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# **The Developing Iraqi Insurgency: Status at End-2004**

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Please note that this is a working draft designed to solicit comments and additional data, and will be steadily revised and updated over time.

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## **I. Failures in Recognizing the Growth and Character of the Insurgent Threat**

Much has been made of the decision to disband the Iraqi Army, and many see it as a key failure in US policy. As has been explained earlier, however, the decision needs to be put in perspective. Most of the Iraqi Army had either been shattered in the field or had deserted before ORHA, much less the CPA, entered the country. In many cases, key facilities had been destroyed or looted to the point where barracks could not be occupied. Not “disbanding” was not a choice in any serious sense; it had already happened, and events since that time have shown that creating effective forces would have required a massive training, equipment, and facility improvement effort – and massive purging of low grade forces and inadequate leaders.

What *is* valid criticism is that Ambassador Bremer, the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), seems to have made this decision after limited consultation with Washington, and that the US formally dissolved the existing army without providing either the Iraqi people or the Iraqi ex-military with any clear or convincing plan to create a new one or to include those who had served in the previous force. It also excluded former Ba’ath and career officers and personnel who were competent and had simply gone along with the former regime to survive or because of the very national threats that developed during the Iran-Iraq War. If the overall manning of the leadership cadres consisted of timeservers, uniformed bureaucrats, and men seeking their own advantage, there were still many in these cadres that had served with honor in previous wars.

It is important to note that Ambassador Bremer did this with strong encouragement – if not pressure – from Iraqi exile leaders like Ahmed Chalabi. Nevertheless, the end result was to further alienate an already hostile Sunni leadership, and largely exclude – rather than co-opt – senior Iraqis in both the military and security services.

### ***Denial as a Method of Counter-Insurgency Warfare***

More broadly, the US did not react effectively as it became clear during the fall and winter of 2003 that the Iraqi people did not want Coalition forces to perform security and police missions as the post war insurgency steadily gathered momentum. The US minimized the insurgent and criminal threat and exaggerated the popular support for US and Coalition efforts. Polls as early as the summer of 2003 showed that at least one-third of Arab Sunnis while over 15% of Shi’ites supported attacks on Coalition forces. The numbers may now be substantially higher.

The US assumed for the first year after the fall of Saddam Hussein that it was dealing with a limited number of insurgents that Coalition forces would defeat well before the election. It did not see the threat level that would emerge if it did not provide jobs or pensions for Iraqi career officers, or co-opt them into the nation building effort. It was slow to see that some form of transition payments were necessary for the young Iraqi soldiers that faced massive, nation-wide unemployment. As late as the spring of 2004, the US still failed to acknowledge the true scale of the insurgent threat and the extent to which popular resentment of Coalition forces would rise if it did not act immediately to rebuild a convincing mix of Iraqi military and security forces.

The US failed to establish the proper political conditions to reduce Iraqi popular resentment of the Coalition forces and create the political climate that would ease the task of replacing them with effective Iraqi forces. It did not make it clear that the US and Britain had no economic ambitions in Iraq and would not establish permanent bases, or keep Iraqi forces weak to ensure their control. It did not react to the immediate threat that crime and looting presented throughout Iraq almost immediately after the war, and which made personal security the number one concern of the Iraqi people. It acted as if it had years to rebuild Iraq using its own plans, rather than months to shape the climate in which Iraqis could do it.

### ***Failing to Admit the Scope of the Problem though Mid-2004***

As a result, the US failed to come to grips with the Iraqi insurgency during the first year of US occupation in virtually every important dimension. It was slow to react to the growth of the insurgency in Iraq, to admit it was largely domestic in character, and to admit it had significant popular support. For all of 2003, and most of the first half of 2004, it referred to the attackers as terrorists, kept issuing estimates that they could not number more than 5,000, and claimed they were a mixture of outsider elements and diehard former regime loyalists (FRLs). It largely ignored the warnings provided by Iraqi opinion polls, and claimed that its political, economic, and security efforts were either successful or would soon become so. In short, it failed to honestly assess the facts on the ground in a manner reminiscent of Vietnam.

As late as July 2004, the Administration's senior spokesmen still seemed to live in a fantasyland in terms of their public announcements, perception of the growing Iraqi hostility to the use of Coalition forces, and the size of the threat. They were still talking about a core insurgent force of only 5,000, when many Coalition experts on the ground in Iraq saw the core as at least 12,000-16,000.

Such US estimates of the core structure of the Iraqi insurgency also understated the problem, even if the figures had been accurate. From the start, there were many part-time insurgents and criminals who worked with insurgents. In some areas, volunteers could be quickly recruited and trained, both for street fighting and terrorist and sabotage missions. As in most insurgencies, "sympathizers" within the Iraqi government and Iraqi forces, as well as the Iraqis working for the Coalition, media, and NGOs, often provided excellent human intelligence without violently taking part in the insurgency. Saboteurs can readily operate within the government and every aspect of the Iraqi economy.

Iraqi and foreign journalists provided an inadvertent (and sometimes deliberate) propaganda arm, and media coverage of insurgent activity and attacks provides a de facto command and communications net to insurgents. This net provides warning, tells insurgents what attacks do and do not work, and allows them to coordinate their attacks to reinforce those of other insurgent cells and groups. As in all insurgencies, a race developed between the insurgents and the Coalition and Iraqi Interim Government forces to see whose strength could grow faster and who best learns from their enemies.

## II. Evolving Threat Tactics and Pressure on Government Forces

From roughly August of 2003 to the present, Iraqi insurgents have developed a steadily more sophisticated mix of tactics, all of which required steadily more competent and combat capable Iraqi government military, security, and police forces. There are no reliable unclassified counts of insurgent attacks and incidents, or of the casualties on both sides. The US reports only on its own casualties, and the Iraqi government has stopped making its own estimates public. Estimates of Insurgent casualties are tenuous at best.

The NGO Coordinating Committee on Iraq has, however, made estimates of the recent patterns of attack which seem broadly correct and illustrate key patterns in the fighting:

- During September 2003 through October 2004, there has been a rough balance of type of attack between improvised explosive device (IED), direct fire, and indirect fire, with a consistent but much smaller number of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED). Numbers of attacks varied significantly by month. There was been a slow decline from well over 400 attacks each by improvised explosive device (IED), direct fire weapons, and indirect fire weapons to around 300. There was also, however, a slow increase in attacks using VBIEDs.
- Attack distribution also varies, with a steadily rising number of attacks in the area of Mosul in the north. Baghdad, however, has been the scene of roughly twice as many attacks and incidents as the other governorates, with 300-400 a month on average. Al Anbar, Salah-al-din, and Ninewa have had roughly one-third to one half as many. Babil and Diyala have averaged around 100 per month, Lower levels of attack have taken place in Tamin and Basra,
- Since the Shi'ite fighting with Sadr has ceased, and the peak of insurgent activity in the south has declined, there have been relatively low levels of attack in the Karbala, Thi-Qar, Wassit, Missan, Muthanna, Najaf, and Qaddisyaa, governorates.
- Erbil, Dahok, and Sulaymaniyah are northern governorates administered by the two Kurdish Regional Governments (KRGs) and have long been relatively peaceful.
- Attacks fit a broad pattern during the day, although 60% of the attacks reported are unspecified. Those that do have a time reported are 10% in the morning, 11% in the afternoon, and 19% at night.

A rough NGO Coordinating Committee on Iraq estimate of targets and casualties for the from September 2004 to October 2004 is shown in the figure below and helps illustrate the continuing diversity of the attacks and that far more than American casualties are involved:

**Table 1****Illustrative Patterns in Targeting and Casualties (September 2003-October 2004)**

Target	Number of Attacks/Incidents	Killed	Wounded
Coalition Forces	3227	451	1002
Coalition Air Convoy	49	55	32
CPA/US Officials/Green Zone	32	60	206
Diplomatic Mission	11	7	9
Local Authority	31	56	81
Contractor	113	210	203
Civilian	180	1981	3467
Criminal & Suspect	49	31	972
ICDC	58	191	310
Kurds Army	31	25	8
Police	209	480	1012
UN	67	2	3
IO	1	2	0
NGO	5	5	11
Journalist	8	27	38
Interpreter	7	17	6
Public Property	182	5	15
Unspecified	43	1	1

***Political, Psychological, and Information Warfare Lessons***

One key point that needs to be remember is that the media tends to focus on dramatic incidents with high casualties, and described these as some sudden change in tactics. In reality, the patterns of insurgent activity have evolved broadly and have come to include a wide range of tactics which are exploited whenever a given group finds them convenient, and which are repeated and refined with time. Insurgents learned the following methods and tactics relating to political, psychological, and information warfare:

- **Attack the structures of governance and security by ideological, political, and violent means:** Use ideological and political means to attack the legitimacy of the government and nation building process. Intimidate and subvert the military and security forces. Intimidate and attack government officials and institutions at the national, regional, and local levels. Strike at infrastructure, utilities, and services in ways that appear to show the government cannot provide essential economic services or personal security.
- **Create alliances of convenience and informal networks with other groups to attack the US, various elements of the Iraqi Interim Government, and efforts at nation building.** The informal common fronts operate on the principal that the “enemy of my enemy” is my temporary friend. At the same time, movements “franchise” to create individual cells and independent units, creating diverse mixes of enemies that are difficult to attack.
- **Link asymmetric warfare to crime and looting; exploit poverty and economic desperation.** Use criminals to support attacks on infrastructure and nation building activity; raise funds, and undermine security. Exploit unemployment to strengthen dedicated insurgent and terrorist cells. Blur the lines between threat forces, criminal elements, and part-time forces.

- **Exploit Arab satellite television as well as traditional media:** Islamist movements and other insurgents learned how to capture maximum exposure in regional media, use the Internet, and above all exploit the new Arab satellite news channels.
- **Maintain a strategy of constant attrition, but strike hard according to a calendar of turning points and/or at targets with high political, social, and economic impact:** Insurgents and Islamists learned the importance of a constant low-level body count and the creation of a steady climate of violence. This forces the US into a constant, large-scale security effort; makes it difficult for Iraqi forces to take hold; puts constant pressure on US and Iraqi forces to disperse; and ensures constant media coverage.

At the same time, insurgents and Islamists showed a steadily more sophisticated capability to exploit holidays, elections and other political events, and sensitive targets both inside the countries that are the scene of their primary operations and in the US and the West. Attacks on Kurdish and Shi'ite religious festivals are cases in point.

- **Push "hot buttons:" Try to find forms of attack that provoke disproportionate fear and "terror" to force the US Iraqi forces into costly, drastic, and sometimes provocative responses:** Terrorists and insurgents have found that attacks planned for maximum political and psychological effects often have the additional benefit of provoking over-reaction. Hamas and the PIJ exploited such tactics throughout the peace process.
- **Game Regional, Western, and other outside media:** Use interview access, tapes, journalist hostage takings and killings, politically-led and motivated crowds, drivers and assistants to journalists, and timed and targeted attacks to attempt to manipulate Western and outside media. Manipulate US official briefings with planted questions.
- **Use Americans and other foreigners as proxies:** There is nothing new about using Americans and other foreigners as proxies for local regimes, or attacking them to win support for ideological positions and causes. There has, however, been steadily growing sophistication in the timing and nature of such attacks, and in exploiting softer targets such as American businessmen in the country of operations, on striking at US and allied targets in other countries, or in striking at targets in the US. It is also clear that such attacks receive maximum political and media attention in the US.
- **Attack UN, NGO, Embassies, aid personnel, and foreign contractor business operations:** Attacking such targets greatly reduces the ability to carry out nation building and stability operations to win hearts and minds. Attacking the "innocent," and curtailing their operations or driving organizations out of the country has become an important focus of insurgents and Islamist extremist attacks.
- **Kidnap, kill, and/or intimidate women and cadres of foreign workers:** Killing and kidnapping women, particularly those working in NGOs and aid projects gets great media attention and leads some organizations to leave the county. Kidnapping or killing groups of foreign workers puts political pressure on their governments, gets high local and regional media attention, and sometimes leads governments to stop their workers from going to Iraq.
- **Attack other religious and ethnic groups in Iraq:** Targeting other groups like Shi'ites and Kurds, using car bombings for mass killings, hitting at shrines and festivals forces the dispersal of security forces, makes the areas involved seem insecure, undermines efforts at governance, and offers the possibility of using civil war as a way to defeat the Coalition and Iraqi Interim Government's efforts at nation building.
- **Kidnap, kill, and/or intimidate professionals, Iraqi media and intelligentsia, "mystery killings:"** Steady killing and intimidate of individual professions, media figures, and intelligentsia in threatened areas offers a series of soft targets that cannot be defended, but where a cumulative pattern of killing and intimidation makes governance difficult, creates major problems for security and police forces, weakens the economy, and exacerbates the general feeling of insecurity to the point where people lose faith in the Iraqi government, Coalition, and political process.

- **“Horror” attacks, atrocities, and alienation:** Whether or not the tactics were initially deliberate, insurgents in Iraq found that atrocities like desecrating corpses and beheadings are effective political and psychological weapons for those Islamist extremists whose goal is to divide the West from the Islamic world, and create an unbridgeable “clash of civilizations.”

Experts have long pointed out that one of the key differences between Islamist extremist terrorism and previous forms of terrorism is that they are not seeking to negotiate with those they terrorize, but rather to create conditions that can drive the West away, undermine secular and moderate regimes in the Arab and Islamic worlds, and create the conditions under which they can create “Islamic” states according to their own ideas of “Puritanism.”

This is why it serves the purposes of Islamist extremists, as well as some of the more focused opponents of the US and the West, to create mass casualties and carry out major strikes, or carry out executions and beheadings, even if the result is to provoke hostility and anger. The goal of Bin Laden and those like him is not to persuade the US or the West, it is rather to so alienate them from the Islamic and Arab world that the forces of secularism in the region will be sharply undermined, and Western secular influence can be controlled or eliminated. The goal of most Iraqi insurgents is narrower – drive the US and its allies out of Iraq – but involves many of the same methods.

Seen in this context, the more horrifying the attack, or incident, the better, and even if it involves Iraqi military, security, and police forces. Simple casualties do not receive the same media attention. They are a reality of war. Killing (or sometimes releasing) innocent hostages does grab the attention of the world media. Large bombs in crowds do the same, as does picking targets whose innocence or media impact grabs headlines. Desecrating corpses, beheading people, and similar acts of violence get even more media attention -- at least for a while.

Such actions also breed anger and alienation in the US and the West and to provoke excessive political and media reactions, more stringent security measures, violent responses, and all of the other actions that help provoke a “clash of civilizations.” The US and the West are often provoked into playing into the hands of such attackers.

At the same time, any attack or incident that provokes massive media coverage and political reactions appears to be a “victory” to those who support Islamist extremism or those who are truly angry at the US – even though the actual body count is often low, and victory does not mean creating stronger forces or winning political control. Each such incident can be used to damage the US and Western view of the Arab and Islamic worlds.

- **Deprive the central, regional, and local governments and efforts to expand legitimacy. Attack nation building and stability targets:** There is nothing new about attacking key economic targets, infrastructure, and aspects of governance critical to the functioning of the state in an effort to disrupt its economy, undermine law enforcement and security, and encourage instability. Iraqi insurgent and Islamist attacks on aid workers and projects; and their role in encouraging looting, sabotage, and theft did, however, demonstrate a growing sophistication in attacking stability efforts and tangible progress in aid and governance. These tactics also interact synergistically with the above tactics.
- **Confuse the identity of the attacker; exploit conspiracy theories:** Insurgents and Islamists learned that a mix of silence, multiple claims to be the attacker, new names for attacking organizations, and uncertain levels of affiliation both make it harder for the US to respond. They also produced more media coverage and speculation.

As of yet, the number of true false flag operations has been limited. However, in Iraq and elsewhere, attacks have often accompanied by what seem to be deliberate efforts to advance conspiracy theories to confuse the identity of the attacker or to find ways to blame defenders of the US for being attacked. In addition, conspiracy theories charging the US with deliberately or carelessly failing to provide an adequate defense have been particularly effective.

- **Seek to create sanctuaries like Fallujah; Shelter in mosques, shrines, and high value targets, and targets with high cultural impact:** Again, exploiting facilities of religious, cultural, and



political sensitivity is not a new tactic. However, as operations against Sadr and in Fallujah have shown, the tactics raise the media profile, create a defensive deterrent, and can be exploited to make the US seem anti-Islamic or to be attacking a culture and not a movement.

- **Exploit, exaggerate, and falsify US attacks that cause civilian casualties and collateral damage, friendly fire against local allies, and incidents where the US can be blamed for being anti-Arab and anti-Islam:** Terrorists and insurgents have found they can use the media, rumor, and conspiracy theories to exploit the fact the US often fights a military battle without proper regard to the fact it is also fighting a political, ideological, and psychological war.

Real incidents of US misconduct such as the careless treatment of detainees and prisoners, and careless and excessive security measures are cases in point. So too are careless political and media rhetoric by US officials and military officers.

Bin Laden, the Iraqi insurgents, etc., all benefit from every Western action that unnecessarily angers or frustrates the Arab and Islamic worlds. They are not fighting to influence Western or world opinion; they are fighting a political and psychological war to dominate Iraq and the Arab and Islamic worlds.

### *Lessons About Methods of Attack and Combat*

There is no tight dividing line between tactics focused on the political and psychological nature of war and military tactics. However, some of the major adaptations that insurgents and terrorists in Iraq made in terms of warfare and modes of attack include:

- **Mix crude and sophisticated IEDs:** Hezbollah should be given credit for having first perfected the use of explosives in well structured ambushes, although there is nothing new about such tactics -- the Afghans used them extensively against the Soviets. Iraq has, however, provided a unique opportunity for insurgents and Islamist extremists to make extensive use of IEDs by exploiting its massive stocks of arms. The Iraqi attackers also learned to combine the extensive use of low grade IEDs, more carefully targeted sophisticated IEDs, and very large car bombs and other devices to create a mix of threats and methods that is much more difficult to counter than reliance on more consistent types of bombs and target sets.
- **Suicide bombs, car bombs, and mass bombings:** The use of such tactics has increased steadily since 1999, in part due to the high success rate relative to alternative methods of attack. It is not always clear that suicide-bombing techniques are tactically necessary. In many cases, timed devices might produce the same damage. Events in Iraq have shown, however, that suicide bombers still have a major psychological impact and gain exceptional media attention. They also serve as symbols of dedication and commitment, can be portrayed as a form of Islamic martyrdom, and attract more political support and attention among those sympathetic to the cause involved.
- **Attack LOCs, rear area, and support activity:** Iraqi insurgents soon found that dispersed attacks on logistics and support forces often offer a higher chance of success than attacks on combat forces and defended sites, and makes the fight wars based on “deep support” rather than “deep strikes” beyond the FEBA.
- **Strike at highly visible targets with critical economic and infrastructure visibility.** Water and power facilities have a broad political, media, economic and social impact. Striking at critical export earning facilities like Iraq's northern export pipeline from the Kirkuk oil fields to the IT-1A storage tanks near Baiji, where oil accumulates before it is pumped further north to Ceyhan has sharply affected the government's revenues, forced it to create special protection forces, and gain world attention.
- **Kill Iraqi elites and “soft targets”:** The insurgents soon found it was far easier to kill Iraqi officials and security personnel, and their family members, than Americans. They also found it was easier to kill mid-level officials than better-protected senior officials. In some areas, simply killing educated elites and/or their family members -- doctors, professionals, etc. -- could paralyze

much of the nation building process, create a broad climate of insecurity, and force the US and Iraqi forces to disperse resources in defensive missions or simply have to stand aside and tolerate continuing attacks.

- **Target elections, the political, process, and governance:** Elections and the local presence of government are soft disperse targets whose operation is critical to political legitimacy. Hitting these targets helps derail the political process, gets media visibility, offers vulnerable "low hanging fruit," and intimidates the government and population in much wider areas than those subjected to direct attack.
- **Strike at major aid and government projects after completion; break up project efforts when they acquire visibility or have high levels of employment:** Insurgents and terrorists often simply struck at the most vulnerable projects, but do seem to have learned that timing their attacks, looting, sabotage, and intimidation to strike when projects were completed meant the Coalition and government aid efforts have maximum cost with minimum effect, and striking at projects when the security forces protecting workers and aid teams were no longer there. They also often led the local population to blame the Coalition or government for not keeping promises or providing the proper protection. Alternatively, breaking up project efforts when they began to have maximum local visibility and employment impact had many of the same effects.
- **Hit the softest element of Iraqi military, security, and police forces:** The insurgents found they could strike at men on leave, their families, recruits or those seeking to enlist, green troops and trainees, and low quality units with limited fear of effective retaliation. High profile mass killings got major media attention. Moreover, isolated forward elements in hostile or threatened areas not only were vulnerable, but successful attacks broke up governance, aid efforts, and intimidated local populations.
- **Make better use of light weapons like automatic weapons, sniping, RPGs, and mortars; attack from remote locations or use timed devices:** While much will depend on the level of insurgent and Islamist extremist access to arms, Iraq and Afghanistan have seen a steady improvement in the use of systems like mortars and anti-tank weapons, and efforts to acquire Manpads, ATGMs, mortars, rockets, and timed explosives. The quality of urban and road ambushes has improved strikingly in Iraq, as has the ability to set up rapid attacks, and exploit the vulnerability of soft skinned vehicles.
- **Create informal distributed networks for C4IBM—deliberately or accidentally:** Like drug dealers before them, Iraqi insurgent and Islamist extremists have learned enough about COMINT and SIGINT to stop using most vulnerable communications assets, and to bypass many – if not most – of the efforts to control cash flow and money transfers.

The use of messengers, direct human contact, coded messages through the Internet, propaganda web pages, and more random methods of electronic communication are all cases in point. At the broader level, however, insurgents in Iraq seem to have adapted to having cells and elements operate with considerable autonomy, and by loosely linking their operations by using the media and reporting on the overall pattern of attacks to help determine the best methods and targets.

Smuggling, drug sales, theft and looting, and direct fund transfers also largely bypass efforts to limit operations through controls on banking systems, charities, etc. Under these conditions, a lack of central control and cohesive structure may actually be an asset – allowing highly flexible operations with minimal vulnerability to roll-up and attack.

The existence of parallel, and not conflicting, groups of hostile non-state actors provides similar advantages and has the same impact. The fact that insurgent and Islamist extremist groups operate largely independently, and use different tactics and target sets, greatly complicates US operations and probably actually increases overall effectiveness.

- **Make cities and towns urban sanctuaries and defensive morasses:** Iraqi insurgents found that cities with supportive and/or accepting populations can be made into partial sanctuaries and centers for defensive fighting and ambushes, and that tactical defeat can normally be dealt with by dispersal and hiding among the civilian population. Such tactics combine well with attacks on

local authorities and security forces friendly to the US, efforts to block nation building at the local level, and efforts to exploit religion, ethnicity, tribalism, etc.

- **Use neighboring states as partial sanctuaries:** While scarcely a new tactic, Iraqi insurgents have made increased use of cross border operations and taken advantage of the difficulties in securing the Syrian, Iranian, and Saudi borders. The Vietnamese used the same tactic in Cambodia and Laos, however, and so have many other insurgent forces. The idea of securing a nation based on securing the territory within its tactical boundaries is often a tactical myth.
- **Exploit weaknesses in US human intelligence (HUMINT), battle damage assessment (BDA), and damage characterization capabilities:** Iraqi insurgents, and other Islamist extremists learned that US intelligence is optimized around characterizing, counting, and targeting things, rather than people, and the US has poor capability to measure and characterize infantry and insurgent numbers, wounded, and casualties. They exploit these weaknesses in dispersal, in conducting attacks, in concealing the extent of losses, and in manipulating the media by claiming civilian casualties and collateral damage.
- **Carry out sequential ambushes:** Increasingly carry out complex mixes of sequential ambushes to draw in and attack Iraqi and US responders to the initial or previous follow-on attacks.
- **Exploit slow Iraqi and US reaction times at the local tactical level, particularly in built up areas:** Learn to exploit the delays in US response efforts, and rigidities in US tactical C<sup>4</sup>I behavior, to attack quickly and disperse.
- **Exploit fixed Iraqi and US patterns of behavior:** Take advantage of any tendency to repeat tactics, security, movement patterns, and other behavior; find vulnerabilities and attack.
- **Hit at US HUMINT links and translators:** US dependence on Iraqi translators and intelligence sources is a key area of US vulnerability and one the insurgents have learned to focus on.
- **Use “resurgence” and reinfiltration – dig in, hide, and reemerge:** Disperse under pressure or when defeat seems likely. Let the US take an “empty” city or objective. “Resurge” when the US tactical presence declines.
- **Use incident frequencies, distribution of attacks, and tactics that strain or defeat US intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (IS&R) assets and ability to support Iraqi forces:** There is no question that assets like RPVs, aircraft, SIGINT systems, etc. can provide significant capability *when they are available*. It is unclear whether it is deliberate or not, but the geographic spread and daily incident count in Iraq indicates that insurgent movements and actions often reach numbers too large to cover. In fact, the US averaged some 1,700-2,000 patrols per day during May 2004. While it is nice to talk about netcentric warfare, it is a lot harder to get a big enough net.

Insurgents learned that the US has less ability to track and characterize irregular forces, insurgent/terrorist teams, and urban and dispersed infantry than forces using mechanized weapons or significant numbers of vehicles. Blending into the civilian population has worked well for local insurgents and Islamists in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and Iraqi insurgents learned that they can exploit rules of engagement where the US and Iraqi government forces do not have soldiers or agents on the ground to perform targeting and IFF functions. As valuable as IS&R assets are, they do not provide some critical kinds of situational awareness with any reliability.

- **Choose a vulnerable Iraqi and US force:** Deny the US and Iraqi forces a large, cohesive enemy while attacking small or dispersed elements of US and Iraqi forces, facilities, or targets.
- **Counter USIS&R capabilities by adapting new techniques of communication and interaction:** The steady leakage of details on US and allied intelligence collection methods has led Islamist extremist and terrorist movements to make more use of couriers and direct financial transfer; use electronic communications more safely; screen recruits more carefully, find ways to communicate through the Internet the US cannot target, disperse better, and improve their hierarchy and cell structure.

- **Counter US and Iraqi government IS&R assets with superior HUMINT:** Developments in Iraq indicate that the US faces a repetition of its experience in Vietnam in the sense that as various insurgent factions organize, they steadily improve their intelligence and penetration of organizations like the CPA, CJTF-7, the Iraqi government and security forces, and the Iraqi factions backing nation building.

Like Vietnam, Iraq is a warning that hostile HUMINT sources are often pushed into providing data because of family ties, a fear of being on the losing side, direct and indirect threats, etc. In Iraq's case, it seems likely that family, clan, and ethnic loyalties have made many supposedly loyal Iraqis become at least part time sources, and that US vetting will often be little more than either a review of past ties or checks on the validity of data being provided. The end result may be an extremely high degree of transparency on US, Iraqi government, aid, and every other aspect of Iraqi operations. This will often provide excellent targeting data on key US and allied officials, events, etc. It can include leverage and blackmail, and vulnerability data, as well as warning of US and other military operations. Dual loyalty and HUMINT penetration of Iraqi security and military forces may be the rule, rather than the exception.

### **III. The Evolving Nature of the Insurgency**

The present level of the threat in Iraq is all too real, and Iraqi Interim Government claims that some 16 of Iraq's provinces are secure are clearly untrue. There is a significant level of security in 12 provinces, and the US and IIG have won significant victories in Najaf and Fallujah. Even most areas where insurgents do operate, and have significant local influence, have divided populations and are not areas the insurgents' control. Moreover, if one looks at the total population of all the scattered cities and areas where insurgents and terrorists largely dominate the area, it does not exceed 6-9% of Iraq's total population.

The battle of Fallujah in November 2004 is a particularly striking example of a tactical victory. It is reported to have killed some 1,200 insurgents and led to the capture of nearly 2000, at the cost of 54 American and eight Iraqi lives.<sup>1</sup> Fallujah remains a troubled city, and insurgents are still active at low levels in parts of Fallujah, but the loss of the city has deprived Sunni insurgents and terrorist groups of their one true sanctuary inside Iraq.

At the same time, the Iraqi Interim Government and US can scarcely claim that they are clearly moving towards victory. The number of incidents has declined somewhat since Fallujah, but major insurgent attacks have occurred in Baghdad, Mosul, Kerbala, and Najaf. The US lost some 24 dead and 60 wounded in one attack on a mess tent in Mosul on December 21, 2002.<sup>2</sup> Some 68 Iraqis had been killed in attacks in Kerbala and Najaf a few days earlier, and some 175 wounded.<sup>3</sup> The Sunni triangle, area along the Tigris, and "triangle of death" south of Baghdad are all areas of intensive Sunni insurgent activity, and the stability of Shi'ite and Kurdish areas remains uncertain.

Iraq faces three elections during 2005: the January 30<sup>th</sup> legislative election, the constitutional referendum, and full national election at the end of the year. Insurgents will have every incentive to create as much political turmoil as possible, as well as continue their attacks on the Iraqi government, economy, intelligentsia, security forces, and the Coalition.

There is no way to quantify how the development of Iraqi military, security, and police forces has kept pace with the development of effective Iraqi government forces. In any case, numerical comparisons are largely pointless. The ratio of security forces to insurgents sometimes has to reach levels of 12:1 through 30:1 in order to provide security in a given area, while in other cases, a small number of security forces can decapitate a movement or cell and end it. In any case, intangibles like the battle for political perceptions and "hearts and minds" are often far more critical than the numbers of insurgents and defenders.

Some things are clear. As Chapter III has described, threat forces have evolved, not just Iraqi military, security, and police forces. The insurgents and terrorists have grown in capability and size, although serious fighting in Fallujah, Mosul, and Samarra may have reduced their capabilities towards the end of the year. The insurgents have also learned a great deal about how to use their weapons, build more sophisticated IEDs, plan attacks and ambushes, improve their security, and locate and attack targets that are both soft and that produce political and media impact.

## ***The Dominant Role of Iraqi Sunni Arab Insurgents***

The insurgency seems to remain largely Iraqi and Sunni dominated. Some 35 Sunni Arab groups have made some kind of public announcement or claimed responsibility for terrorist or insurgent attacks – although many may be little more than cells and some may be efforts to shift the blame for attacks or make the insurgent movement seem larger than it is. An overwhelming majority of those captured or killed have been Iraqi Sunnis, as well as something like 90-95% of those detained.

These insurgents have suffered significant tactical defeats since early 2004, notably in Najaf, Baghdad, Samarra, Fallujah, and Mosul. Nevertheless, US and Iraqi government attempts to root out the insurgency have so far only had limited impact. There is no evidence that number of insurgents is declining as a result of Coalition and Iraqi attacks to date. The number of insurgent attacks has been consistently high since the spring of 2004, although the pattern fluctuates over time.

Insurgent cadres have steadily become more experienced, adapting tactics and methods of attack as fast as Coalition can counter them. Coalition troops reported that insurgents in Fallujah utilized an improved RPG in efforts to counter armored vehicles. The fighting in September-November of 2004 has shown they are developing networks with some form of central command, planning, and financing.

They work with criminal elements for effective looting and sabotage campaigns. The insurgents and their criminal allies also understand the limits of Coalition ability to cover the given areas and vulnerabilities. Many patterns of Coalition, Iraqi government, and Iraqi forces activity are easily observed and have to be predictable. Bases can often be observed and are vulnerable at their entrances, to rocket and mortar attacks, and along their supply lines. There are many soft and relatively soft small isolated facilities. Aid projects are easy to infiltrate and to target when nearing completion. NGO or contractor headquarters are easily observable targets. Infrastructure and energy facilities are typical of targets that have long lines of pipes or wires and many vulnerable links. Media have to more to be effective, as do emergency workers and medical teams. A nation is inevitably filled with soft or vulnerable targets that insurgents can choose at will, and experience has taught the insurgents and terrorists a great deal.

The problem is broader. As has been touched upon in Chapter III, the insurgents have good sources in the Iraqi Interim Government and forces, Iraqi society and sometimes in local US and Coalition commands. This is inevitable, and little can be done to stop it. Iraq simply lacks the resources and data to properly vet all of the people it recruits. Many Iraqis only work for the government or in the Iraqi forces because they cannot find other employment, and/or quietly sympathize with the insurgents, the workers in US and government facilities, and in various aid and construction projects, are even harder to vet. Men who do support the government are vulnerable to threats against the families, kidnappings, and actual murders of friends and relatives.

US human intelligence is improving but is hurt badly -- as are civil-military and other efforts – by high turnover and rotations. Most Iraqi networks serving the US in hostile areas have serious quality and loyalty problems, while others either use their positions to settle scores or misinform Coalition troops.

The Sunni insurgents are divided into a complex mix of Sunni nationalists, pro-Ba'ath/ex-regime, Sunni Iraqi Islamist, outside Islamic extremists, foreign volunteers with no clear alignment, and paid or politically motivated criminals. Most now seem organized so that their cadres are in relatively small cells, some as small as 2-3 men. These can recruit or call in larger teams, but the loss of even a significant number of such cells may not cripple a given group, and several Sunni groups operate in most areas.

There are no reliable estimates of the numbers of such insurgents, or breakdown by motivation and group. There also are no recent polls that provide a clear picture of how many Iraqi Arab Sunnis support the insurgents, although some ABC polls indicated that the number was well over 33% by the spring of 2004. Many members of the Sunni clergy have become steadily more supportive of the insurgency since that time, and battles like Fallujah have inevitably helped to polarize Sunni opinion.

US officials kept repeating estimates of total insurgent strengths of 5,000 from roughly the fall of 2003 through the summer of 2004. In October, they issued a range of 12,000 to 16,000 but have never defined how many are hard core and full time, and how many are part time, and US experts would be the first to indicate that any such numbers are guesstimates. They also are careful to note that they are uncertain as to whether the numbers are increasing or decreasing with time as a result of US and Iraqi operations versus increases in the political and other tensions that lead Iraqi Arab Sunnis to join the insurgents.

While some US officers have talked about the battle of Fallujah in November 2004 as a tipping point, many US experts are cautious. They feel the insurgents did lose a key sanctuary, suffered more than 1,000 killed, and lost significant numbers of prisoners and detainees. They also lost some significant leaders and cadres. Many insurgents and insurgent leaders seem to have left Fallujah before the fighting, however, and many others escaped.

Various insurgent groups were able to attack in other areas like Mosul, Ramadi, Samarra, Baquba, Balad, Bajii, Tall Afar, and Hawija during the fighting in Fallujah, and seem to have planned to disperse and to shift their operations before the fighting in Fallujah began.<sup>4</sup> The fighting in Mosul was particularly severe, and the US military reported a total of 130-140 attacks and incidents a day.<sup>5</sup> While the Coalition and Iraqi forces did capture large numbers of weapons and supplies, few experts – if any -- feel that the insurgents face any near term supply problems given the numbers of weapons looted from Iraq's vast arms depots during and after the fighting that brought down Saddam.

Many of the Sunni insurgent groups seem to have a significant degree of independence, but it is clear that many cooperate in at least some operations, and that some have effective central leadership and coordination. One serious question is how much influence various Ba'ath groups have. As is discussed later, both US and Iraqi Interim Government officials – such as the MNF commander General Casey and Iraqi Defense Minister Hazan Shaalan -- believe that Ba'ath leaders in Syria coordinate some or many of the Ba'ath sympathizers.

These Ba'ath groups are not generally “former regime loyalists,” but rather Sunni nationalists involved in a struggle for current power. This has allowed them to broaden their base and establish ties to Islamic groups as well. They benefit from the fact that they

began to organize at least a crude level before the invasion began, and have since steadily tightened their organization and purged suspect members. According to one report, they held a major meeting at Al Hasaka in April or May of 2004 to tighten their structure, and their field leaders include Mohammed Younis al-Ahmad, a former aide to Saddam Hussein, and Ibrahim Sabawi, Hussein's half brother and a former security director. They also benefit from the fact that key elements of the leadership of the Iraqi 5<sup>th</sup> Corps are still in Mosul.<sup>6</sup>

US experts talk of informal networks, using tools like the Internet, to coordinate operations and exchange data on tactics, targets, and operations. There is evidence of such exchanges between cells and groups in Iraq and outside groups including those in Afghanistan. Insurgent groups also use the media to get near real time information on what other groups and cells are doing and to find out what tactics produce the maximum political and media impact.

The Sunni insurgent groups are concentrated in Sunni-populated areas like the "Sunni Triangle" and Al Ansar Province to the west of Baghdad, and the so-called "Triangle of Death" to the southeast of Baghdad. As a result, four of Iraq's provinces have both a major insurgency threat and a major insurgent presence. Sunni insurgents have also repeatedly shown since the battle of Fallujah that they can strike in major mixed or Shi'ite-dominated cities like Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra. They have also operated in Kurdish areas. No province is safe from occasional attack, and attacks are only part of the story.

There is continuing sabotage of key targets like Iraq's oil facilities, and a constant campaign of intimidation, disappearances, and "mystery killings." Even cities that were supposedly liberated before the battle of Fallujah, like Samarra, have been the source of enough continuing attacks to force the redeployment of large numbers of Iraqi security and police forces and elements of key US counterinsurgency units like Task Force 1-26.<sup>7</sup>

As is the case with so many other types of reporting, the US no longer provides detailed data on the frequency and types of their attacks, or on their locations. The private organizations that try to do this produce interesting results, but results that are often suspect. What US official sources have said is that:

- Some 40-60 towns and cities have been scene of attacks each week since late August. Many are outside the "Sunni Triangle" and Al Ansar Province.
- The most violent city in terms of number of major incidents has been Baghdad, with 20-40 attacks a week.
- Mosul is second with 4-13 major attacks per week.
- The level of attacks in Basra has been relatively low by comparison, but peaks of 7 attacks per week have occurred in Basra and its environs.

One broader problem is that the various Sunni insurgent groups ultimate have a non-negotiable agenda. They cannot bring back Arab Sunni minority rule or the Ba'ath; they cannot regain the level of power, wealth, and influence they once had. They cannot reestablish the form of largely secular rule that existed under Saddam, or reestablish Iraq as a country that most Arabs see as "Sunni."



An understanding of these political may eventually drive some towards moving into the non-violent political process in Iraq. In practice, however, such insurgent groups have a much better vision of what they oppose than what they are for, and limited interest in pragmatic realpolitik. Many will do everything, and sometimes anything, they can to drive the Coalition out and break up the peaceful political process almost regardless of the damage done to Iraq and to Sunni areas. Some will move on to join the most extreme Islamist movements. There are no clear limits to the willingness of at least some Sunni Arab insurgent elements to escalate, even if this means trying to drive the nation into a civil war they cannot win. Some are likely to escalate even further as their situation becomes more threatened. It seems almost certain that many cadres and leaders of such groups and cells cannot be persuaded, only defeated.

### ***Outside Islamist Groups and Volunteers***

Other key insurgent elements include Arab and Islamist groups with significant numbers of foreign volunteers like the one led Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. It is unlikely that such foreign volunteers make up more 10% of the insurgent force, and probably only make up around 5%. They are not an organized force, they come from a wide range of countries and often with little or no training and the overwhelming majority have only a limited history of affiliation with any organized Islamist or extremist group.<sup>8</sup> Some are, however, considerably better organized. A number of groups claim affiliation with Zarqawi, but it is unknown how closely tied many of these groups are to Zarqawi. It is likely that some of them can only claim him as an inspiration.

Views differ sharply over the size of Zarqawi's movement, its alignment and ties to Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, and how many of its current "fighters" are Iraqi vs. non-Iraqi. Some press estimates went as high as 10,000 before the fighting in Fallujah. It seems more likely that Zarqawi's movement now consists of a series of cells, with a limited central organization. They probably total less than 1,000 full and part time men and more probably a core strength of no more than several hundred. Nevertheless, Zarqawi's movement has been extremely effective at striking at targets with high media and political impact, particularly in the form of suicide bombings and beheadings.

Movements like the Army of Ansar al-Sunna, which claimed responsibility for the attack on the US mess tent in Mosul in December, 2004 and for many other suicide attacks, present the problem they seem to have a mix of links to Zarqawi and possibly al Qaida. They seem to be largely Iraqi, but their mix of Sunnis and Kurds is uncertain, as is the extent to which the group and its cells are at least partly a legacy of Ansar al-Islam – an Islamist group that is reported to have been where Zarqawi took refuge before the war and which is still active.

This inability to characterize many Islamist movements, and the fact that successful suicide bombings and other attacks can have a major political and media impact even if they serve little clear military purpose, illustrates the fact that outside threats must be measured in terms of effectiveness and not numbers. In practice, the insurgents can choose the place and time of the attack, focus on targets with key political and media impact, and have an effect even if they fail to achieve the purpose of their attack, but create visible explosions or kill innocent civilians.

They often have excellent intelligence from sources within the Iraqi government, Iraqi forces, the Iraqis supporting Coalition forces and government activities, and Iraqi industry. This enables them to locate soft targets, hit at a key points in terms of Iraq's economy and aid projects, and time their attacks to points of exceptional vulnerability. In practice, it also allows them to pick weak and vulnerable elements of the Iraqi military, security, and police forces and often produce significant casualties. At the same time, in many areas they can use intimidation, threats, kidnappings, and selective murders and assassinations to paralyze or undercut Iraqi units. In practice, this means a comparative small number of core insurgents can bypass or attack the developing Iraqi forces with considerable success.

Like the Iraqi Sunni Arab Insurgents, they have also improved their ability to take advantage of the fact that media coverage of the fighting, particularly by Arab satellite television, provides a real time picture of what tactics and weapons work, what strikes have most media and political impact, and often what targets are vulnerable. This "Al Jazeera Effect" substitutes for many elements of a C<sup>4</sup>I system. At the same time, confronting this confusing array of threats is made more difficult without general Iraqi loyalty and stand-alone Iraqi forces.

These groups also pose a particular threat because they have no clear boundaries or limits. Iraq is a theater of operation for far broader causes, and a vision of Sunni Islam that rejects Shi'ites and even Sunnis that dissent from the extremists. So far, such groups have generally been careful to avoid open splits with Shi'ite insurgents, and some even cooperated with Sadr and his militia. They have, however, carried out mass attacks and bombings on Shi'ites, and they have no natural limits on the means of violence against those they regard as enemies of Islam. If anything, they ultimately gain the most if the Sunni and Shi'ite worlds divide, if Iraq becomes the continuing scene of violence between the US and Arabs and ties down US forces, and their actions create as much regional instability as possible.

### ***The Uncertain Status of the Shi'ites***

The risk of civil war in Iraq seems limited, although it cannot be dismissed. Iraqi Arab Shi'ites resent the US presence, but most seem to realize that the fact they are 60% of the population will give them political dominance *if* Iraq is secure enough so that its new political system divides up power according to the size of given factions.

The Moqtada al-Sadr now *seems* to be committed to participating in Iraq's political process. His Mehdi Army did, however, present a serious threat to Coalition and government forces in Najaf and other Shi'ite areas in the south during much of the summer of 2004, however, and in areas like Sadr City in Baghdad. Moqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army continues to exist despite its apparent retreat from Najaf following the ceasefire negotiated by Sistani. It is widely believed to have reconstituted a large percentage of itself in the Baghdad slum of Sadr City. It has scarcely been disbanded or disarmed. In practice, Sadr's movement also controls Sadr City more than the government does, and is active in poorer Shi'ite areas throughout the country.

The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the faction of Abdul Aziz al-Hakim also have a powerful militia. Al Dawa, the Badr Corps, and the Iraqi Hezbollah remain potential security problems. Both Iraq's Sunni interim president, Ghazi

al-Yahwar, and King Abdullah of Jordan have both sounded warnings about the risks of Shi'ite dominance in the January 30, 2005 elections and possible Iranian influence.<sup>9</sup> These warnings may well be exaggerated. Iraqi Shi'ites are Iraqi nationalists, not tools of Iran, and neither Iraqi Shi'ite clerics aside from the Sadr faction nor most of the Shi'ite population support a clerical role in politics. The Shi'ite factions are also scarcely united. Sadr is believed to have been responsible for the assassination of both Al Khoi right after the fall of Saddam Hussein and for the killing of Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim -- Abdul Aziz al-Hakim's brother -- in August 2003.

Yet, no one can predict how stable Iraq's political structure will be after the January 30, 2005 election. It is not clear that Sadr and other Shi'ite elements will hold together, or that other splits will not occur during 2005. Iraq must deal with forging and approving a constitution and with moving towards general elections at the end of the year without any clear picture of what political leaders, political parties, and power sharing arrangements will emerge in the process.

Shi'ite splits are possible, as are sectarian and ethnic splits, and these could put new burdens on Iraq's forces, and potentially paralyze or divide key elements -- as was the case in Lebanon. What is more serious, however, is that Shi'ite politics might respond over time to constant Sunni insurgent bombings and attacks by striking back at the Sunnis, rather than seeking to include them. Shi'ite political leaders have generally been careful to avoid this so far, but the preaching in mosques has become more polarized and popular tension is growing. Certainly, this is a fault line that attacks like the bombing in Kerbala and Najaf on December 20, 2004 have shown that some Sunni Arab and Islamist extremist insurgents are certain to continue to try to exploit in as bloody and violent a form as possible,

### ***The Kurds and Other Minorities***

The two major Kurdish parties, the Barzani and Talibani factions, retain powerful militias and the Kurds represent a faction that is now considerably more powerful relative to other Iraqi factions in military and security terms than their 15% of the population. Iraqi security and stability depends on finding a power-sharing arrangement that gives the Kurds incentives to be part of the political process just as much as it does on developing such arrangements for the Arab Sunnis.

There is no reason such a compromise cannot be found. Unfortunately, however, Iraq has a long history of not finding it on any lasting basis. Saddam Hussein has also left a legacy of many areas where Kurds were forcibly expelled and Sunni Arabs and minorities were given their homes and property.

There has already been serious tension in areas like Kirkuk and Mosul. There has also been some armed violence between Kurds, Arabs, and Turcomans, as well as struggles over "soft" ethnic cleansing in North, and there may be more violence in the future. Many experts feel that the only reason that Kirkuk has been relatively peaceful, and still has something approached a representative government, is that the Kurds simply are not strong enough relative to the other factions in the city to impose their will by intimidation or force. There are serious tensions between the Kurd, the Turcomans, and Assyrian Christians, as well as between Kurd and Arab.

Kurdish unity is always problematic. The Kurds have a saying that, “the Kurds have no friends.” History shows that this say should be, “the Kurds have no friends including the Kurds. The Barzani and Talibani factions have fought on several occasions, and at one point Barzani collaborated with Saddam Hussein when the latter sent troops into the area occupied by Talibani. Their present marriage of convenience has not unified the Kurdish controlled provinces in the north as much as divided them, and could create future problems for both Kurdish political unity and any agreement on some form of autonomy.

At a local level, there are many small tribal and local elements as well as the numerous “bodyguards.” Most are not hostile, but many could join in if the conflict expands.

### ***The Problems of Iran and Syria***

Foreign countries also play a role. General George Casey, the commander of the MNF and a US officer who has been careful not to exaggerate the threat, has warned that Syria has allowed Iraqi supporters of Saddam Hussein to provide money, supplies, and direction to Sunni insurgents, and continues to be a serious source of infiltration by foreign volunteers.<sup>10</sup>

US officials and commanders do state that Syria has made some efforts to improve its broader security and reduce infiltration. Syria also faces problems because its border forces are relatively weak, and lack training and equipment, and much of the border is only demarcated by an earthen berm. Iraq also has comparatively few border posts and many isolated posts have been attacked and some have been destroyed or abandoned.<sup>11</sup>

This illustrates a general problem for both Iraq and its neighbors. Iraq’s borders total: 3,650 kilometers in length: Iran 1,458 kilometers, Jordan 181 kilometers, Kuwait 240 kilometers, Saudi Arabia 814 kilometers, Syria 605 kilometers, and Turkey 352 kilometers. Most of these borders are desert, desolate territory, easily navigable water barriers, or mountains. Even Iraq’s small 58-kilometer coastline is in an area with considerable small craft and shipping traffic and presents security problems. Insurgents also do not need major shipments of arms. As a result, virtually anyone can go in and out moving money and small critical supplies, and volunteers can simply enter as ordinary visitors without equipment. Even if Iraq’s border forces were ready, and its neighbors actively helped, border security would be a problem.

At the same time both senior US and Iraqi officials feel that Syria has allowed senior ex-Ba’athist cadres to operate from Syria, and help direct the Sunni insurgency. These seem to include top level officials under Saddam Hussein such as Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, one of Saddam's Vice Presidents.

Iran certainly has an active presence in Iraq, and ties to several key Shi’ite political parties. King Abdullah of Jordan has gone so far as to charge that Iran is attempting to rig Iraq’s election with up to 1,000,000 false registrations. Some senior Iraqi Interim Government officials clearly see Iran as a direct and immediate threat. The Iraqi Minister of Defense made the following points in a briefing on September 22, 2004:

- Iranian intervention and support of Sadr pose major threats; and some infiltration has taken place across the Syria border.
- Iran is behind Sadr. It uses Iranian pilgrims and sends arms, money, and drugs across border

- Iraq must have strong border defence forces. "If doors and windows are empty, no amount of cleaning will ever get rid of the dust."

Since that time Prime Minister Allawi has repeatedly expressed his concern over Iran's actions, as have other senior officials. Iran has denied these charges, and American experts seem more concerned with the potential role Iran could play in any Iraqi civil conflict, or once a Shi'ite political majority takes office, than with direct Iranian support of a Shi'ite insurgency.

As General George Casey put it, "I don't see substantial Iranian influence on this particular government that will be elected in January. I see Iran as more of a longer-term threat to Iraqi security... a long-term threat to stability in Iraq. If you look on the other side, I think Syria is a short-term threat, because of the support they provide to Ba'athist leaders operating inside and outside of Iraq."<sup>12</sup> The uncertainties surrounding Iran's role, however, can scarcely be ignored.

### ***Inclusion versus Conflict***

It is clear that much of the future nature of the insurgency in Iraq depends on the wisdom and pragmatism of Iraq's present and emerging political leaders over the course of the new year, and before, during, and after each of the three elections to come. So far, they have resisted polarization along ethnic and sectarian lines, but the future is anything but clear – particularly since Iraq is only really developing political leaders and parties and no one knows how a Shi'ite majority will behave or govern.

The key issues for Iraq are whether large numbers of Sunnis that are now neutral or hostile towards the Iraqi Interim Government can be persuaded to join in the political process, and whether some form of stable new balance of power can be found that will make Sunnis accept a political process dominated by the Shi'ites and where the Kurds and other minorities also play a role proportionate to their size. There cannot be a solution to the Sunni insurgency without a political solution that the vast majority of Sunnis at least tolerate and hopefully support.

At the same time, the Iraqi government must show it can actually govern at the local and regional level, and the Iraqi military, security, and police forces must reach a level of critical mass where they are large enough to serve the country, large enough to take over most of the burden of maintaining security from the US, and effective enough to show that the new Iraqi government is not only legitimate in terms of politics but in terms of force. Political legitimacy is essential to *good* government, but no government can govern that lacks the force to ensure the security of its population and deal with insurgent and terrorist threats.

There also will almost certainly be at least another year of intensive fighting against Islamist and extreme elements that will reject inclusion in the political process almost regardless of what political system emerges during the coming elections. There are only three ways to deal with Iraq's most hard-line elements: Kill them, imprison them, or drive them out of the country. There is a very real war to fight, and it is still unclear when or if Iraqi forces will really be ready to fight it in anything like the total numbers required.

## ***The Critical Importance of Effective Iraqi Military, Security, and Police Forces***

Political and economic events also play a role in the insurgency, and reinforce the need for effective Iraqi forces. The Coalition's persistent inability to deliver a popular political message, its failures to use economic aid effectively, have continued to aid the insurgents. So have the problems in the governance efforts of the Interim Iraqi Government, and its persistent inability to follow up US and Iraqi tactical victories with effective governance, aid, and government activity in areas like Samarra, Mosul, and Fallujah.

The lack of highly visible Iraqi forces, and the fact that US occupiers have both won virtually every such victory and still dominate most security activity have also reinforced the image of a nation where fighting is done by foreigners, non-Muslims, and occupiers.

The end result has been that many Coalition and Iraqi Interim Government tactical victories produce a costly political and military backlash. Even successful military engagements can lead to the creation of as many new insurgents as they do kill or capture. The lack of popular support means that many existing insurgents disperse with their weapons or bury their weapons and supplies for later retrieval.

To return to points made earlier, US and Coalition-dominated actions are seen as actions by "occupier" forces; they are a source of constant propaganda and fuel conspiracy theories. Real and imagined civilian casualties, collateral damage, and the impact on civilians and shrines that these engagements cause remain a constant problem.

All of these points reinforce the need to create larger and more effective Iraqi forces as soon as possible, and to give them full force protection and counterinsurgency capability. No one can argue that Iraqi forces can deal with the current level of insurgency and terrorism in the near future. The threat may not be quantifiable in net assessment terms, but it is all too clear that Iraqi forces will remain a fraction of what is needed through at least mid-2005 and probably deep into 2006. They also will not have airpower, significant armor, or modern IS&R support for years to come.

The nature of both the insurgency in Iraq and Iraqi politics makes it all too clear, however, that only Iraqi forces can minimize the anger and resentment at US forces, give the emerging Iraqi government legitimacy, and support efforts to make that government and the Iraqi political system more inclusive. It is also clear that even the segments of Iraqi society that tolerate Coalition forces as a necessity today want them out as quickly as is practical

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<sup>1</sup> "Telling the Fallujah Story to the World," IMEF and MNC-I Effects Exploitation Team, 20 November 2004 (Third cut). Bill Gertz, "Foreign Terrorists in Fallujah," Washington Times, December 14, 2004, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Vick, "Mess Tent Blast Kills 19 GIs," Washington Post, December 22, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> John F. Burns, "Allawi Predicts More Strife, But Says Voting Will Go On," New York Times, December 21, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Vick and Jackie Spinner, "Insurgent Attacks Spread in Iraq," Washington Post, November 16, 2004, p. 1; Rowan Scarborough, "stifling Iraqi Revels a Long-Term Project," Washington Times, November 16, 2004, p. 1; Edward Wong and James Glanz, "Revels Attack in Central Iraq and the North," New York Times, November 16, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Shadid, "Troops Move to Quell Insurgency in Mosul," Washington Post, November 17, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> See Anna Ciezadlo, "Fragmented Leadership of the Iraqi Insurgency," Christian Science Monitor, December 21, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Vick, "Troops, Iraqi Police Attacked in Sunni Heartland," Edmund Sanders, "Flare of Violence Kills 4 in Samarra," New York Times, December 9, 2004; Washington Post, December 9, 2004, p. 28; Josh White, "Town Reflects Rising Sabotage in Iraq," Washington Post, December 9, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> "Iraqi TV Reports Confessions from Foreign Fighters," USA Today, November 8, 2004, p. 8; "Iraq to Exhibit Foreign Fighters," Miami Herald, October 29, 2004; John Hendren, "Few Foreigners Among the Insurgents," Los Angeles Times, November 16, 2004, p. 1,

<sup>9</sup> John F. Burns and Robert F. Worth, "Iraqi Campaign Raises Question of Iran's Sway," New York Times, December 15, 2004, p. 1

<sup>10</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, "General: Iraqi Insurgents Directed from Syria," Washington Post, December 17, 2004, p. 29; Bill Gertz, "Commander Says Syria Must Curb Terrorist Support," Washington Times, December 17, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Blanford, "Sealing Syria's Desolate Border," Christian Science Monitor, December 21, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, "General: Iraqi Insurgents Directed from Syria," Washington Post, December 17, 2004, p. 29.