powers were helping the Iraqi people.³⁶

In the nine months that the 101st Airborne Division spent in Mosul, a semblance of normalcy returned to the city and Mosul’s various groups and even some former regime elements were able to form working relationships. Many of the practices instituted by Major General Petraeus would become the core of a revised counterinsurgency strategy that is now being used to re-secure Mosul. The level of security in Mosul was at its highest under the 101st Airborne. These levels have not been seen in the city since the departure of the 101st Airborne Division.

In January 2004, Task Force Olympia, about 8,700 soldiers built around the 3rd Stryker BCT (SBCT), 2nd ID, replaced the 101st Airborne Division reducing the number of forces in Ninawa by half. In less than twelve months, the gains made by the 101st Airborne Division were reversed.³⁷ During 2004, ethnic tensions grew and a balance emerged whereby insurgents and Arab nationalists controlled the west side of Mosul and Kurdish political parties and militias controlled the east side.³⁸ In October 2004, the 3rd SBCT, 2nd ID was replaced by the 1st SBCT, 25th ID. One of the 1st SBCT, 25th ID’s battalions, however, was immediately deployed to Fallujah as part of Operation Phantom Fury, leaving Mosul with only 3 battalions.³⁹ As the Coalition deployed fewer combat forces to Ninawa, insurgents from Fallujah fled in large numbers to Mosul.

In the second week of November 2004, insurgents mostly associated with AQI and Ansar al-Sunna, in addition to some former regime groups, began conducting operations against Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces across the city and targeting Kurds in eastern Mosul. On November 11th, several hundred insurgents stormed police stations across the city. Instead of confronting the masked gunmen, all but 200 of Mosul’s 5,000 policemen refused to fight and melted away into the population. The insurgents then established themselves in western Mosul and some areas of eastern Mosul. Undermanned Coalition Forces relied on several thousand Kurdish peshmerga to help retake the city. Fighting ensued over the next two weeks, leaving many killed and wounded before a degree of security was restored.⁴⁰

The Battle for Mosul in November 2004 had lasting implications. First, Kurdish forces re-entered the city in large numbers and in one form or another. Those units have not left, as they

were re-flagged and now operate as the 2nd Iraqi Army Division. Second, before November 2004, Sunni Arab insurgents associated with the former regime operated in Mosul, but afterward the dominant presence was AQI and Ansar al-Sunna, which were firmly entrenched in western Mosul and parts of eastern Mosul. A stalemate emerged with overwhelmingly-Kurdish army forces operating on the east side of the city and insurgents on the west side. The city's Sunni Arab population tolerated and even supported AQI and other insurgents and Mosul developed into a hub for AQI. This stalemate did not change very much through 2006.

Operations against AQI in 2007

By the end of 2006, AQI, other Sunni insurgent groups, and Shi'a militias controlled large swaths of terrain across Iraq. Coalition Forces operated out of large Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) and conducted mostly targeted raids, while focusing on a train and transition strategy. Around this time, two dynamics began to change the situation in Iraq – the establishment of the Anbar Awakening Council and the growth of the Sons of Iraq (SoI) movements; and a change in counterinsurgency strategy coupled with a surge in combat forces.⁴¹

The new counterinsurgency strategy and troop surge focused initially on Baghdad and the surrounding areas, where combat forces conducted clearing operations to retake areas under enemy control or influence. Although Multi-National Division-North (MND-N) was already conducting an economy of force mission, additional forces were shifted from northern Iraq to Baghdad. The 4th Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division (4th HBCT, 1st CD) took over responsibility for Ninawa province from the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division (3rd SBCT, 1st ID) in December 2006 without its 2-12 Cavalry battalion. That battalion deployed to the Mansoor security district in Baghdad, instead of to Ninawa with the rest of the brigade. This reduced the Coalition's presence in Ninawa province from four battalions to three and reduced the presence in the city of Mosul from two battalions to one.

The 4th HBCT, 1st CD was headquartered at FOB Marez in Mosul. The 3-4 Cavalry, a Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition (RSTA) squadron, was based at FOB Sykes and was responsible for the area stretching from Tal 'Afar out to the Syrian border. The 1-9 Cavalry, an Armed Reconnaissance Squadron (ARS), was responsible for training Iraqi Army and Police officers in the province. Only the 2-7 Cavalry, a Combined Arms Battalion (CAB), remained in the city of Mosul.⁴² In addition to the loss of one battalion of Coalition Forces, the Iraqi Army moved two battalions from its 2nd Division from Mosul to Baghdad. In total, 1,000 U.S. soldiers and about 6,500 Iraqi soldiers and policemen were responsible for securing a contested city of almost 2 million.⁴³

At the beginning of 2007, the main effort for both Coalition and insurgent operations in Iraq was in Baghdad and the surrounding areas in central Iraq. Conditions in Mosul and Ninawa were actually significantly better at the time and the number of attacks fell by approximately one-half over the first half of the year. In December 2006, there was an average of 15-18 attacks a day in Ninawa province.⁴⁴ In March 2007, this number fell to 10-13 attacks a day.⁴⁵ By July, this number fell further to 7-9 attacks.⁴⁶ Attacks involved improvised explosive devices (IED), vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIED), and small arms fire. VBIEDs, the most effective of these weapons, were used in attacks 3-5 times a week.⁴⁷

There were three reasons for the decline in the number of attacks during this time. First, the increasing capacity of the 2nd and 3rd Iraqi Army Divisions led to greater effectiveness in Coalition and ISF operations. Second, AQI was focused on the fight for central Iraq and may have shifted reinforcements there. And third, a great deal of infighting among insurgent groups in Mosul and the surrounding area led to a decrease in the enemy's ability to conduct attacks.⁴⁸

While attacks actually decreased in northern Iraq through the first half of 2007, the fight for central Iraq began pushing AQI further north. As Coalition operations cleared areas in Baghdad, insurgents moved outside of the city to the northern and southern Baghdad belts and up into Diyala province. In June 2007, Coalition operations followed AQI out into the belts and up into Baqubah methodically pushing AQI further and further north from the capital. As the operational tempo increased throughout the spring in central Iraq, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces also targeted AQI along the Tigris River Valley and in Ninawa province in order to disrupt insurgent pockets and the lines of communication that run from Mosul down the Tigris River Valley.

In the months of May and June 2007, 13 AQI leaders were captured or killed in Mosul, including six emirs, four terrorist cell leaders, and two facilitators. Several of these individuals played key roles in AQI operations in Mosul. On May 29th, ISF detained Aman Ahmad Taha Khazam al-Juhayshi, the alleged emir of Ansar al-Sunna in Mosul.⁴⁹ Two weeks later on June 12th, ISF and Coalition Forces killed Kamal Jalil Bakr 'Uthman, also known as Sa'id Hamza, who was an AQI military emir in Mosul.⁵⁰ Days later, Coalition Forces killed another key AQI leader, Izz al-Din, also known as Abu Ahmad, who led five AQI cells in the city.⁵¹ On June 25, Coalition Forces killed the AQI emir for western Mosul, Khalid Sultan Khulayf Shakir al-Badrani, also known as Abu Abdullah.⁵² By the end of June, the AQI network in Mosul had seriously been weakened by the deaths of these key leaders and the capture of a number of other AQI insurgents, facilitators, and financiers.⁵³

Coalition and Iraqi forces continued to dismantle the Mosul AQI network in July and August 2007. During this time, operations were conducted almost daily. By mid-July, it had become evident that U.S. and Iraqi efforts during the previous month had greatly strained the

AQI network. Several individuals detained in July operations had been recently promoted to fill the “numerous vacancies in the terrorist leadership structure.”⁵⁴ Because many of the newly-promoted operatives were less qualified, it facilitated further disruption of AQI in Mosul. Coalition raids in mid-July netted a suspect believed to be the most active AQI cell leader in Mosul, a security emir for Mosul, and an AQI battalion commander.⁵⁵

During the months of May, June, and July 2007, Coalition Forces developed an intelligence picture of the AQI leadership network in Mosul and increasingly targeted higher-ranking individuals. This intelligence provided the basis for a series of operations in late July and early August in which Coalition and Iraqi forces targeted the AQI emir for all of Mosul. Beginning on July 20th, raids targeting associates of the emir of Mosul resulted in a number of key captures, including the AQI administrative emir for Mosul, the emir’s driver, and a sniper cell leader. During a cordon and search operation in the northeastern part of the city on August 1st, ISF engaged and killed the emir for Mosul, Safi, and three of his bodyguards who attempted to flee in a pickup truck. Safi was the overall emir for Mosul and the suspected deputy emir for all of northern Iraq.⁵⁶

Not only did these key captures and kills diminish AQI’s capacity, but several large caches and IED factories discovered during these months further undermined the terrorist network in Mosul. It is also worth noting that many of these finds were due in large part to tips by local citizens, suggesting growing willingness to cooperate with Iraqi and Coalition forces. In early July 2007, ISF discovered a large IED factory, an explosives cache, and a military grade bunker system on the outskirts of Mosul.⁵⁷ Nearly 10,000 pounds of ammonium nitrate, a chemical used to make home-made explosives, were found at the site along with other bomb-making materials.⁵⁸ The next day, in the al-Sina’a neighborhood in western Mosul, ISF discovered a second IED factory, which specialized in constructing curb-shaped IEDs.⁵⁹ On July 11th and 19th, caches were also found in the al-Sina’a neighborhood and on the western outskirts of Mosul. As IA soldiers continued to target illegal weapons production in western Mosul, another large weapons cache was discovered at a home in the al Najjar neighborhood on July 30th.⁶⁰

By August, Coalition and ISF operations in Mosul had seriously degraded the AQI network in northern Iraq. Military operations in the preceding months had been successful and were becoming even more effective, local Iraqis became more forthright with tips and intelligence about AQI members and weapons caches, and there were widening divisions between insurgents and the population as was the case elsewhere in Iraq. By late summer, however, there were signs that AQI’s migration north could soon have a greater impact on Mosul as levels of insurgent activity increased south of the city.

In August, the 4th HBCT, 1st CD shifted some its focus to the Za'ab triangle southeast of Mosul, in northern Salah ad Din province – a region that spans the area roughly between Qayyarah, Bayji, and Kirkuk.⁶¹ Za'ab is a strategic area connecting multiple insurgent lines of communication; and Coalition Forces had not had a presence there in months. By August, it was clear that it had become a safe haven that AQI had fallen back on when pushed out of areas further south. Moreover, there were signs that Mosul itself was also starting to feel the effects of the AQI displacement from central Iraq. Increasingly, individuals that had fled Baghdad started showing up in northern Iraq. In one case in late August, Coalition Forces detained an alleged AQI leader who had recently fled from Baghdad along with seven of his associates. This leader provided financial support to AQI, was a foreign terrorist facilitator, and controlled terrorist operation south of the Baghdad Airport before coming to Mosul.⁶² In addition, attacks in late summer hovered around 7-10 a day, but days with higher numbers of attacks became more frequent.⁶³

Around the same time that AQI migrated north, the 3-4 Cavalry redeployed from Iraq in early September without replacement, leaving only two battalions in Ninawa. The 1-9 Cavalry shifted from a training mission and was given responsibility for the area from Tal 'Afar out to the Syrian border, as well as the Qayyarah area south of Mosul.⁶⁴ The 2-7 Cavalry remained in Mosul and continued to disrupt the AQI network during September under the division-level offensive Lightning Hammer II. As part of operations in Mosul, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces targeted AQI financiers, facilitators, weapons facilities, and leadership.

On September 3 and 4th, 2007, Coalition and Iraqi Army forced detained two key AQI financiers, including one who was believed to be the number one AQI financier in Ninawa.⁶⁵ On September 8th, Iraqi Security Forces cleared a large weapons cache and VBIED and IED factory in western Mosul. The cache included three prepared VBIEDs, three partly constructed VBIEDs, and 21 IEDs.⁶⁶ On September 24th and 25th, Coalition Forces targeted the emir for all of northwestern Iraq in northeast Mosul, detaining seven individuals, including the emir's brother who was responsible for arranging vehicles, distributing wages, and supplying false documentation for AQI members in Mosul.⁶⁷ In October, Coalition Forces continued to disrupt the network under Lightning Hammer II. During various raids, Coalition Forces targeted and detained cells leaders, an administrative emir, and the security emir for the city.⁶⁸

By November 2007, it was clear that AQI and other Sunni insurgents had migrated further north, where attacks were higher than anywhere else in the country.⁶⁹ On November 5th, MND-N launched the division-level offensive Operation Iron Hammer. In addition to the Khalis Corridor in Diyala province, the Za'ab triangle and Mosul were highlighted as areas of concern given their increased levels of AQI activity. In Mosul, intelligence driven raids targeted insurgents cells and weapons caches on both sides of the city, in addition to foreign terrorist facilitators.⁷⁰ Outside of Mosul, support areas and lines of communication were targeted south

of the city near Qayyarah and west of the city along the main roads through Tal 'Afar and Rabiah to the Syrian border. Senior leaders were thought to have fallen back to this area and even across the border into Syrian.⁷¹ During this time, Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the overall leader of AQI, is known to have transited Mosul twice.⁷² These operations continued in the last week of November and into December under the follow on to Iron Hammer, Operation Iron Reaper.⁷³

Changing Dynamics in Mosul at the End of 2007

During the summer of 2007, Coalition and Iraqi operations seriously challenged the AQI network in Mosul. A number of senior Mosul leadership individuals were killed and detained, and insurgent infighting weakened terrorist operations. At the same time that the network in Mosul deteriorated, however, the fight in central Iraq began pushing insurgents north. By the end of summer, elements of AQI fell all the way back to Ninawa province in order to rebuild the Mosul network, as well as to regroup and reconstitute their overall network in order to repenetrate areas where they had been ousted from in central Iraq.

In September 2007, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces reached a security trough in Ninawa. Operations were still successfully targeting AQI, but a larger insurgent presence and a determined effort by AQI to rebuild the Mosul network led to increases in the number of attacks in Ninawa. From March to September 2007, there were about 7-9 attacks on any given day in Mosul and the surrounding area. Only on a few occasions did AQI carry out spectacular attacks demonstrating a higher operational capability. On May 16th, the network conducted a complex attack in and around Mosul. 200 armed gunmen attacked the main provincial jail using 6 VBIEDs, 14 IEDs, RPGs, and assault rifles. At the same time 2 VBIEDs were used to destroy a bridge just west of the city.⁷⁴ On August 14th, several massive VBIEDs targeted Yezidi villages near the border town of Sinjar in western Ninawa, killing 344 and injuring more than 700.⁷⁵ Coalition and Iraqi operations made large-scale, coordinated attacks like these infrequent, but by the end of the summer attacks against Iraqi Police checkpoints and patrols began to increase slightly.

A spike in violence and the number of attacks coincided with the latter weeks of Ramadan at the end of September. On September 26th, four VBIEDs detonated across northern Iraq, one of which targeted the Mosul courthouse and killed three Iraqi citizens while wounding more than 40 others.⁷⁶ Later that week, AQI gunmen killed three prominent Sunni Imams from three different mosques in Mosul.⁷⁷ And two weeks later, a VBIED targeted an Iraqi police station on the western side of the city, killing 16 and wounding another 50.⁷⁸ These larger and more symbolic attacks were accompanied by more ordinary IED and small arms attacks, and kidnappings and murders. As more and more insurgents moved north, this spike in violence gave way to a period in which attacks in Ninawa actually began to increase throughout the fall

and into winter, even as attacks everywhere else in Iraq declined. By late October and throughout November, attacks increased to around 80 a week or more than 11 a day on average. In the first week of December 2007, this number rose to 103 or almost 15 attacks a day.⁷⁹

Throughout late summer and fall, commanders thought areas in northern Iraq, particularly Mosul, would be areas where AQI would attempt to regroup.⁸⁰ Planners hoped that the 2nd and 3rd Iraqi Army Divisions, two of the more effective Iraqi units, would be able to join with two Coalition battalions to secure Ninawa and prevent AQI from regrouping and reconstituting in and around Mosul.⁸¹ By the first week of December, however, it was clear that AQI had indeed regrouped in the Mosul area and that Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces needed more troops and an increase in operational tempo. Commanders on the ground in Mosul first recommended the return of the two Iraqi battalions from the 2nd division that had been moved to Baghdad as part of Operation Fardh al-Qanoon.⁸² Moreover, decisions were likely taken at this time to shift a Coalition battalion to Mosul as well as to form the Ninawa Operations Command.

December through early 2008

In early December 2007, the 4th HBCT, 1st CD rotated out of theatre and was replaced by the slightly larger 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR), a highly-mobile, combined arms unit.⁸³ The 3rd ACR deployed with three squadrons, two of which took over responsibility for Ninawa.⁸⁴ The 3-3 Armored Cavalry (AC) squadron was assigned to Mosul and the 1-3 AC squadron was assigned to western and southern Ninawa. The 3rd ACR increased Coalition troop strength in Ninawa slightly, and added 300 tanks and Bradley personnel carriers, and a number of Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAPs).⁸⁵ Upon taking over responsibility for Ninawa province, the 3rd ACR, in conjunction with Iraqi Security Forces, increased the tempo of operations to pressure a resurgent AQI network in Mosul. A key part of these operations was the development of a more comprehensive intelligence picture about the AQI network in the city in order to set conditions for operations in 2008, when a larger force presence would be available.

In the first few weeks of December, Coalition Forces detained three wanted individuals and an additional 26 suspected terrorist associates in Mosul in near-daily operations.⁸⁶ The most important individual detained was Yasin Sabah Salih Jubayyir, AQI's security emir for most of northern Iraq, who was captured on December 13th. Yasin was a foreign fighter who helped direct AQI security operations across the north. He operated along the upper Tigris River Valley and was a senior weapons and terrorist facilitator.⁸⁷ Also captured on December 13th with Yasin was Najim 'Abdalla Hasan Salih, AQI's security emir for Mosul.⁸⁸ The capture of these two individuals, in turn, helped develop intelligence about the Mosul network and led to multiple captures and kills, including Haydar al-Afri, also known as Imad Abd al-Karim, on December 25th. Haydar was the AQI leader for the western region of Mosul where he facilitated weapons

and materials to cells in western Mosul, and planned attacks against Iraqi and Coalition Forces.⁸⁹ In the last few days of December, Coalition Forces detained another 30 individuals including one who was the leader of an assassination cell that conducted attacks against Iraqi Security Forces. He was also involved in extortion, executions, and counterintelligence operations.⁹⁰

In the first two weeks of January 2008, Coalition Forces detained 53 individuals in the Mosul network. Among them were foreign terrorist facilitators, individuals associated with IED attacks, two IED cell leaders, media cells, and associates of AQI senior leaders.⁹¹ One of the individuals detained on January 6th was believed to be AQI's deputy emir in the city. He was involved in planning attacks and operated as a judge in an illegal court system that ordered and approved abductions and executions. He was also a close associate of the two AQI leaders, Yasin and Haydar al-Afri, that were captured in December.⁹² On the January 7th, another high-value target, Mohammed Ibrahim Ali, a wanted AQI bomb maker and IED cell leader, was also detained.⁹³ In several operations in the second half of January, Coalition Forces continued to target the network associated with Yasin, Haydar al-Afri, and the deputy emir captured on January 6th, leading to the capture of an IED cell leader, individuals involved in kidnapping, and maintaining and facilitating weapons.⁹⁴ In an operation on January 21st, Coalition Forces detained AQI's overall security emir for Mosul.⁹⁵

By mid-January 2008, a number of security developments led to an augmented and more coherent force structure in Mosul. First, Coalition Forces moved the 1-8 Infantry Battalion, a Combined Arms Battalion (CAB), from the Baghdad area to Mosul. The 1-8 Infantry Battalion took over responsibility for Mosul with the 3-3 AC squadron, splitting the city into two halves with each unit covering one side. Second, the two battalions from the 2nd Iraqi Army Division that were deployed in Baghdad began returning to Mosul. And third, the Iraqi Security Forces established the Ninawa Operations Command (NOC).

The purpose of the NOC was to coordinate the efforts of the Iraqi Army, Iraqi Police, Border Security Forces, and Iraqi Special Operations Forces operating in Ninawa.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the establishment of the NOC provided a coherent Iraqi operational command to partner with Coalition forces throughout the province. Importantly, Major General Riyadh Jalal Tawfiq – a Sunni Arab – was selected to head the NOC. Previously, he was commander of the 9th Iraqi Army division, which was responsible for the Rusafa area in east Baghdad. Rusafa was one of the key flashpoints in the sectarian conflict that consumed Baghdad in 2006. General Riyadh is credited with having helped secure this key district in Baghdad in 2007, and was selected based on his ability to lead effective military operations and to work across the sectarian and ethnic cleavages that often plague Iraq. These qualities were deemed important for trying to coordinate the efforts of the largely Kurdish Iraqi Army divisions in Ninawa with the largely Arab population and police force in Mosul.

Despite these developments, security in Mosul continued to deteriorate from December 2007 through February 2008, with increased significant daily attacks, at least half of which consisted of IEDs and VBIEDs.⁹⁷ In the month of January alone, 300 IEDs were found or detonated by the 3-3 AC squadron.⁹⁸ By the middle of February, attacks averaged around 20 per day, ranging anywhere from 12 to 30. One week, attacks spiked to 180, or almost 26 attacks a day.⁹⁹ Moreover, spectacular attacks became more frequent. The Zanjili bombing on January 25th killed and wounded almost 300 Iraqis, and flattened an entire neighborhood block.¹⁰⁰ The following day, the Ninawa provincial police chief was killed by a suicide bomber while inspecting the carnage.¹⁰¹ And on January 28th, a complex attack coordinating an IED attack and small arms fire conducted by AQI and Ansar al-Sunna insurgents killed five U.S. soldiers in the Sumer neighborhood in the southeastern part of the city.¹⁰²

The Zanjili explosion, in particular, raised the visibility of Mosul as an insurgent stronghold. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki made a speech two days after the explosion calling for a final, 'decisive battle' against AQI in Mosul.¹⁰³ Maliki said that reinforcements were being rushed to the city and that the fight would begin immediately.¹⁰⁴ Maliki's statements, however, belied the facts on the ground. Moving forces to Mosul had been planned long before and most of the forces had already arrived. More importantly, no one expected the fight for Mosul to be an end-all battle, nor end quickly. In Major General Hertling's words, "It is not going to be this climactic battle...It's going to be probably a slow process." This process had begun in December with the movement of forces to Mosul, efforts to begin establishing combat outposts (COP) across the city, and operations to develop intelligence about the enemy system in and around the city.

In February 2008, Coalition Forces continued operations against the AQI network targeting neighborhoods in both western and eastern Mosul. In the first two weeks of the month Coalition Forces detained a suicide bombing cell leader and his associates, another judge of an illegal terrorist court system, and a number of associates of a senior AQI foreign facilitator also believed to be responsible for the January 28th attack against Coalition soldiers.¹⁰⁵ Many of those individuals detained were associated with others detained or killed in December and January, indicating that a more developed intelligence picture was leading to greater operational success.

During February, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces also heavily targeted the Sumer and Palestine neighborhoods in the southeastern part of Mosul. These neighborhoods are the first point of entry into Mosul from the outer lying areas on the eastern side of the Tigris River south of the city. Sumer in particular has been a highly contested area with AQI using the neighborhood to project forces into other areas further north in eastern Mosul and also as a transit point in and out of the city on the eastern side. On February 7th, elements of the 1-8 Infantry battalion and the 2nd Iraqi Army Division began Operation Viking Harvest II in an effort

to clear the Sumer and Palestine neighborhoods of insurgents and establish a new COP.¹⁰⁶ The area was closed to traffic for three days in effort to stem the escape of insurgents.¹⁰⁷ On the first day of the operation, 41 individuals were detained in both targeted and cordon-and-search raids that were developed based on intelligence.¹⁰⁸ In the following days, a number of other wanted and suspected individuals were detained and a large weapons cache including suicide bomb vests and materials was found and cleared.¹⁰⁹

Operations in the southeastern part of Mosul ultimately led to a number of high-value captures. On February 18th, Coalition Forces captured Abd-al-Rahman Ibrahim Jasim Tha'ir, the Mosul military emir, who oversaw all of AQI's operations in Mosul.¹¹⁰ He was formerly the military emir for Bayji, but was moved to Mosul after the previous military emir was detained on January 21st.¹¹¹ Abd-al-Rahman sat at the top of a pyramid of various Mosul networks and cells. His capture helped develop intelligence about the southeastern network and led to several other important captures later in the month. Three days after Abd-al-Rahman's capture, Coalition Forces conducted another operation in southeastern Mosul targeting the alleged senior leader for the network in Bayji.¹¹² During the same week, Coalition Forces detained several other individuals on the western side of the city including an associate of numerous foreign AQI leaders in Samarra who recently relocated from Samarra to Mosul.¹¹³

Abd-al-Rahman's capture was important in terms of operations in Mosul and Ninawa province in general, but these three captures also highlight the move of AQI from further south along the Tigris River to Mosul. The individual from Samarra likely relocated because of the successful operations in months prior to clear Samarra of insurgents. Mosul may have just been a place to regroup. The Bayji area, however, does not seem to have been cleared of insurgents yet. The relocation of Abd-al-Rahman and the senior leader from Bayji to Mosul, along with similar cases in recent months, suggests that the Bayji area is still very active and that AQI is using the area as a reserve force for emirs captured or killed in Mosul and possibly elsewhere.

On February 27th, the intelligence gathered from Abd-al-Rahman and various other operations in February led Coalition Forces to the location of the AQI military emir for the southeastern region of the city, Abu Yasir al-Saudi, AKA Jar Allah.¹¹⁴ Jar Allah was a Saudi national who spent time fighting in Afghanistan before arriving in Iraq in August 2007 along with three other Saudis. Upon arriving in Iraq Jar Allah and his associates were sent to Mosul where they were to help supervise AQI activities in the city. They quickly became an important part of operations in Mosul and Jar Allah eventually took charge of the AQI network in the southeastern region of the city. Jar Allah was connected to the AQI senior leader for the northern Iraq networks and was an associate of Abu Ayyub al-Masri.

As the military emir for southeastern Mosul, Jar Allah was "a key operational leader" responsible for planning and conducting attacks across the city. Jar Allah's network was

responsible for the attack on Coalition Forces on January 28th that killed 5 soldiers in the Sumer neighborhood in southeastern Mosul. During this complex attack insurgents first fired on a Coalition patrol from a nearby mosque and then targeted the unit with an IED device. His network also constructed a large VBIED using 5,000 pounds of explosives packed inside a truck painted to look like a Red Crescent food relief truck. Coalition forces found and cleared this VBIED on February 15th before it could be used. In addition to directing AQI's operations in southeastern Mosul, Jar Allah was also involved in smuggling and kidnapping, and helped direct AQI's foreign terrorist facilitation activities in the city.

The following diagram was released by MNF-Iraq after Jar Allah's capture and shows the type of intelligence picture that Coalition Forces worked to develop since January and the significant progress made against not only the southeastern network, but the overall Mosul network.



Source: MNF-Iraq

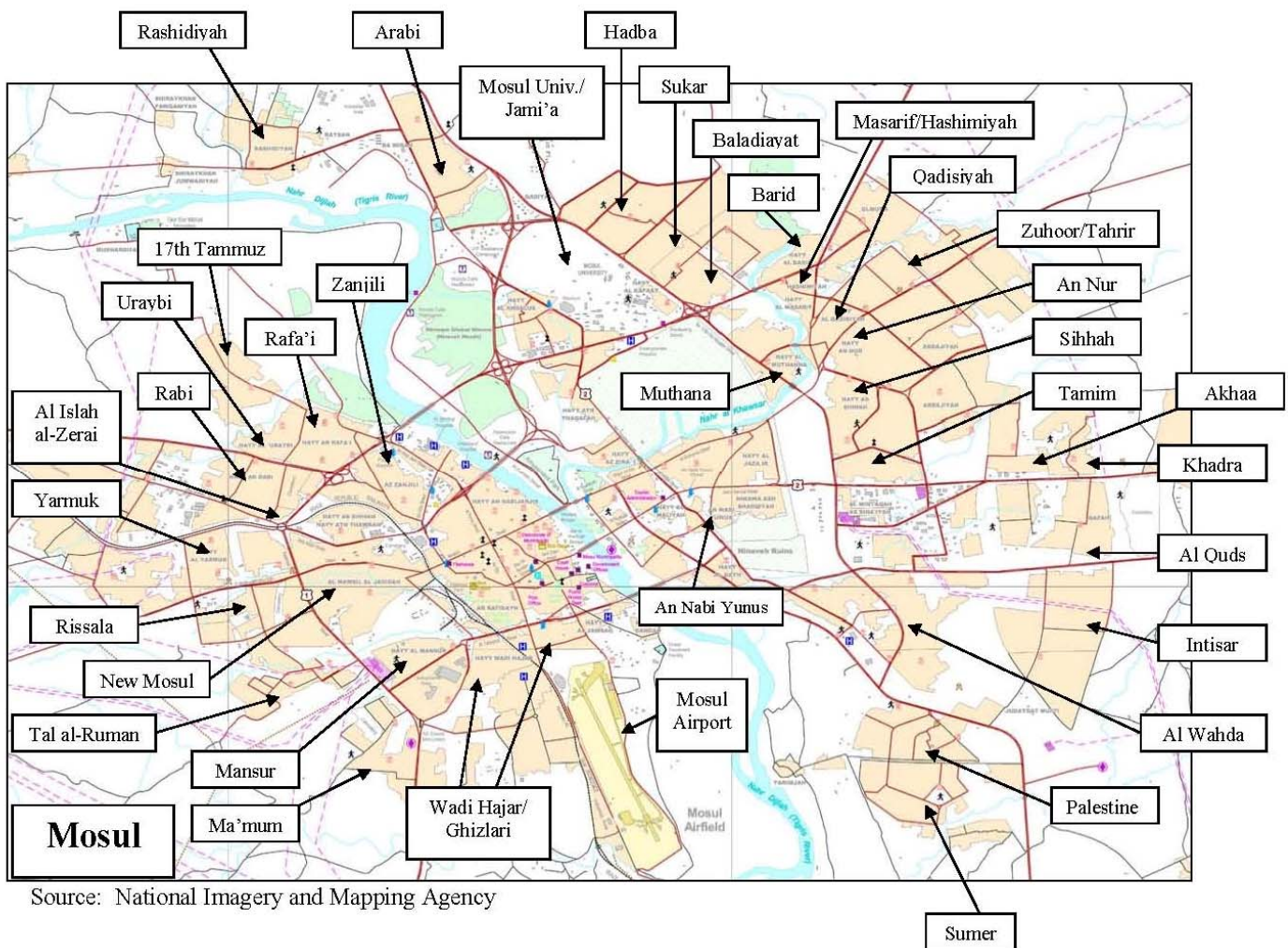
The unnamed military emir at the top of the chart is Abd-al-Rahman, who's name had not been released yet. Below Abd-al-Rahman is Jar Allah (Abu Yasir al-Saudi) and his southeast network. As the diagram depicts this network was fairly sophisticated with multiple cells in

charge of various activities ranging from RPG, IED and anti-aircraft attacks to administration and operational security. Many of Jar Allah's associates were also foreign nationals. In January and February, Coalition Forces captured 8 members of this network and killed 4 others. And in the days that followed Jar Allah's capture Coalition Forces continued to target the network.¹¹⁵ These operations led to another high value target later in the week. On March 8th, Coalition Forces killed Ahmad Husayn Ghanim 'Ali, also known as Abu Mansur, the security emir for east Mosul. Abu Mansur was AQI's deputy emir for the city and was a judge in the network's illegal court system.¹¹⁶

Operations in March and April have continued to target the southeastern network as well as other areas. Moreover, the formation of a more comprehensive strategy has emerged, which is described below after a description of the enemy system in Mosul.

The Enemy System in Mosul

Mosul is situated at a strategic crossroads in northern Iraq at the meeting point of west-east and north-south lines of communication. Looking along the west-east line, the important feature is Mosul’s proximity to the Syrian border. This line has been important to the Sunni insurgency since 2003. A lesser line also stretches from the east near the Iran-Sulaymaniyah area where Ansar al-Sunna still maintains a base of operations.¹¹⁷ The north-south line runs along Main Supply Route (MSR) Tampa from the Turkish border down through Mosul and then roughly follows the Tigris River Valley/MSR Tampa down through central Iraq. This line has functioned as one of the primary lines of communication for the Sunni insurgency, and, in particular, AQI.



Mosul’s strategic location and population have made it a hub for the Sunni insurgency in northern Iraq. The west-east and north-south lines connect leadership elements in Syria to those in Mosul and subsequently down to central Iraq. Coalition Forces assess that while Baghdad has always been the operational center of gravity for AQI, Mosul is the network’s strategic center of gravity – an area of interest that if lost would make AQI’s survival very difficult.¹¹⁸ First, Mosul

is critical for AQI's financing. Its location makes it a hub for financiers traveling back and forth between Syria and Iraq. The city also houses a number of large banks where wire transfers are received. Mosul is also the center for trade and industry in northern Iraq, which is important because AQI has relied on raising money through intimidation, extortion, fraudulent real estate deals, and kidnapping.¹¹⁹ Second, Mosul is the destination for foreign terrorists entering Iraq from Syria. Foreign fighters and future suicide bombers are given instructions on how to get to Mosul and from there link up with the network that then funnels them south into central Iraq.¹²⁰ Third, in addition to its role in funding and facilitation, Mosul has been a large urban sanctuary for AQI because of its location away from central Iraq. Insurgents fell back on Mosul in November 2004 and have now done so again.

At the beginning of March between one-half and two-thirds of the attacks in Iraq occurred in or around Mosul.¹²¹ AQI is considered the largest and most active terrorist group in the city, but there are also elements of Ansar al-Sunna, Jaysh Islamiya, 1920 Revolutionary Brigades, and Naqshibandi groups.¹²² Coalition intelligence officers believe there are 400 to 600 "hardcore" AQI terrorists and 1,200 to 1,600 nationalist insurgents and other individuals (often simply working for money).¹²³ Mosul is considered the last urban stronghold of AQI and is home to "a fractured insurgency of many different groups."¹²⁴ Coalition Forces believe that AQI has tried to regroup and reconstitute its network in Mosul, while attempting to unify the larger insurgency, which has become increasingly fractured.¹²⁵ There is some evidence that AQI and Ansar al Sunna have formed a working relationship in Mosul, but there is still infighting between elements of the insurgency, particularly AQI and the nationalist groups.¹²⁶ The ultimate goals of these different factions will likely remain irreconcilable, but there may be instances of tactical and operational cooperation as the insurgency is squeezed.

Mosul's enemy groups are mixed among the population across both the west and east sides of the city, but the west side and the eastern and northern suburbs of Sumer/Palestine and Rashidiyah are the main strongholds. Beyond Mosul, AQI uses suburbs, close villages, and villages out in the belts as support zones for operations in the city. These areas are homes to safe houses, more elaborate insurgent complexes, weapons caches, weapons assembly sites, and areas where AQI can simply escape security operations in the city.¹²⁷ Attacks on the west side of the city tend to target Coalition Forces, Iraqi Army, and Iraqi Police patrols, checkpoints, and infrastructure (COPs, bases, stations). Attacks on the east side also target security forces, but civilians in the largely Kurdish areas are heavily targeted as well.¹²⁸ Insurgents have also attacked Kurdish political party offices on the east side. Outside of the city insurgents mostly target security patrols along main routes. Attacks against security patrols are generally conducted with IEDs, while those against checkpoints and infrastructure tend to be conducted with VBIEDs and sometimes small arms fire. Large attacks against civilians are sometimes conducted with VBIEDs, but most tend to be small arms fire attacks or outright murder, like beheadings.

The pattern of these attacks suggests that AQI is trying to control roads and prevent patrols with IEDs both inside and outside of Mosul. At the same time checkpoints and infrastructure are targeted in order to thwart the establishment of an effective security structure across the city. Moreover, attacks against Kurdish civilians and political party offices are a deliberate effort to divide Arabs and Kurds in order to find sanctuary among an Arab population skeptical of Kurdish intentions in northern Iraq.

The Strategy to Secure Mosul

Through the first two months of 2008, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces captured or killed 142 AQI insurgents in Mosul including a number of senior leaders.¹²⁹ At the same time that Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces developed intelligence and conducted operations, they also worked to implement the first stages of a larger, more comprehensive strategy for clearing the city and establishing greater security. This strategy will include both kinetic and non-kinetic operations.

Major General Mark Hertling described the emerging strategy for Mosul as very similar to the strategy employed in Baghdad the previous year with Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces methodically taking control of key areas across the city and maintaining forces in these areas.¹³⁰ Commanders have stressed that this kinetic process of securing Mosul will take at least several months.¹³¹ The key to this strategy is moving security forces from large FOBs on the outskirts of the city to COPs in neighborhoods where they can sustain a 24/7 security presence and protect the population. By the beginning of March, Coalition Forces had already built 20 COPs across Mosul and more were in the planning stage.¹³²

The first COPs were built in western neighborhoods like Yarmuk and Rissala, eastern neighborhoods like Sumer, Palestine, and Intisar, and Rashidiyah in the north.¹³³ These neighborhoods are located just outside of central Mosul and many of them border key highways like MSR Tampa, which are important routes for Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces. These outer neighborhoods are also the links between insurgents operating inside and outside of the city. This approach suggests that Coalition Forces aim to establish security in these areas first and then expand security zones both toward center city and the outskirts.

Once COPs are established they house a combination of Coalition soldiers, Iraqi Army soldiers, and Iraqi Police officers. These forces then work together to collect intelligence and clear neighborhoods, establish both permanent and spot checkpoints in their area of operation, and conduct presence patrols. In doing so, the enemy does not enjoy sanctuary, or freedom of movement and supply. This helps to set the conditions for possible reconciliation and local

governance. Once COPs are established and security can be expanded outward, Coalition and Iraqi leaders try to link neighboring COPs to one another in order to form a seamless security blanket across the city. This process is still in the early stages in Mosul. Some of the areas that need to be cleared have not had a Coalition or Iraqi Army presence for 16 months or longer. Furthermore, insurgents on the west side of the city are considered among the most active and best organized in all of Iraq.¹³⁴ On top of this, tensions between a largely Kurdish Iraqi Army Division and Arab Iraqi Police units and population will make this process even more difficult.¹³⁵

Other ideas have also been discussed to try to deny enemy freedom of movement. In December, the Ninawa provincial council approved a plan to dig a large trench around the outside of Mosul and establish a series of entrances with checkpoints to better control who enters and exits the city.¹³⁶ It is not clear where this project stands at present. Coalition Forces, however, in a similar effort have been working to repair breaches to a twenty foot high earthen berm that was built around parts of the city after the November 2004 Battle of Mosul.¹³⁷ There have also been plans discussed by ISF to build large concrete barriers similar to those in Baghdad around problem areas like Sumer.¹³⁸

Outside of Mosul, commanders have stressed that operations in areas west and south of the city will be important for establishing security in Mosul. On the immediate outskirts of the city are a number of villages and industrial areas that insurgents have been operating from and where they take kidnapping victims. For example, the Badush area just west of the city where a large cement factory is located has provided a more rural operating area for insurgents out of the reach of forces in Mosul. The village areas of Salam and Yarimjah have provided similar sanctuary just southeast of the city. Further to the west, the areas of Tal Afar, Sinjar, and Biaj, and the villages along the corridor of the main highway that runs from the Syrian border through these areas to western Mosul will be targeted. To the south, the Tigris River Valley cities of Sharqat and Qayyarah, as well as smaller villages like Hammam al-Alil and al-Hadra will be targeted. And the southwest belt that swings between these west-east and north-south lines, which includes villages like Adba and Jurn, will also be targeted.

Military operations will be important for setting the conditions for greater security in Mosul, but the most important aspects of an enduring security structure will be the result of political integration and progress. First, local tribes and former military personnel and regime elements need to be integrated into security forces and local government. Second, the status of Kurdish areas in northern Iraq needs to be settled. To some degree these issues are interrelated. Beyond these two issues, the Government of Iraq (GOI) needs to support provincial reconstruction and provincial elections will help establish a more representative provincial government.

In 2003, parts of Mosul's large Sunni Arab population – particularly former Iraqi Army soldiers - lost a lot of political power when Saddam Hussein fell from power. Major General Petraeus worked hard to reintegrate the reconcilable part of this population while cracking down on the irreconcilable part in 2003, which helped ensure a smaller and less enthusiastic base of support for the insurgency. When security deteriorated in November 2004 and was only reestablished with a large Kurdish military presence, an uneasy balance was established across the city with greater support for AQI and other insurgents stemming from distrust of Kurdish intentions. This uneasy balance has ossified to some degree and could be exploited by AQI. Part of the strategy to secure Mosul, therefore, requires working with local Arab tribes and doing more to reintegrating Arabs into security forces.

The SoI programs have been successful in parts of Iraq, but commanders have stressed that they are unlikely to work in Mosul because of Kurdish fears of organized Arab security forces operating outside of a formal security structure. There are currently some 1,200 SoI members in Ninawa mostly south of the city among the Jiburi tribe. In January, when talk about a 'decisive battle' in Iraq circulated, Iraqi leaders stressed that participation from local Mosuli tribes was needed and that efforts would be made to reach out to them.¹³⁹ On February 18th, Prime Minister Maliki traveled to Ninawa to meet with a delegation of leaders from the Jiburi tribe to explain the upcoming operation and the importance that Iraq's tribes have had in helping secure Iraq in the last year and promoting reconciliation.¹⁴⁰ Efforts to reach out to the Shammar tribe in western Ninawa have not been as successful because of the support that AQI receives from some tribe members and intense disputes with Kurds over the status of certain western cities like Sinjar.¹⁴¹

Since January, there has also been an effort to recruit Iraqi security forces from among Mosul's Arab population, especially from west Mosul where Coalition and Kurdish Iraqi Army soldiers have a difficult time operating. In February, the NOC was able to enlist 2,200 new soldier and officer candidates for the Iraqi Army during a recruiting drive. 1,300 of the individuals were new recruits, while 900 were former noncommissioned and commissioned Iraqi Army officers. An announcement was also made that a new recruiting center would be opened in western Mosul to continue receiving recruits from the area.¹⁴²

The divide between Arabs and Kurds in Ninawa province has been a problem since the beginning of the Iraq War. Large swaths of Kurdish majority areas in Ninawa, including Mosul, are eligible under article 140 of the Constitution to be annexed by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), and Kurdish officials in the Ninawa provincial government are actively pushing measures to move this process forward.¹⁴³ Kurds do not constitute a majority in the province, but control the Governor and deputy Governor posts, as well as the Ninawa Provincial Council. Kurdish political parties and peshmerga forces have been active in Mosul since the first days of the war as detailed above. They have also been active in the northern and western parts

of the province as well. There is a perceived Kurdish expansionism that many Arabs in Ninawa fear. The United Nations is currently working this issue, and resolution of some of the contested areas in Ninawa and elsewhere could go a long way toward helping establish security in northern Iraq.

At the same time that operations and political integration move forward, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces, and local government will begin efforts to reconstruct secure parts of Mosul that have been devastated by attacks in the last year. The city and province will both need support from the GOI for these efforts, but GOI funding of provinces has been problematic across Iraq and the north should expect no different. Later in the year, provincial elections will take place, which will also be important for political progress in Mosul and Ninawa. Sunni Arabs largely boycotted the 2005 elections and as a result Kurdish political parties occupy most government positions in the province. Participation by Sunni Arabs in the upcoming elections will hopefully redress some of the imbalances and provide a legitimate outlet for current grievances.

Conclusion

The fight for Mosul will be long and will play out over the coming months. Coalition and Iraqi forces will likely employ a similar strategy to that employed in Baghdad with some key differences. While Baghdad was cleared with twenty Coalition battalions, there are only two in Mosul. The lion's share of the burden will therefore fall on Iraqi Security Forces. As a result, the operation is likely to be much slower than if it were conducted by Coalition Forces. The Iraqi Security Forces are still building capacity and their shortcomings in logistics and supply have long been a problem in Mosul. This will be an important test to see whether a slimmed down Coalition Force can work with Iraqi Security Forces to create and maintain security in an area that is a sanctuary for a large number of determined insurgents.

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¹⁶ Phillip Robertson, "An Arab Mogadishu: A Report from the Most Violent Place in Iraq," *Salon*, April 23, 2003.

¹⁷ David Rohde, "In Newly Occupied Mosul, U.S. Colonel Faces 1.7 Million Added Responsibilities," *New York Times*, April 12, 2003; Michael Gordon R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: the Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), p. 450.

¹⁸ David Rohde, "Sniper Fire Greets GIs in Big City in North," *New York Times*, April 11, 2003; Phillip Robertson, "An Arab Mogadishu: A Report from the Most Violent Place in Iraq," *Salon*, April 23, 2003.

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