

THE U.S. ARMY IN THE IRAQ WAR

VOLUME 1

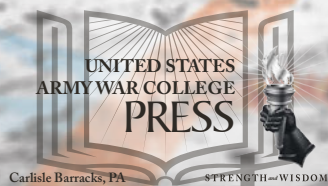
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2003-2006

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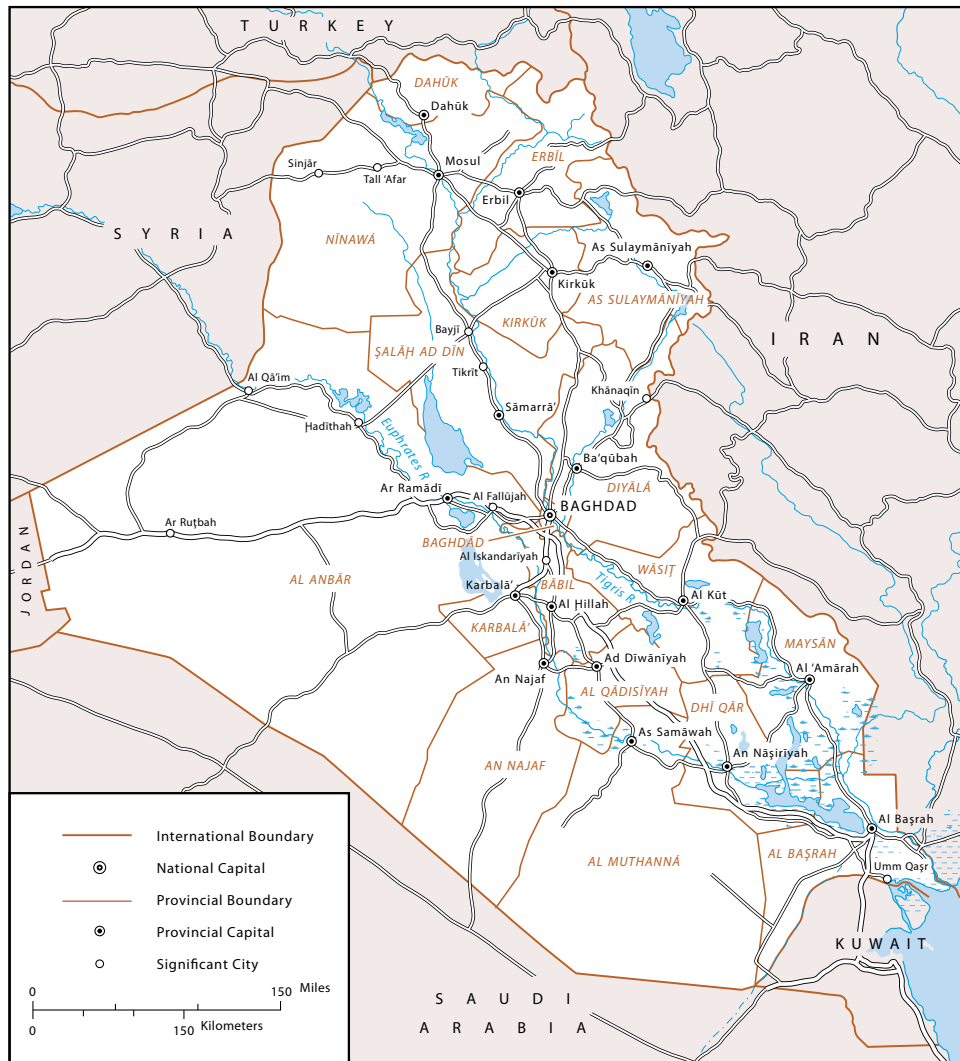
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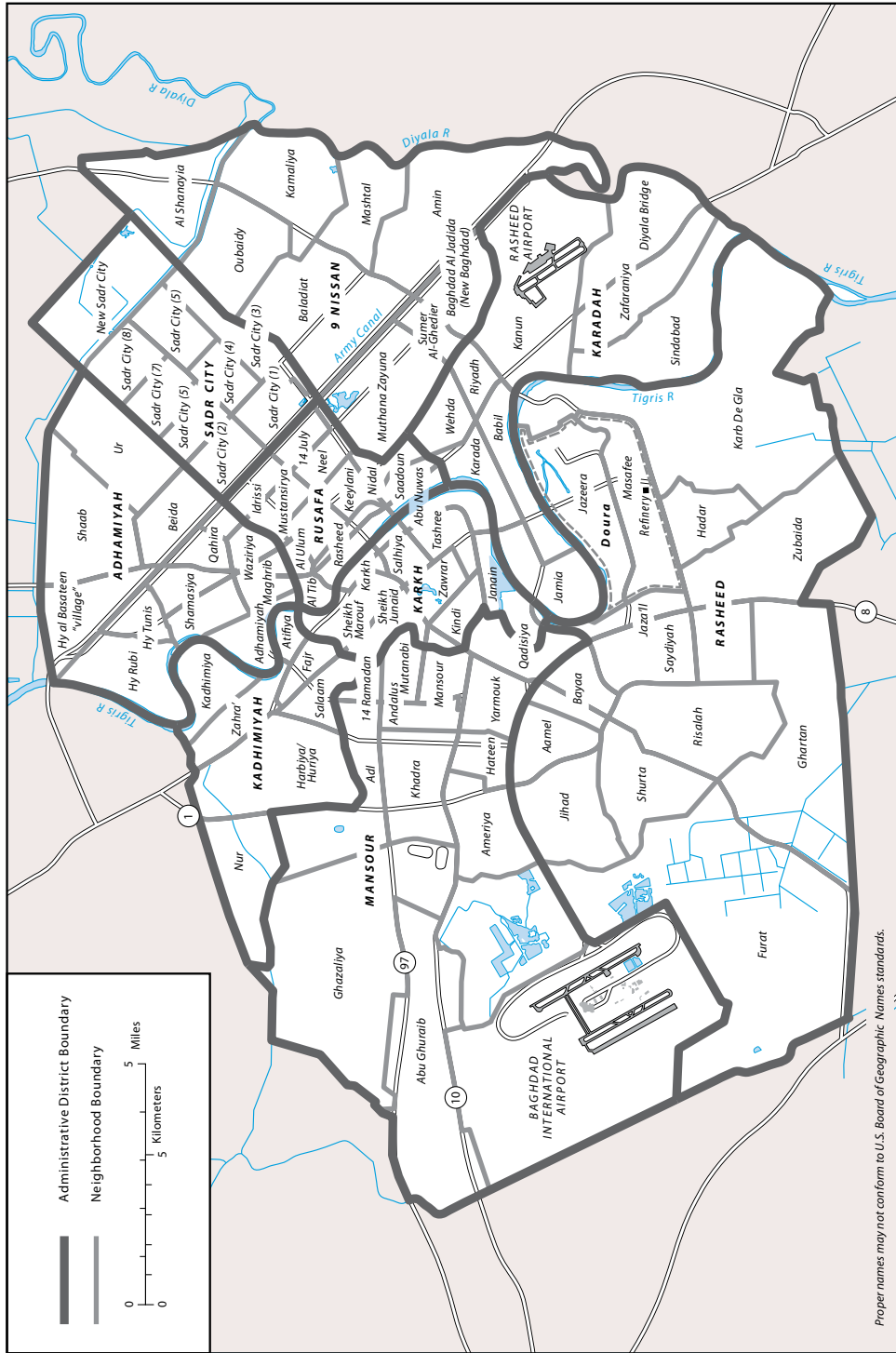
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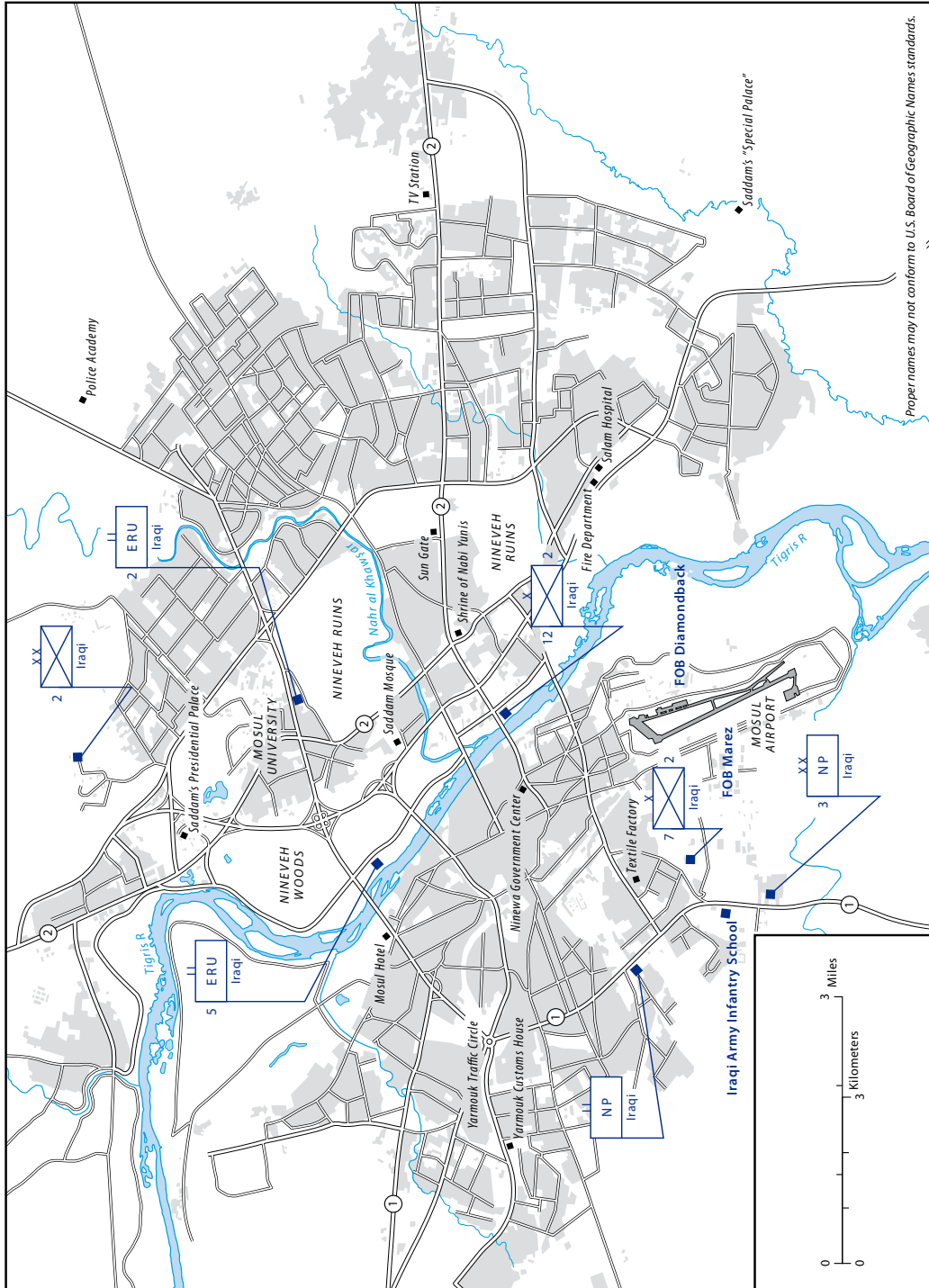
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Map 1. Iraq.



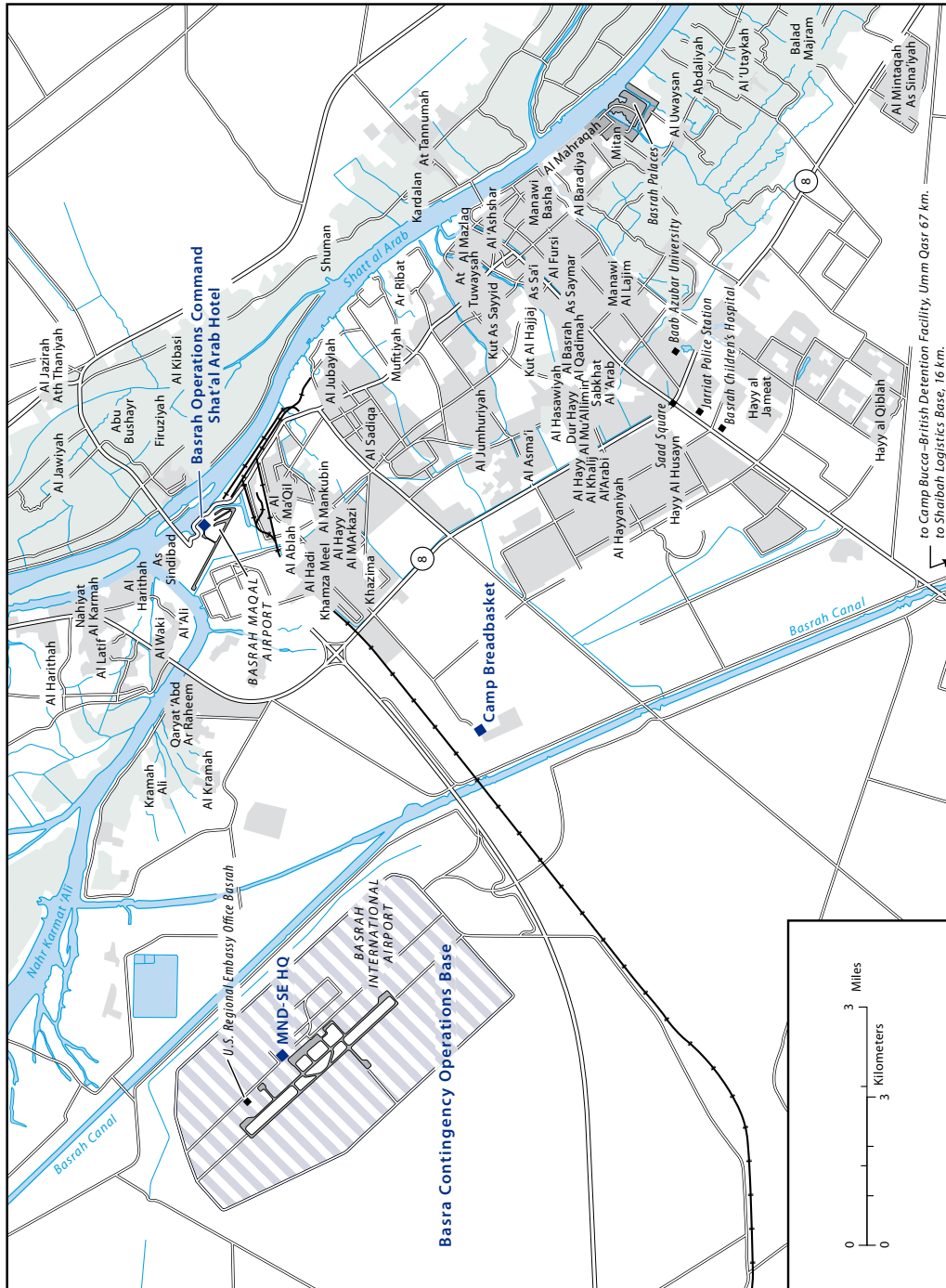
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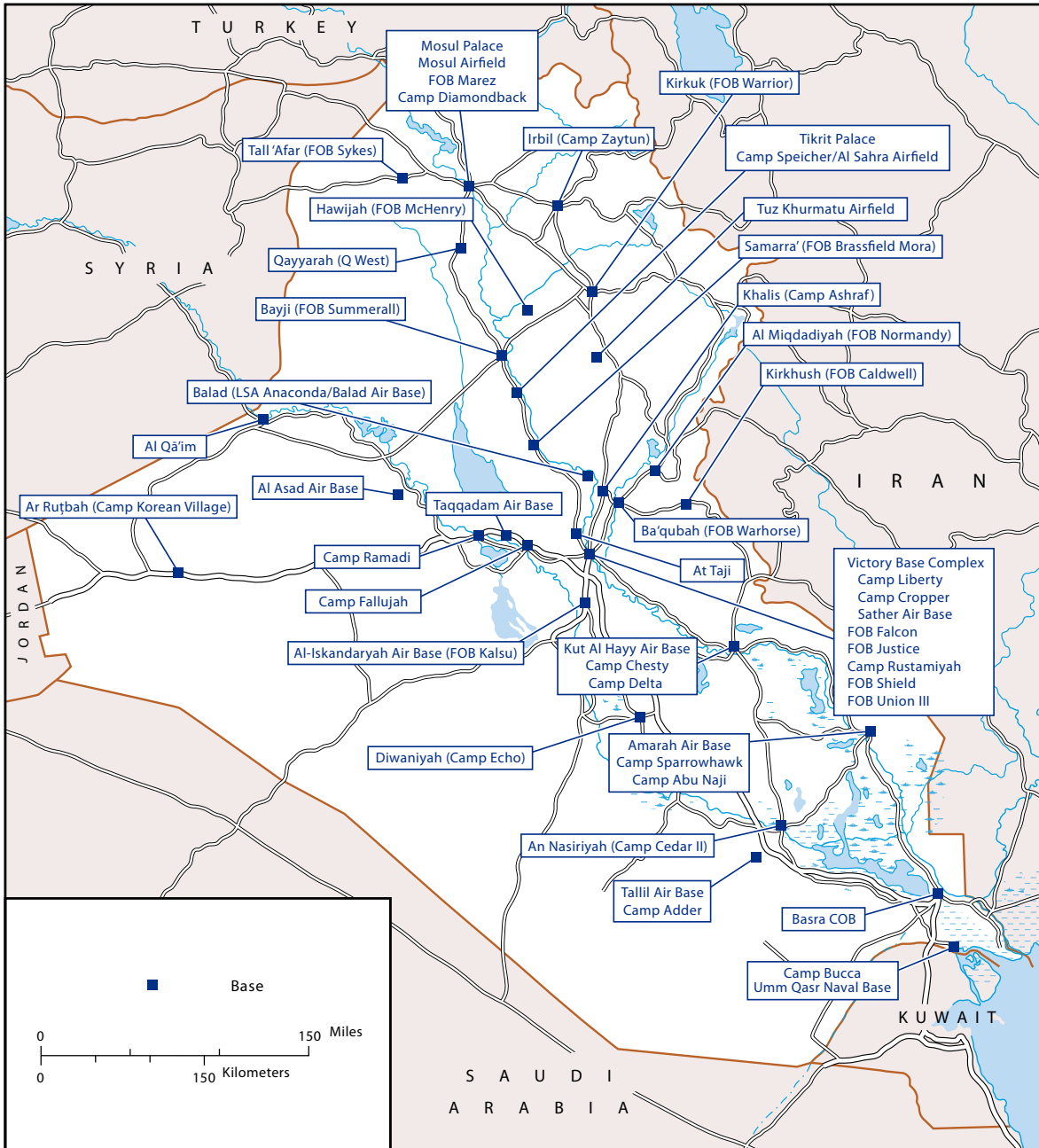
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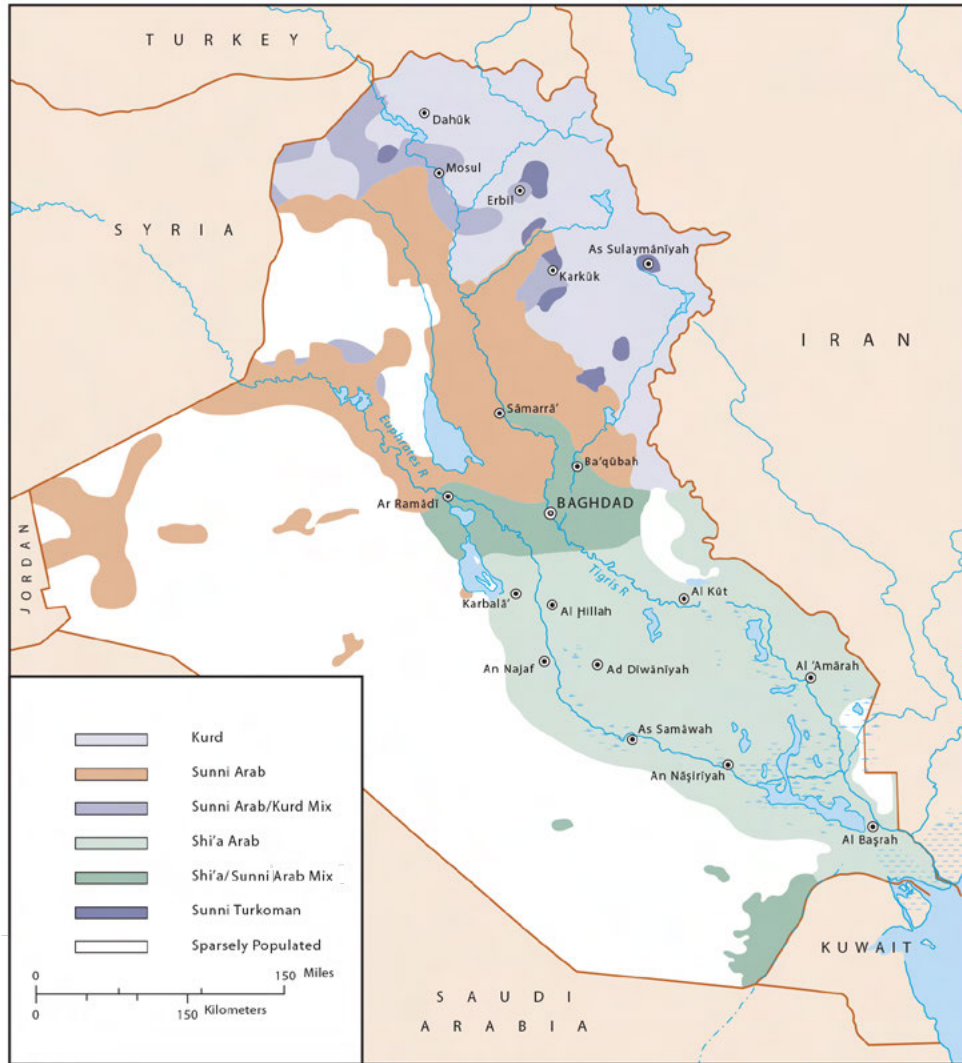
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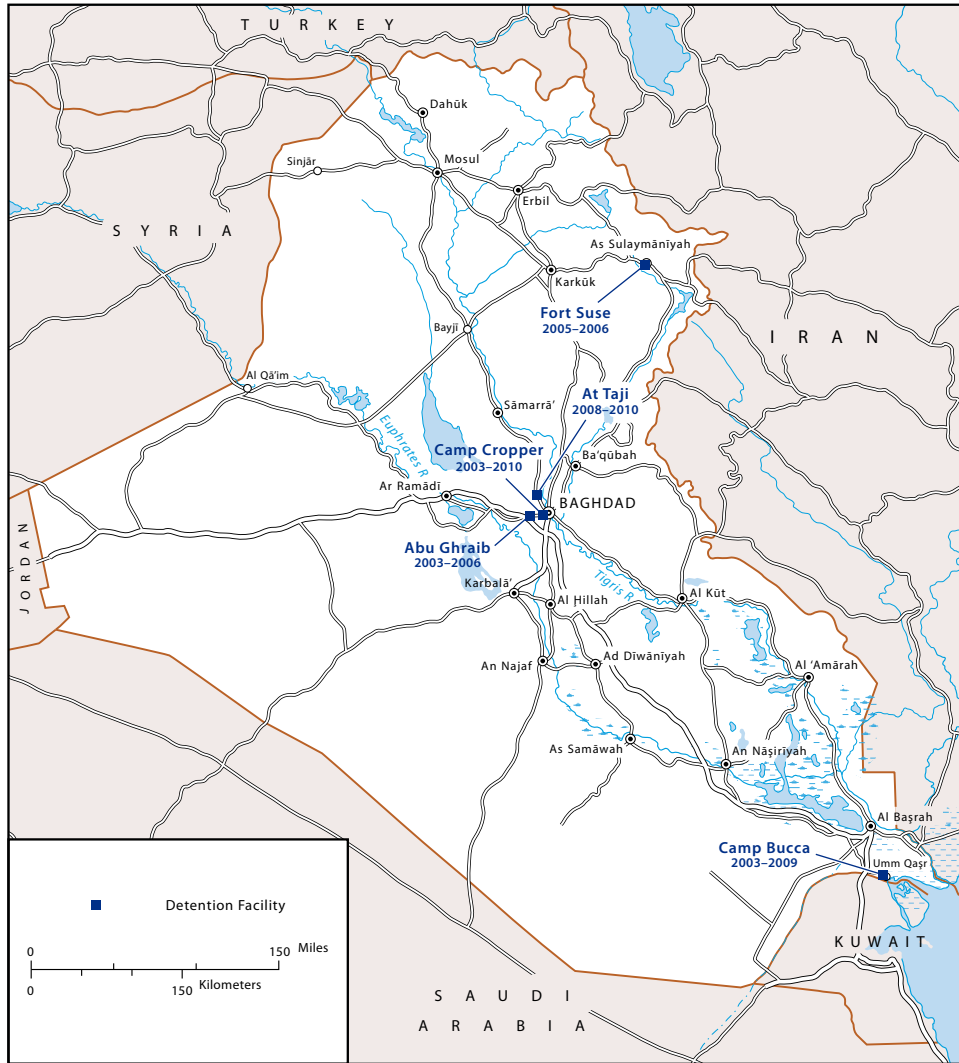
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VOLUME 1
INVASION • INSURGENCY • CIVIL WAR
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Colonel Joel D. Rayburn

Colonel Frank K. Sobchak

Editors

with

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July 2018

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FOREWORD

In July 2013, 18 months after the last of our operating forces departed Iraq, the Army commissioned a study to capture key lessons, insights, and innovations from our more than 8 years of conflict in that country. Having been at war continuously since the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11), it was time to conduct an initial examination of the Army's experiences in the post-9/11 wars and their implications for our future operations, strategy, doctrine, force structure, and institutions. Many of our adversaries have already begun applying the lessons learned from observing our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the hopes of erasing our tactical and technological advantages. It is our solemn responsibility to learn, innovate, and adapt faster than they do. The two-volume study, *The United States Army in the Iraq War, 2003-2011*, by the Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) Study Group, is part of the Army's effort toward that end.

In setting the scope of these volumes, the OIF Study Group was directed to focus its research on the operational level: the level of war, command, and intelligence that bridges the strategic and the tactical levels and is essential to understanding the interconnectedness of a theater of operations as a whole, from both the enemy's perspective and ours. In Iraq, as in other wars, the operational level of the war was often the most difficult to clearly delineate. It is the level that constantly feels the push and pull from above and below, from the impact of tactical decisions upward and the operational implications and subsequent tactical direction necessary to support national and international policy decisions or non-decisions for that matter. As a result, it has been understudied compared to tactical and strategic matters, even though it holds useful near-term lessons for our forces that are still at war in the same theater against mainly the same enemy and for efforts in an undefined future. The Iraq War emphasized the harsh importance of the operational level through the reminder that a nation can win every tactical engagement, but not succeed in the ultimate outcomes.

During the course of the Iraq War, our forces learned a great deal about the theater and the enemies we faced. Our forces also adapted over time to the changing character of the conflict, making many important operational and tactical innovations. However, we risk losing this knowledge if we do not capture it in our doctrine and our history. Time and interest and detailed memory will fade, and we must avoid repeating the errors of not fully assessing and evaluating previous conflicts that were assumed to be aberrations from the Army's core competencies.

The story of the Army at the operational level of the Iraq War, as documented by the OIF Study Group, is one of units and headquarters working in difficult and complex environments, and one where leaders at all levels made tough decisions. As the group's research emerged, a number of findings became apparent. First, was the perpetual reminder that even as our technological means become more advanced, we cannot ignore operational art, the principles of war, and the importance of terrain. These fundamentals were every bit as important to our counterinsurgency and stabilization campaigns in Iraq as they were in previous, more conventional conflicts, and it is clear in retrospect that those who rejected the idea that there is an operational level of war in counterinsurgency were wrong.

We must never forget that the enemy has strategic goals and an operational scheme to achieve those goals. To sustain and ultimately succeed in our operations, we must have a thorough understanding of the operating environment and the local political and social consequences of our actions, especially when facing an enemy who lives and breathes in that environment, providing a level of understanding that we will always be challenged to match. When operating among host nation populations, we must constantly clarify our intentions in order to avoid creating new enemies. We must be willing to reexamine the assumptions that underpin our strategy and plans and change course if necessary, no matter how painful it may be to confront failure. The war also reiterated that the Army requires a capable and balanced total force of Active Army, National Guard, and Army Reserve components to be able to endure the strain of engagements from a conflict of this duration. While the decision-makers who embark upon war often hope it to be a short, uncomplicated affair, wars have a logic of their own and rarely conform to pre-planned timelines.

This account of the Iraq War holds some important strategic and institutional lessons as well. We must seek better ways of operating effectively with our coalition partners, whose constraints and caveats are naturally different from ours. We must also employ better ways of generating and partnering with effective and legitimate host nation forces and of accounting for the political pressures that constrain those forces. Within the Army, Joint Force, and the U.S. national security community, we must institutionalize the lessons the Iraq War holds for civil-military relations in major combat operations.

Long, complex campaigns, such as the one in Iraq, always require a comprehensive approach for employing all the instruments of national power together—a synchronization of our diplomatic, informational, military, law enforcement, and economic tools. The Iraq War also reinforces the importance of leader development at senior levels. The conduct of war and the nature of decision-making are becoming more decentralized and, as a result, we must develop leaders who are capable of thinking strategically and leading joint, interagency, and multinational teams at an earlier stage in their careers.

We have seen in recent years that the United States has entered another historical cycle, like those that followed major American wars in the past, in which our civilian and military leaders debated the utility of landpower for our national objectives. The operational histories of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan should inform this debate. A reading of *The United States Army in the Iraq War, 2003-2011*, indicates that, even at a much higher end strength than they now have, our ground forces were overtaxed by the commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the studies, debates, and decisions on troop levels in both theaters had severe operational consequences. A reading of these volumes also indicates that our adversaries are unlikely to abandon the enemy actions that were adopted in Iraq and Afghanistan that they view as successful, and that landpower will remain an important element of strategic deterrence in the future.

These volumes are not meant to be the definitive account of the war or the last word in the debates the war has spawned. They are intended, instead, to initiate a constructive debate about the Iraq War's significance to the Army and the Joint Force and its strategic importance as an early phase of a conflict whose full consequences and end we cannot yet see. Nor are these volumes meant to be the Army's parochial version of what happened in Iraq. The OIF Study Group did not pull any punches in their analysis, and the Army

did not filter or edit their conclusions. As a result, these assessments, at times, strike a critical tone that some readers may find unusual for an Army history. It was important that this work be a frank account of the conduct of our Iraq campaigns, capturing the lessons not just from our successes, but also from our mistakes. Only a candid appraisal of this kind will allow true learning and be of true value for the next generation of Army leaders and for the Joint Force.

It is our hope that these volumes will prompt and enable further studies on other levels and aspects of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a byproduct of this work, nearly 30,000 pages of documents were declassified, and hundreds of hours of interviews were conducted. All of these primary sources, over time, will be reviewed and reassessed as a way to reexamine the study itself and topics that fell outside the scope of the study, such as logistics and humanitarian assistance. Among other topics, the Army and the Joint Force will need further studies focusing on strategic planning, the sustainment of these theaters, and our forces' experiences at the division level and below. Capturing the story of the Army's tactical fight in Iraq is a critical gap that should be addressed as it is of supreme importance for understanding counterinsurgency campaigns. By comparison, the Army's operations in the European and Pacific theaters during World War II spawned 10 and 11 volumes respectively, with many additional studies on logistics and other functional areas. I strongly believe the Iraq conflict merits the same level of historical analysis.

The history of the Iraq War is the astonishing story of an Army that reached within itself to learn and adapt. It was a formative experience for a generation of Soldiers and leaders. Moreover, it was a field of sacrifice for many thousands of our fellow countrymen. Above all, these volumes are meant to ensure their sacrifices are not forgotten.

MAJOR GENERAL JOHN S. KEM
Commandant
U.S. Army War College

PREFACE

In September 2013, Chief of Staff of the Army General Raymond T. Odierno directed the Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Study Group to research and write an operational history of the U.S. Army's experience in the Iraq War from 2003 to 2011. This volume, *The United States Army in the Iraq War, 2003-2006*, is the first of two fulfilling that task. It tells the story of the U.S.-led campaigns to remove Saddam Hussein and his Iraqi Ba'athist regime from power in 2003 and to stabilize the country following those operations. It details the course of the campaigns up to a point in late 2006 when President George W. Bush and other U.S. leaders changed the strategy in Iraq to one that resulted in the "surge" counteroffensive by American troops in 2007-2008. That counteroffensive and the subsequent withdrawal of the coalition forces from Iraq are the subjects of the second volume of this series.

In scope, the study group members consciously modeled this history after the Army's Green Book histories of World War II. As the Green Books and as General Odierno charged us to do, we focused on the operational level of war. These volumes are narrative histories that tell the story of U.S. forces in Iraq, mainly from the perspective of the theater command in Baghdad and the operational commands immediately subordinate to it. They focus on the decisions and intent of the senior three and four-star commanders in Baghdad over time. In writing this history, we strived to evaluate the major decisions of these commands to understand what commanders intended to accomplish and to comprehend how the commands interpreted the situation at the time. We also traced many of those decisions to the tactical level to judge how strategic and operational intent translated into changes on the battlefield. At the same time, we examined the broad trends and tactical developments that bubbled up to affect the operational and strategic levels, including missed opportunities along these lines. Our team also assessed the impact of changes to the institutional army, such as modularization and transformation, on the operational conflict in Iraq. Finally, we explored the assumptions underpinning the U.S. campaign in Iraq at various times and assessed their validity.

We have attempted to write this history with two audiences in mind. For the professional audience of current and future Army leaders, we have sought to articulate the key operational and strategic lessons from the Iraq War that in our estimation should inform strategy, operations, and the Army as an institution. Beyond the professional Army audience, however, we have attempted to write this history in an accessible way so that a civilian audience will be able to understand the Army's experience in the war. We believe too few military accounts thus far have attempted to explain to the American public what the armed forces have gone through in the post-September 11, 2001 (9/11) wars. The experience of war otherwise becomes a gulf between the two.

Readers will note that, although this book is named an Army history, we have included other military services and international forces in the story, sometimes in great detail. In contemporary warfare, the Army goes to war as part of a joint force and often with coalition partners. It is impossible to tell the Army's story in Iraq without telling the story of the U.S. Marines, the British armed forces, and other coalition ground forces as well.

Readers will also note that we have attempted, to the best of our knowledge and ability, to include in this history the enemy perspective, the nature of the operating environment, and the political and social context for the conflict. We have done this to explain

why various groups and peoples fought against or alongside coalition forces, what they hoped to achieve, and how their leaders made decisions in response to (or independent of) the coalition's actions.

Volume 2 of this series will include a concluding summary of our major findings concerning the operational and strategic lessons of the war, but readers will see throughout this first volume some of the themes that we have drawn from our research. The March–April 2003 campaign to remove the regime of Saddam Hussein achieved its operational objectives more quickly than either side or outside observer expected. But the aftermath of that victory was equally surprising, as the United States and its allies failed to consolidate their gains by stabilizing the country, rebuilding the state they had destroyed, and perhaps establishing the basis for a sustainable political outcome. In the first year of the war, a difficult post-regime-change stabilization campaign grew into an even more difficult insurgency. In the 3 years after that, the conflict became an ethnic and sectarian civil war among Iraqi factions that were battling for power and survival.

For the Army, the story of the 4-year period following the fall of Saddam Hussein is a mixed one. The stunningly swift destruction of the Iraqi military and advance to Baghdad showcased the U.S. military's proficiency in conventional warfare. In the stabilization and counterinsurgency campaigns that followed, however, thinly stretched units and over-taxed headquarters often found themselves undertaking unexpected missions for which they were doctrinally, materially, and perhaps intellectually ill-prepared. Throughout that period the Iraqi theater of operations was constrained, with units and leaders operating under a chronic shortage of troops and following a strategy and campaign plan that ultimately failed. Under these conditions, Army leaders and their Soldiers went through a difficult learning process, suffering painful losses—more than 36,000 killed and wounded during the war's duration—as they adapted to a conflict whose character changed rapidly. By late 2006, many tactical Army units had come up with innovative solutions to their local problems—some by recalling counterinsurgency lessons from the Army's distant past, others by exploiting emergent opportunities to work with tribes and local communities—but not until 2007 would these approaches be synchronized and integrated at the operational and strategic levels.

In writing this narrative history, we have relied to a great degree on military records from U.S. operational headquarters and interviews, many of them not previously accessible to scholars. Some readers, particularly those within the national security community, may be surprised with information revealed in this book. Our study benefited tremendously from CENTCOM's support in declassifying and/or redacting over 30,000 pages of material selected by our team. We were also aided by the products of an earlier effort led by the researchers of General George Casey's book, *Strategic Reflections*, which yielded over 10,000 pages of declassified or redacted material. To ensure we properly safeguarded sensitive national security information further, this manuscript underwent security reviews at the Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review and at the U.S. Army War College. We have also benefited from the fact that much more is known today about the enemy and about the actions of the Iraqi Government than was known during the early years of the war. From our vantage point in 2016, however, we recognize that we have written a history of a war that is not yet over. With thousands of U.S. and coalition forces back in Iraq campaigning against an enemy that is a successor to al-Qaeda in Iraq, we understand that there may be many more accounts written before the story

truly ends. We do not expect that our work will be definitive. Instead, we hope our contribution helps to open the door to future research by others whose investigations we fully expect will supersede our own.

The scope of this project and the time available prevented us from covering a number of major areas of research that we will have to leave for others to examine. We hope that our work at the operational level will point the way for scholars to research and write the story of U.S. ground forces at the tactical level. Some histories at that level have begun to appear, such as Dale Andrade's *Surging South of Baghdad*, but many more are needed.

Another omission in this history is the role of U.S. special operations forces in Iraq, who were involved in virtually every major development during the war, but whose story we have not been able adequately to tell. The special operations commands are not yet ready to grant researchers complete access to their operational records to chronicle the often amazing tales they contain. The sections of our history that recount the special operations role in Iraq represent a small fraction of what the special operators actually did, and we hope that someday soon that story can be fully told.

We also have not been able to provide a full account of the enemy and Iraqi forces of various kinds that fought during the war, though we have worked hard to assemble as much of that information as we can. Neither the enemy forces nor the Iraqi security forces have yet told their own story, and until they do, historians' understanding of their perspective is necessarily incomplete.

A few other areas of research were beyond the scope of this history but should be undertaken by researchers, including the shared logistics that supported both Iraq and Afghanistan, air power in Iraq, and the maritime component of the Iraq campaign. The functional areas of information operations and reconstruction projects deserve their own treatment as well. Even more importantly, the Defense Department needs to produce a history of U.S. Central Command in the post-9/11 wars, so that the operational histories of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars—as well as other smaller operations—can be put into their regional, strategic context. The fight against al-Qaeda in Iraq or the Islamic State in Iraq was part of a broader campaign against al-Qaeda and its associated movements. This strategic history should be modeled on the U.S. Army in World War II series volume, *The Supreme Command*, an overarching history of the Allies in the European theater without which the operational histories of the European theater cannot be fully appreciated.

A history set in Iraq will contain many Arabic personal and place names, many which have no standard spelling. In rendering these Arabic names into English, we have followed standard transliteration in many cases, but in others we have used the spelling most common within the U.S. military, whether that spelling followed transliteration rules or not. For simplicity's sake, and to reflect U.S. military and Iraqi usage, we have also tended to drop the articles from the spelling of place names in the text. The maps are more formal and retain the article.

Finally, throughout these volumes, we, the authors, retain full responsibility for all matters of interpretation as well as for any errors or omissions of fact.

COLONEL JOEL RAYBURN
Washington, DC
February 2016

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As a small team focused on a specific task for a fixed duration, we relied frequently on larger Army and joint organizations that generously contributed their input, time, and resources. Within the Army, we are grateful to the Center of Military History and the Histories Division for providing an array of resources for this project, including historians who helped edit chapters and footnotes, shared ideas, and furnished valuable primary sources. We also would like to thank the Historical Products Branch for its professional editors, cartographers, and visual information specialists who helped turn our manuscript into printed form. Our team is also indebted to the Strategic Studies Institute at the U.S. Army War College for further editing and ultimately publishing our work.

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provided us their team's extensive interviews and draft manuscripts of several volumes of the *On Point* series, enabling us to build on their excellent work. Fort Leavenworth's Center for Army Lessons Learned also provided access to its extensive unpublished unit-level studies, particularly to valuable interviews and after action reports from the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq. At TRADOC Headquarters, Brit McCarley, Karen Lewis, and Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Richard Rinaldo opened TRADOC's extensive holdings and offered constructive input during the early stages of this project. We received similar assistance from Robert S. Cameron at the Army's Armor Center at Fort Benning, GA.

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At the U.S. Central Command History Office, David "Scotty" Dawson and Charles Newell helped us comb through archives and provided their own expert knowledge about the Iraq campaign. Daniel Darling, one of Central Command's finest and most prolific intelligence experts, contributed several monographs that helped unlock some of the mysteries of the Iraqi insurgency. Major General Michael Garrett, U.S. Central Command chief of staff, put his staff at our disposal and accomplished the Army's most extensive document declassification project since World War II in support of these volumes. Their work enabled us to declassify almost 30,000 pages of important operational records.

Many elements from the special operations community provided unique and invaluable support for our project. At U.S. Special Operations Command, the Command History team helped fact-check our data, provided archival research and sources, and helped us gain access to key leaders. We would also like to thank the Center for Counterterrorism Studies and the Command History team at Joint Special Operations Command for enabling us to access their lessons-learned studies and historical archives. Special thanks across these teams go to Shawn Woodford, Colonel (Ret.) Steven Cage, Gaea Lenders, and Colonel (Ret.) James Herson. Likewise, William Knarr of the Joint Special Operations University and the Institute for Defense Analyses provided invaluable primary and secondary sources on Anbar Province across the war, and his interviews of insurgent commanders and Iraqi leaders are unique among the current set of primary sources. We

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Finally, we would like to thank the scores of individuals who granted us interviews or participated in discussions during this project. Their names, except for those who wished to remain anonymous, appear in our bibliographical section. These interviews and meetings enabled us to improve our understanding of the human factor and of command decision-making during the Iraq War. The interviewees, some of whom contributed many hours of their time, helped us clarify topics of concern, provided insight into important decisions, and gave us a more nuanced understanding of previously reported events. We also wish to thank the U.S. Army's General Officer Management Office for helping us connect with many senior leaders from all phases of the war.

CHAPTER 1

PROLOGUE: THE COLLISION COURSE, 1991-2003

BEYOND THE TRUCE TENT

The American and Iraqi military commanders who met near the Iraq-Kuwait border to negotiate a cease-fire on March 3, 1991, were perhaps equally surprised to find themselves there under the circumstances that confronted them. By the time General H. Norman Schwarzkopf of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and Iraqi General Sultan Hashem met in the truce tent at Safwan, Iraq, a lightning armored thrust had ejected the Iraqi armies from Kuwait, the country they had invaded in August 1990. The U.S.-led Operation DESERT STORM, a 39-day air campaign followed by a 100-hour ground assault, had left an estimated 20,000 Iraqi soldiers dead and another 50,000 captured. The coalition, in stark contrast, had lost 245 troops killed, far fewer than the coalition commanders had expected, and had suspended combat operations without ever being asked for terms.¹



Source: Department of Defense (DoD) by Sergeant Jose Trejo (Released).

General Norman Schwarzkopf During the Iraqi Surrender at Safwan Airfield in Iraq (March 3, 1991).²



Source: Iraqi TV, still photo by Wikimedia Commons contributors.

Saddam Hussein.³

The 4-day ground campaign had been one of the most unequal in military history, and the outcome would force military professionals around the world to reexamine their assumptions about military effectiveness. However, it had not ended the regime of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Having achieved their original objective of restoring Kuwait's sovereignty and territorial integrity, then-President George H. W. Bush and his fellow coalition leaders had decided not to order their troops to march on to Baghdad. Instead, the massive force that devastated the Iraqi military disappeared from the theater almost as quickly as it had secured victory. Within weeks, a force of nine U.S. Army and Marine divisions melted away to a single brigade left behind in Kuwait.

The U.S. and Iraqi forces that faced each other in the deserts of Kuwait and Iraq had little idea that they represented merely the opening phase of what became more than a quarter-century of warfare. From January 1991, until the time of this book's writing, hostilities between or involving the United States and Iraq never ceased. The American and Iraqi armies that clashed and then disengaged in 1991 were far different from the forces that would clash again in the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Both the U.S. military and the Iraqi regime of Saddam went through dramatic, even transformational changes during the 12-year interval. The experiences of the 1990s – a decade in which the U.S. military was constantly engaged in contingency operations and the Iraqi regime constantly engaged in internal conflicts – shaped the ways in which the American forces and Iraqis operated and behaved in the short war of March-April 2003 and the protracted conflict that emerged afterward. Throughout the 1990s, hostilities between the United States and the Iraqi regime gradually intensified, leading to short bouts of violence in 1993, 1994, 1996, and 1998 that presaged the reigniting of open warfare between the two sides.

THE U.S. ARMY AFTER OPERATION DESERT STORM

The 1990s were a busy time for the U.S. military, despite the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rapid democratization of Eastern Europe. Aside from continuing its commitment to armed deterrence in Kuwait, Sinai, and the Korean Peninsula, the United States participated in numerous contingency operations in places such as Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. Despite these expanding military commitments, the nation sought to achieve a post-Cold War peace dividend by reducing its Cold War military structure. As its forces shrank, the U.S. military sought to offset the reduction in numbers by harnessing emerging technologies. The military force that emerged at the end of the decade was far different from the one welcomed home to ticker-tape parades in 1991.

Shortly after its redeployment from the Persian Gulf, the U.S. Army that achieved a lopsided victory against Iraq underwent dramatic changes in size. Of the 18 active divisions the Army fielded in 1989, only 10 remained by 1995. In keeping with popular expectations of a peace dividend, the Army's active duty strength shrank from 770,000 in 1989 to 510,000 in 1995, a precipitous drop that continued gradually to 490,000 by 2002. An even steeper reduction took place in the Army's civilian workforce, cut by 58 percent between 1989 and 1993. With the reduction in personnel came a shift in roles unnoticed by many outside the military profession. Active duty troops performed many of the support functions for the Cold War Army, but after Operation DESERT STORM, the troops on active duty were to be expeditionary, focused on training to sustain their capabilities throughout the turbulence of the drawdown.⁴ As a result, contractors partially filled the void, becoming commonplace in the Army's maintenance bays and training centers, and even accompanying the Army as it deployed abroad in the 1990s.

These cuts in personnel and combat power occurred during a period of fluctuation in the country's national security strategy after 40 years of containment. As the United States searched for a strategy for the post-Cold War world, the military sought to understand the ways in which Operation DESERT STORM might signify the character of future wars. One of the most prominent lessons uniformed leaders took from Operation DESERT STORM was that the military needed to find ways to project power more rapidly. Future foes were unlikely to afford the United States the luxury of the deliberate 6-month buildup that had followed Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. Accordingly, Chief of Staff of the Army General Gordon R. Sullivan enhanced the Army's expeditionary capabilities in the Gulf region by pre-positioning in Kuwait and Qatar equipment from the Army's deactivated units. When combined with regular troop deployments to Kuwait, the Army could place a division on a combat footing in that region within days, with the promise of more divisions arriving in shorter order than in 1990. At the same time, the Army continued a rotation of forces to Kuwait that included components of a maneuver brigade and air defense artillery units.⁵

Meanwhile, the Army's first post-Operation DESERT STORM doctrine, presided over by the commander of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), General Frederick M. Franks, Jr., who had led VII Corps during the war, offered more continuity than change with the AirLand Battle doctrine under which the Army had operated during Operation DESERT STORM. In addition to high-intensity combat, the 1993 edition of Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, placed increased emphasis not just on force

projection, but also on operations other than war (OOTW), an expansive category that included such diverse missions as peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, counterterrorism, and counterinsurgency. For the Army, OOTW remained a series of potential operations that were considered less demanding than high-intensity combat, and consequently, the belief prevailed that units could be trained up for these lesser cases prior to any deployment, while not sacrificing readiness for high-intensity fire and maneuver.

The “Revolution in Military Affairs”

As the decade progressed, the Army came under increasing pressure to conform to the growing belief among military theorists that technology would transform future battlefields in accordance with a “revolution in military affairs” (RMA).⁶ Advocates of RMA believed that a new way of war in the information age had begun to emerge in the Operation DESERT STORM air campaign, one in which advanced technology would give those who possessed it, such as the U.S. military, a decisive advantage over any potential foe. RMA advocates predicted that improvements in precision-guided munitions and sensor technologies would create a networked battlefield in which the fog of war could be eliminated. On this future battlefield, U.S. forces supposedly would enjoy almost complete awareness of both the friendly and enemy situation, enabling small, high-tech U.S. forces to conduct rapid, decisive maneuvers leading to the quick collapse of the enemy.⁷

The impact of RMA on the Army was mixed. While these network-centric or effects-based concepts did not find universal support within the Army, there were a substantial number of adherents, particularly in the fires, attack aviation, and intelligence communities. At the same time, buzzwords and phrases associated with RMA and adopted by the joint fires and intelligence communities, such as “information dominance,” made their way into the Army’s lexicon. Despite these influences, successive Army chiefs in the 1990s remained skeptical about the promise of technology alone to change the inherent nature of war, and a number of Army officers concluded that Operation DESERT STORM might be a poor example of what the future was likely to bring. They predicted that future campaigns probably would take place under more trying conditions, and that America’s technological advantages would likely be fleeting and unlikely to lift the fog of war.⁸ Some Army thinkers also noted that RMA discounted the possibility that adversaries might challenge the U.S. military through unconventional means rather than the conventional ones that failed the Iraqis in 1991. Ultimately, no clear consensus coalesced around either RMA or its critics to guide Army force development.



Source: U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sergeant Angela Stafford (Released).

General Eric K. Shinseki, Chief of Staff of the Army (1999-2003).⁹

Rather than make wholesale changes to the Army's structure or systems, Army leaders of the 1990s opted instead for an evolutionary modernization of the existing force. They employed a number of simulation exercises and field trials to find the best way to modernize the Army's systems and force structure. Venues such as the Modern Louisiana Maneuvers (1992-1994), led by Brigadier General Tommy Franks, were used to test ideas and concepts for modernization as part of an overarching Army concept called Force XXI, within which the 4th Infantry Division became the experimental force and digital test bed. The 4th Infantry Division tested evolutionary appliqués to existing systems such as the M1 tank and experimented with them in training in order to give the Army a way to make decisions about what systems to procure on a larger scale. Nonetheless, the resultant enhanced legacy forces did not satisfy the Army's critics, who advocated a focus on leap-ahead technology and brought increasing pressure on the Army of the 1990s to be, as Chief of Staff of the Army General Eric K. Shinseki put it, more "responsive, deployable, agile, versatile, lethal, survivable, and sustainable."¹⁰

Operations Other Than War: Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans

While the Army sharply downsized following the Gulf war, the subsequent decade brought increased demand for its forces in mid-scale contingency operations and in low-intensity conflict, including a continuous deterrent posture to contain Saddam's still-aggressive regime in Iraq.¹¹ This trend of OOTW began with Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, the effort to render humanitarian assistance to the large Kurdish refugee

population that sought shelter from Saddam's forces under a U.S. no-fly zone in northern Iraq in the immediate aftermath of Operation DESERT STORM.

After Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, the next OOTW occurred in Somalia. In April 1992, the United Nations (UN) established the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), a security force and contingent of observers meant to prevent Somali warlords from disrupting relief supplies to the starving population.¹² U.S. officials quickly discovered that peacekeepers and aid alone could not alleviate the suffering, and despite the intentions of the international community, the warlords on the ground ignored the UN-brokered cease-fire, rendering the humanitarian relief operation ineffective. In response, the United States committed forces to Somalia in December 1992, as part of a 24-country coalition named the Unified Task Force that aimed to secure the relief activities under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Under the oversight of CENTCOM, the various national contingents grew to about 12,000 personnel, which augmented the 25,000 American service members deployed to Somalia. This more robust U.S. military presence, dubbed Operation RESTORE HOPE, succeeded in ending large-scale starvation, but it was quickly reduced and replaced by a U.N.-led force. When the peace enforcement mandate broadened to include disarming the warring parties, Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aided and his militia forces retaliated, killing 24 Pakistani soldiers in June and 4 American Soldiers with a roadside bomb, or improvised explosive device (IED), in August. In response, the United States committed a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) to fight Aided and his forces, though Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Les Aspin denied U.S. field commanders' requests for armored vehicles in support of these expanded operations.¹³

U.S. involvement in Somalia culminated with the Battle of Mogadishu, October 3-4, 1993, which pitted a task force of Army Rangers against thousands of Somali militiamen. In the bloodiest urban combat American forces had experienced since the Battle of Hue, Vietnam, in 1968, the United States lost 18 Soldiers killed and another 77 wounded; while between 1,500 and 3,000 Somalis were killed or wounded. Following the battle, the United States ceased further offensive operations, and then-President William J. Clinton ordered a complete withdrawal by March 1994.¹⁴ For their part, Army leaders assessed the iconic clash in Mogadishu as a failure. What had begun as a response to a humanitarian crisis had expanded to peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and ultimately pitched urban combat—a mission creep that significantly shaped Army leaders' future views about humanitarian intervention and nation building.¹⁵

Six months after ending the mission in Somalia, the United States embarked on another major OOTW in Haiti to reinstate elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, removed in a military coup 3 years before. On September 18, 1994, Clinton initiated a Marine and airborne assault on Haiti. With troops of the 82d Airborne Division en route, former President Jimmy Carter negotiated the peaceful exit of Haiti's military rulers and the return of Aristide. Within hours, Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY changed from an invasion into a permissive stabilization mission that would last until 2000.¹⁶ Throughout its 6-year presence in the poverty-stricken country, the U.S. military's operating posture was in many ways a response to the disaster in Mogadishu, so that the Army in Haiti was on force protection to such a degree that, in one observer's words, it "not only drove the mission, it almost became the mission."¹⁷

By 1993, the Army experienced a 100 percent increase in the number of Soldiers deployed on contingency operations since the end of the Cold War.¹⁸ As more Army units deployed in stability and support operations, the Army sought to change the way it prepared these units for their real-world missions by incorporating low-intensity conflict or peacekeeping scenarios into war games and combat training centers.¹⁹ The Combat Maneuver Training Center in Germany developed a “Danubian” scenario to stress an increased spectrum of war including ethnic factions, media, and civilians on the battlefield. In 1993, the Joint Readiness Training Center conducted its first peacekeeping rotation with the complexities of interagency actors and international nongovernmental organizations.²⁰ The National Training Center (NTC) in California continued to focus on high-intensity operations, but prescient NTC leaders like Colonel William Scott Wallace recognized that it was time to modernize the opposing force, concluding that if his son had a cell phone in his car, the enemy was probably using cell phones as well.²¹ Training center rotations exercised contingency deployments by using all manner of movement, drawing pre-positioned equipment, and intermediate staging including airfield seizure for forced entry in some instances.²² The focus of these efforts was at the tactical level, however, and in its higher-level operational exercises, the Army struggled to develop simulations adequately depicting, or even incorporating, the lower-intensity end of the conflict spectrum.²³ At the same time, the combat training centers served as barometers of Army readiness as the decade progressed: fiscal austerity and high operations tempo made for training rotations in which units performed less effectively than they had previously.²⁴

By the mid-1990s, the Army’s training systems became increasingly geared toward the ongoing crisis in the Balkans, where the wars following the fragmentation of Yugoslavia in 1991 had a profound impact on the Army’s assumptions and perspectives in ways that would affect the later campaign in Iraq. When the Yugoslav Republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina declared independence in 1991 and 1992, ethnic and nationalist civil wars erupted.

U.S. Army battalions rotated to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as lightly armed UN observers in 1993 in an effort to contain the spread of conflict and forestall Serbian aggression. Once North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) air strikes—combined with the threat of Croatian Army and Bosnian Muslim ground forces—established a stalemate among the warring parties in Bosnia in 1994-1995, the United States was able to broker a fragile peace through the Dayton Accords in late 1995. As part of a larger NATO peacekeeping force designed to enforce the accords, the United States deployed the 1st Armored Division into northern Bosnia. Although U.S. leaders declared the mission would last for only 1 year, it would eventually continue for the better part of a decade.²⁵

The long Balkan peacekeeping mission exposed disagreements within the ranks of senior American officers as they struggled to define the Army’s role after the Cold War. Preferring the mission of conventional warfighting, many Army leaders resisted the idea of focusing on OOTW, even when they were clearly the Army’s primary role in the 1990s. There was also the U.S. peacekeeping forces’ operating posture that emphasized force protection so heavily that the average Soldier’s contact with the local population was minimal.²⁶ Units tended to satisfy themselves with presence patrols and inspections to

monitor the General Framework Agreement for the Peace, with little consideration of how their military tasks should contribute to the political goals of the operation, while elevating force protection to a mission essential task. As U.S. Army commander of the NATO force in Bosnia, Shinseki assessed that, with their limited numbers (fewer than 20,000 U.S. troops), his forces could only provide general area security and could not be expected to perform other tasks such as replacing the functions of the local police.²⁷ Meanwhile, as had been the case in Haiti and Somalia, the Army adopted routinized patrolling; established large semi-permanent bases serviced by contractors; and provided extensive amenities for the deployed forces.

While the Army remained committed in Bosnia, it expanded its Balkan presence southward in 1999 as the United States intervened to stop Serbian forces carrying out large-scale ethnic cleansing against Kosovo's Albanian majority population. In March 1999, NATO began an air campaign focused on military, communications, and industrial targets throughout Serbia and Kosovo, aiming to force Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to withdraw his troops from Kosovo altogether. NATO ground forces entered Kosovo without a fight, 38,000 sorties and 78 days later, taking up another stabilization mission.²⁸

Despite NATO's declaration at the outset of the conflict that its troops would not engage in ground combat in Kosovo, NATO commanders had relied on ground forces deployed to Macedonia and Albania to deter the Milosevic regime from further aggression. While he had considered using ground forces, NATO Commander General Wesley K. Clark had also expected to be able to wield the deep strike aviation capability that had become the centerpiece of the AirLand Battle doctrine the Army had developed against the Soviets. To prepare for a deep strike against the Serbs, V Corps Commander Lieutenant General John W. Hendrix task organized units from the Germany-based 12th Aviation Brigade with elements of 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division to form Task Force Hawk under the command of Brigadier General Richard A. Cody and his deputy, Colonel Raymond T. Odierno. However, difficulties in deploying Task Force Hawk and its 48 AH-64 Apache helicopters from Germany to operating bases in Albania meant that the attack helicopters never tested the extensive Yugoslav air defense network and did not contribute to the campaign against Serbian forces. Reviewing the aviation operation's results with Hendrix, U.S. Army Europe Commander General Montgomery C. Meigs (who was also commander of the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina) came to believe that the Army's independent deep strike aviation capability did not really exist.²⁹

As Task Force Hawk transitioned into a ground-based Task Force Falcon and occupied one of NATO's five multinational brigade sectors in Kosovo, NATO troops encountered unanticipated levels of civil violence between Albanians and Serbs, so that their primary mission quickly became one of restoring order and maintaining peace. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Army had only experienced the aftermath of sectarian violence; in Kosovo, it became the Army's job to stop it. Ironically, having bombed Serbia into submission, U.S. troops found themselves protecting ethnic Serbs living in Kosovo from Albanian reprisals as the once-dominant ethnic minority felt the wrath of the long-suppressed majority. Further complicating the deployment was a reluctance to tie the Army's operation to any political end state for Kosovo, whether as an autonomous province of Serbia, UN protectorate, or independent country.³⁰

The delays in the deployment of Task Force Hawk prompted the Army to reevaluate its strategic agility. The Kosovo war highlighted other shortcomings as well, such as the limitations of operating heavy vehicles in areas with underdeveloped infrastructure, the lack of organic mobility and adequate protection in light units, and the manpower-intensive nature of operations in urban areas and complex terrain. From the American perspective, the air campaign had compelled the withdrawal of Serbian forces, but the subsequent messy reality of peace enforcement had required ground troops. This renewed the debate within the U.S. military not only about joint operating roles, but also about the character of modern war in the post-Cold War era, while giving greater impetus to the advocates of RMA who saw Kosovo as a validation of their ideas.

The Kosovo Campaign, however, had raised serious questions about RMA's validity. It emerged in the operation's aftermath that U.S. military leaders had dramatically overestimated the effect of the air campaign. On June 10, 1999, SECDEF William S. Cohen announced that air power and missiles had degraded and diminished the Serbian military, destroying more than 50 percent of its artillery and one-third of its armored vehicles. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Henry Hugh Shelton elaborated on Cohen's figures, citing the destruction of around 120 tanks, 220 armored personnel carriers, and up to 450 artillery pieces and mortars, losses that U.S. leaders assessed had been the basis for the Serbian decision to withdraw. However, when NATO troops and Western reporters arrived in Kosovo, they found little physical evidence of such battle damage, noting instead the Serbian use of decoys and the difficulty with assessments conducted at high altitude.³¹ A *Newsweek* article published the following year cast doubt on the Pentagon and NATO figures. Rather than the 744 supposedly confirmed kills during the conflict, the article cited a suppressed U.S. Air Force report based on a search of Kosovo that found evidence of only 14 tanks, 18 armored personnel carriers, and 20 artillery pieces destroyed. U.S. and NATO leaders had probably vastly underestimated the importance in the campaign of the 18,000-strong Kosovo Liberation Army, the Kosovar Albanian insurgent force that had styled itself as "NATO's ground force."³² Overall, the Kosovo episode was a warning that faith in precision air strikes and information dominance to change an enemy state or population's behavior might be misplaced.

Modularity, Transformation, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld

By 1996, OOTW were consuming the equivalent of 4 of the Army's 10 remaining divisions. The demands of preparing units to deploy, deploying them, and then recovering them to training proficiency for conventional combat required a 3:1 ratio of units committed to sustain one unit on deployment.³³ When considering personnel, this ratio increased to 5:1, given the number of individuals going through training or education programs at any given time.³⁴ Though the 1990s operations tempo was much lower than the Army would experience in the wars following September 2001, it was nevertheless a difficult strain on a force that continued a strenuous regimen in which units spent months of each year at training centers, honing their skills for high-intensity combat operations.

To ease this pressure and generate more combat formations out of the existing force, Army leaders in the late 1990s began the process of moving away from a division-based structure in favor of modular combat brigades. With the Balkan experience in mind,

Shinseki developed and fielded the first Interim Brigade Combat Teams (IBCT): brigades optimized to provide numbers of boots on the ground and speed of deployment similar to that of light units, but with tactical mobility, firepower, and protection comparable to heavy units.³⁵ After evaluating a series of options, the Army selected a variant of the Canadian LAV III to form the basis of the brigade and named the new vehicles Strykers. The IBCTs were meant to be relatively self-contained formations that could fight and sustain themselves independent of the division headquarters or support structures. They were meant to be modular, interchangeable formations that could be plugged into any higher division headquarters, not just the division to which they were organically assigned.³⁶ Army planners drawing on the ideas of the RMA expected that future Army brigades and divisions equipped with superior technology would be able to maintain situational awareness through passive, technological means, rather than using traditional combined arms organizations to conduct continuous reconnaissance, fight for information, and develop the situation in close contact with enemy forces.³⁷



General Myers (left). Source: DoD photo by Master Sergeant James M. Bowman, USAF (Released).

**Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard B. Myers and
SECDEF Rumsfeld.³⁸**

Rumsfeld's arrival at the DoD in 2001 created a significant countercurrent to the plans and operating posture that had marked the Army of the 1990s. Rumsfeld believed in the full potential of new technologies to greatly accelerate the force development process, an idea at odds with Army leaders' evolutionary approach to transformation, which relied on the gradual integration of proven technologies rather than the quick integration of unproven ones. Cautious of not losing the legacy force capabilities, however, Army leaders wanted to test new technologies carefully to ensure they worked first and avoid, in the words of future Under Secretary of Defense Michael G. Vickers, trading away "current capabilities" for "future possibilities."³⁹

Rumsfeld was also disinclined to continue the 1990s trend of employing the Army on a large scale in OOTW, following the lead of former President George W. Bush, who as a presidential candidate had criticized Clinton's use of the military for peacekeeping. During his January 2001 confirmation hearing, Rumsfeld told Congress, "I don't think it's necessarily true that the United States has to become a great peacekeeper" and suggested that peacekeeping missions could be the work of other nations.⁴⁰ He later repeated this sentiment on nation building when speaking about Afghanistan and the concerted effort to maintain a small force presence and "not engage in what some call nation building." Rumsfeld's way ahead centered not on people, but equipment: missile defense and the harnessing of technology to make smaller forces more lethal and deployable.⁴¹

THE IRAQI REGIME IN THE 1990s

As the U.S. Army became involved in numerous contingency operations around the globe and debated its structure, organization, and technology for a future of force projection overseas, the Iraqi regime was on a different trajectory altogether. For Saddam, the lessons of 1991 would be far different from those taken by his Western enemies. For reasons Saddam struggled to understand, the United States had decided to stop short of removing his weakened regime from power, despite the stunning conventional military victory it had just achieved. The existential threat to his regime, Saddam noted, had come not from the 100 hours of high-intensity combat against the U.S.-led coalition in Kuwait and the southern Iraqi desert, but from the popular uprising and chaos that had followed. For the next 12 years, Saddam would focus mainly on building the capabilities that would be needed to survive against internal threats and to deter the enemy Iranian regime, rather than those needed to fight an unwinnable war against the U.S. military. As the Ba'ath Party attempted to shore up its regime's legitimacy, it set in motion changes that would ravage Iraqi society and lay the groundwork for future conflict among Iraqis.

The 1991 Iraqi Intifada

For the coalition commanders who gathered at Safwan on the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border on March 3, 1991, the war was over. But for the Iraqi generals who walked away from the truce tent, the war was just beginning. On February 15, then-President George H. W. Bush urged Iraqis to mount a popular uprising, telling a worldwide television audience that "there is another way for the bloodshed to stop, and that is for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside."⁴²

As the Iraqi divisions in Kuwait collapsed, Iraqis did what Bush had suggested they do. Within days of the March 3 cease-fire, Shi'a crowds and army deserters had overrun every major southern city and were fighting Ba'ath Party loyalists for control. Hoping to exploit the situation, members of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the Badr Corps, twin Iraqi Shi'a groups created by the Iranian regime during the Iran-Iraq war, crossed the border from Iran to claim control of Basrah, southern Iraq's largest city. Meanwhile, in northern Iraq, the peshmerga troops of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) seized the major cities of the Kurdish north. The Kurdish parties aimed to create an independent Kurdish zone and inflict a blow in retaliation for the Ba'athist regime's Anfal Campaign of 1988, which had killed more than 100,000 Kurds and displaced a million more. By March 20, the uprising had reached its high point, with most of Iraq's southern and Kurdish provinces in rebel hands.

The uprising was short-lived. Republican Guard divisions that had escaped from Kuwait moved into rebel-held northern and southern cities, driving the lightly armed rebels from city centers. Their methods were rough, especially once it was clear American units would not intervene. Military helicopters that Schwarzkopf had permitted his Iraqi counterparts to use ostensibly for humanitarian purposes were turned against mutinous communities such as the Shi'a holy city of Karbala, where regime troops allegedly dropped sarin gas and strafed fleeing rebels and civilians.⁴³

The regime's secret police executed thousands in the reoccupied cities and buried them in mass graves. The Mujahedin e Khalq (MeK), an Iranian opposition group led by Maryam and Massoud Rajavi and sponsored by Saddam, helped drive the KDP and PUK out of the northern cities and into the Kurdish mountains. In the south, hundreds of thousands of Shi'a fled into Iran or Iraq's vast marshes. In the north, more than a million Kurds fled toward Turkey or Iran. By mid-April, the regime had retaken all major cities, tens of thousands of Iraqis had been killed, and one in 10 Iraqis had been driven from their homes.⁴⁴

Although U.S. units on the ground near the southern Iraqi cities saw regime loyalists suppressing the rebellion and although rebel leaders from Basrah had appealed to U.S. combat units to come to their aid, U.S. leaders chose not to intervene, a decision that allowed Saddam to remain in power and that created a generation of Iraqi Shi'a resentment against the United States.⁴⁵ By summer 1991, the regime was carrying out large-scale reprisals. In the northern cities, the Ba'ath accelerated a decades-long effort to Arabize the most important mixed-ethnicity regions, expelling as many as 100,000 Kurds accused of supporting the rebellion and resettling Shi'a Arabs from southern Iraq to disputed areas such as Kirkuk. An even larger regime response took place in the south. The vast marsh regions of the lower Euphrates and Tigris Valleys had been a safe haven for the Shi'a tribal rebels, but by 1992, the Ba'ath began draining the marshes by diverting the main channels of the rivers. By the late 1990s, 90 percent of the southern marshes had disappeared, forcing hundreds of thousands of Marsh Arab tribesmen to migrate into the Shi'a slums of the south and Baghdad. The displacement ended a Marsh Arab way of life that had existed for millennia and caused an ecological crisis across southern Iraq. To ensure against future uprisings, Saddam was sowing demographic chaos.

The Islamicization of the Ba'ath and Deterioration of the Iraqi Army

As the U.S. Army went through its post-Operation DESERT STORM transformation, Saddam presided over a transformation of his own in Iraq, seeking new means to shore up his regime in the wake of the 1991 uprising, as well as a new ideological basis for his rule. Though Ba'athism was a secular pan-Arab ideology and though he had long suppressed Iraq's various Islamic movements, in 1993 Saddam decided to Islamicize his regime in a national Faith Campaign designed to invest his rule with religious legitimacy. The formerly secular leader encouraged the building of mosques, offered clerics state sponsorship, and claimed speciously that Ba'athism's founder Michel Aflaq (a Syrian Christian) had converted to Islam on his deathbed in Baghdad. Saddam also clothed himself in religious imagery, adding "Allah Akbar" to the Iraqi flag and having Islamic scholars "discover" his descent from the Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁶

Most significantly, though, Saddam sent thousands of Ba'athist military and intelligence officers into mosques and seminaries to undertake Islamic studies, especially from Salafi clerics whom Saddam considered less threatening than the Muslim Brotherhood. The result was a fusion of Ba'athists and Salafis whom Iraqi Islamists believed were to form an Islamic resistance if ever Saddam's regime were under assault again. Meanwhile, Saddam's Vice President Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri created a similar fusion of Ba'athists and religious figures among the Sufi sect, known as Naqshbandis, whose largest following was in the upper Tigris region and Anbar. Even among the Shi'a, the Ba'athist regime encouraged Najaf-based Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr to build a large popular following as long as Sadr agreed to align politically with the regime against Iran.⁴⁷

Significant changes were underway among Iraq's military and security services as well. The 60 Iraqi divisions that the Third Army had eviscerated in Kuwait and southern Iraq were never fully reconstituted. The post-1991 Iraqi Army shrank to five corps of 18 divisions, with an additional two corps of the Republican Guard. In December 1995, senior Iraqi military leaders, including Republican Guard Commander Lieutenant General Raad Hamdani, met with Saddam to recommend new doctrines and organizations based on the lessons drawn from the 1991 war. Because the U.S. military, with its technological advantages, could destroy any large formations, Hamdani observed there was no point in building them; instead, the Iraqis should eschew armored forces in favor of light infantry that would disperse and offer guerrilla resistance against an invading force. Saddam reportedly rejected the suggestion, asserting that had his army not possessed heavy forces, Iraq would not have emerged "victorious" from the 1991 war.⁴⁸ Officially, the army would retain its pre-1991 doctrine and armaments.

Nevertheless, the Iraqi security sector changed dramatically after 1995. Whereas the Iraqi military of the 1980s was dominated by a huge regular army and the Republican Guard, the Iraqi regime of the 1990s began a proliferation of paramilitary organizations affiliated with the Ba'ath Party. These paramilitaries drew resources and recruits away from the regular military, whose large formations had already been starved of resources by the postwar sanctions. Most notably, Saddam's eldest (and unstable) son Uday commanded the Fedayeen Saddam, a Ba'athist militia with as many as 40,000 members.⁴⁹ Probably most Fedayeen were Sunnis, but a large number were Shi'a recruited from

lower-class neighborhoods in Baghdad's Saddam City (later renamed Sadr City in 2003) and other areas where jobs were scarce.⁵⁰

The Iraqi Resistance to Saddam

The regime's mid-1990s restructuring coincided with a series of internal challenges to Saddam's rule. The most prominent came from within his own family. In August 1995, Saddam's son-in-law and kinsman, Hussein Kamal al-Majid, defected from his senior post overseeing Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs and set himself up in opposition to Saddam in Jordan. Just 6 months later, however, Saddam lured Hussein Kamal back to Baghdad with a promise of amnesty, only to immediately execute him for treason.⁵¹

Other challenges came from within Ba'athist and Sunni tribal networks that had once been Saddam loyalists. After the 1991 uprising, Saddam hoped to bolster his regime by empowering Iraq's tribes, just as he had empowered its Islamists. He reversed the long-standing Ba'athist policy of suppressing tribal identity and restored the power of tribal sheikhs, even allowing the arming of tribal militias with heavy weapons meant to be used against invaders or insurgents if a 1991-type crisis should recur. But the pro-tribal policy created new dangers as well. In May 1995, the Albu Nimr tribe, part of Anbar's large Dulaim tribal confederation, rose in revolt in Ramadi after the regime executed three senior Dulaimi generals who had criticized Uday. The Special Republican Guard quickly suppressed the uprising, but the incident demonstrated Ramadi's restiveness and the fractures between Anbaris and the Ba'athist regime.⁵² Nor was Saddam's support within the Ba'ath Party fully assured. In June 1996, Saddam's intelligence apparatus uncovered a coup plot involving more than 100 officers coordinated by former Iraqi general Mohammed Shahwani, a Sunni Turkoman from northern Iraq who lost three sons among the 85 Iraqis executed for their roles in the conspiracy.⁵³

Others among Saddam's opponents took advantage of his Faith Campaign to mobilize against the regime. The Salafi networks that Saddam had encouraged contained not just Ba'athists sent for religious indoctrination, but also "pure" Salafis opposed to secular states in the Muslim world. In the late 1990s, the most militant of the pure Salafis began a low-level terrorist campaign against the Ba'ath Party, carrying out intermittent attacks against Ba'athist targets.⁵⁴ The emergence of this threat led Saddam's half-brother and intelligence chief Barzan al-Tikriti to warn Saddam in 2000 that the Islamist groups the regime was supporting would eventually try to topple the Ba'ath.⁵⁵

Finally, from their bases inside Iran, Badr Corps members conducted cross-border operations into Iraq throughout the 1990s. Formed by the Iranian regime during the Iran-Iraq war, the Badr Corps was comprised of Iraqi prisoners of war who had defected to Iran, as well as Iraqi refugees who had fled to Iran. The Badr Corps and affiliates such as the shadowy Sheibani Network sought to gather intelligence and carry out acts of sabotage and subversion in the Shi'a south, intending to lay the groundwork for an eventual revolt. The Iranian regime directly sponsored these activities through the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, which by 1998 came under the command of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani.⁵⁶

THE CONTINUING U.S.-IRAQ CONFRONTATION, 1991-2000

In April 1991, a contingent of U.S. Marines and a single U.S. Army brigade in Kuwait, the 1st Brigade of the 3d Armored Division, covered the redeployment of the 500,000-strong coalition as it departed the Persian Gulf theater. In June, the lone Army brigade was replaced by 3,600 troops of the Germany-based 11th Armored Cavalry, commanded by Colonel Andrew J. Bacevich. The cavalry unit initiated a rotational mission—to deter any future aggression by Saddam against Kuwait—that would last more than a decade and take place alongside an intermittent escalation of U.S.-Iraq tensions into warfare.

The deterrence mission started on a somber note for Bacevich and his 11th Armored Cavalry when their ammunition containers exploded at Camp Doha, Kuwait, on July 11, 1991, killing three Soldiers and wounding 55 more, while destroying or damaging four M1A1 tanks and 98 other vehicles. Compared with the losses sustained by the force during Operation DESERT STORM, these postwar losses signified that the contingency mission of deterring Iraqi aggression would lack the luster and clear sense of success that characterized the lightning ground campaign of February-March 1991.⁵⁷

Operation PROVIDE COMFORT

The rapid redeployment of coalition troops from Kuwait after Operation DESERT STORM was not the end of U.S. involvement on the ground inside Iraq. As Saddam's troops quelled the northern uprising in April 1991, more than a half million Kurdish refugees entered Turkey, seeking safety from the Iraqi regime's crackdown. Hundreds of thousands more migrated toward improvised camps near the mountainous border. Hundreds died each day of exposure and starvation. Unlike the Shi'a rebellion in the south, the Kurdish plight gained the attention of Western capitals and the global media, prompting UN intervention to alleviate the humanitarian crisis.⁵⁸ The resulting operation, PROVIDE COMFORT, began with airdrops of humanitarian supplies, but soon expanded to include ground forces to safeguard the refugee population. In early April 1991, a small NATO force under U.S. Army Major General Jay M. Garner carved out an enclave in the border zone to facilitate the safe return of the Kurds to Iraq. Garner's multinational command included an airborne infantry battalion under Lieutenant Colonel John P. Abizaid and the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) under Colonel James L. Jones, Jr., which together maneuvered inside Iraq to force an Iraqi Army corps to withdraw from the Kurdish zone and clear the way for Kurdish refugees to return home. With the humanitarian mission completed, U.S. ground forces left northern Iraq in July 1991, but NATO military operations continued in the air.⁵⁹ As part of Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, the United States established a no-fly zone, later named Operation NORTHERN WATCH, above the 36th parallel in northern Iraq to protect the population from the worst excesses of Saddam's regime. A matching no-fly zone, dubbed Operation SOUTHERN WATCH, covered much of southern Iraq. These no-fly zones were part of a low-intensity conflict lasting more than a decade between the United States and Iraq. This state of affairs that military historian Richard Swain called "neither war nor not war" would continue until 2003.⁶⁰

Saddam and the Clinton Administration

Within 2 years of Operation DESERT STORM's end, Saddam began to show that he was unafraid of renewing some measure of hostilities with the United States. He also demonstrated that his destabilizing reach still extended beyond Iraq's borders. In April 1993, the United States foiled a plot by Saddam's intelligence officers to assassinate former U.S. President Bush during his visit to Kuwait. When the plot became known, Clinton ordered punitive missile strikes against Iraqi intelligence buildings in Baghdad.

In late 1994, the U.S.-Iraqi confrontation intensified further when the Iraqi regime ceased cooperation with UN weapons inspectors and deployed two Republican Guard divisions menacingly close to the Kuwaiti border. In early October, Clinton ordered the 1st Brigade, 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized), and a sizable U.S.-U.K. contingent of air and naval forces to Kuwait to deter any Iraqi incursion. Deploying by air, the U.S. brigade was able to fall in on pre-positioned equipment in Kuwait in less than a week, demonstrating a power projection capability the United States had lacked in the region before 1991. The Iraqi divisions withdrew from the border zone by the end of October, but thereafter U.S. troops rotated to Kuwait in a continuation of a series of exercises known as Intrinsic Action, which, by 1999, involved the permanent stationing of a brigade-sized contingent in the country.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi regime closely watched the United States' multiplying OOTW. As U.S. troops withdrew from Mogadishu, Saddam took to heart what he believed was the Somalia expedition's chief lesson: that America would not bear military casualties, and that U.S. troops, once bloodied in battle, would abandon the field. This judgment became a key element of Saddam's strategic thinking, so much so that on the eve of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq 9 years later, he would distribute copies of author Mark Bowden's *Black Hawk Down* to his commanders.⁶¹

The Kurdish Civil War and Operation DESERT FOX

Operation PROVIDE COMFORT prevented the Iraqi regime from pursuing the KDP and PUK rebels of March-April 1991 into the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan. As a result, by the time fighting between Kurdish peshmerga and Iraqi troops ceased in October 1991, NATO operations had essentially created an autonomous Kurdish zone beyond Baghdad's control. A Green Line separated this zone from Arab Iraq, beyond which NATO ground troops and aircraft deterred the advancement of Saddam's forces. In the new autonomous zone, the KDP and PUK began to administer rival Kurdish "statelets" where several million Kurds lived independently for the first time in modern Iraqi history.

While the U.S. 1st Armored Division carried out its NATO peacekeeping mission among the Bosnian ethnic groups in 1996, the Iraqi regime began to encroach upon the autonomous Kurdish zone from which Garner, Abizaid, and Jones had expelled Iraqi troops in 1991. The Western powers that had enabled the Kurdish parties to establish self-governing statelets were surprised when in August 1996, the Kurds themselves invited Saddam's forces back across the Green Line. A dispute over revenues from smuggled oil escalated into a Kurdish civil war between Massoud Barzani's KDP and Jalal Talabani's PUK, and with the backing of the Iranian regime, the latter was able to drive

Barzani and the KDP out of Erbil. Faced with impending defeat, Barzani and the KDP turned to Saddam for help, and soon a joint KDP-Iraqi offensive pushed Talabani's forces out of Erbil toward the mountainous Iranian border, where the Iranian regime allowed the PUK leader and his peshmerga to shelter and survive the onslaught. As Saddam's Republican Guard units prepared to advance on Talabani's stronghold of Sulaymaniyah, U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf responded to Saddam's violation of the UN-protected Green Line by launching cruise missile strikes against Iraqi air defense targets in southern Iraq on September 3, 1996, in Operation DESERT STRIKE. Shortly after the air strikes, Iraqi troops withdrew to their positions on the Green Line, leaving Barzani in control of the Kurdish capital.

The air strikes of September 1996 were part of worsening tensions between the West and Saddam's regime. In June 1996, UN weapons inspectors had destroyed a germ warfare facility in the desert 60 kilometers from Baghdad, but they frequently were prevented from inspecting other suspected Iraqi WMD sites. By February 1998, a frustrated Clinton pressed Congress and U.S. allies to do more to curb the Iraqi regime's behavior, citing Saddam's suspected WMD programs and his failure to comply with numerous UN resolutions as a threat to the region. In October 1998, Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act, allocating \$97 million for Iraqi opposition groups. Just weeks after the act's passage, the UN confrontation with Saddam escalated into a crisis when the regime ceased all cooperation with UN weapons inspectors, forcing the inspection teams to depart Iraq on December 15, 1998. Within hours, U.S. and U.K. forces launched Operation DESERT FOX, which combined 600 sorties and 400 cruise missile strikes in a 70-hour air offensive against regime targets throughout the country.⁶²

In the smoldering U.S.-Iraqi conflict, the late 1998 confrontation constituted a significant flare-up, in both military and political terms. Following Operation DESERT FOX, Iraqi air defense systems became more aggressive against Western aircraft enforcing the no-fly zones, prompting the United States and Great Britain to increase their sorties against Iraqi targets. In 2002, Iraqi air defenders attacked coalition aircraft on 500 occasions, prompting 90 coalition air strikes in response. Patrolling the contested northern and southern no-fly zones eventually involved as many as 200 aircraft and 7,500 airmen on a daily basis.⁶³ The increased pressure from the Western air forces led the Iraqi Army to adopt tactics it had developed after the 1991 war to protect itself from enemy air strikes. The highest value Iraqi assets, such as air defense units, were being repositioned continually to different parts of the country to evade tracking by Western satellites, going to near-random locations on an unpredictable schedule. Despite the chaos caused by the constant movement of tactical formations, however, the Iraqi Army managed to provision its units without interruption, demonstrating a robust combat service support capability even in remote areas. The most actively repositioned units learned to maintain three command posts at once, often widely distant from one another, and to maintain weapons and ammunition stocks in even more locations, leading to the gradual saturation of Iraqi territory with vast stores of munitions.⁶⁴

On the political level, the confrontation with the Iraqi regime that culminated in Operation DESERT FOX changed U.S. policy toward Iraq from containment to regime change, a change Clinton announced on December 18, 1998. The Clinton administration, however, showed little inclination to take direct action to implement the new policy.⁶⁵ Rather

than direct action, the act opened the way for official U.S. sponsorship of such groups as the Iraqi National Congress of Ahmad Chalabi, the Iraqi National Accord of Ayad Allawi, and the Kurdish parties, with the U.S. side of the relationship eventually to be managed by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Ryan Crocker.

Sanctions and Internal Unrest

By 1999, the international sanctions that had been in place against Iraq for 8 years had profoundly affected the Iraqi state and Iraqi society, though not in ways that restrained the Ba'athist regime's destabilizing activities as the Western powers had hoped they would. The sanctions had prevented Iraqis from modernizing so that Iraq's institutions generally operated with the unimproved infrastructure and technology they had acquired in the 1970s. Much of Iraq's national infrastructure had been damaged in the air campaign of the 1991 war as well – one estimate put the total damage at \$262 billion – and the regime had been slow to reconstruct after the war as international sanctions took effect. The sanctioned Iraqi state lacked the means to maintain even the oil sector that provided almost the entirety of the state's revenues so that a country that had appeared wealthy and modern in the 1970s looked blighted and poor by the late 1990s. The Iraqi education system that had led the Arab world since the 1950s, already seriously strained during the Iran-Iraq war, broke down under the weight of the sanctions; the population's literacy rate fell, and the country's human capital began to wither. Iraqi professionals, such as engineers and doctors, were isolated from international counterparts and could no longer keep up with advances in their fields. Iraq's social fabric suffered as well. Its middle classes were hard-hit by inflation and the shrinking of the economy, so that many educated Iraqis left the country, creating a brain drain that exacerbated all other problems. The state and society also bore the burden of a large number of orphans and widows created by successive wars, so that Iraqi cities contained millions of poor, quasi-literate youth.⁶⁶

Under sanctions, Iraq's economic shortages created some perverse incentives. Government ministries that had dispersed large oil-funded budgets in the 1970s tended to hoard resources rather than distribute them in the 1990s and the state's provision of services decayed badly. With the licit economy nearly broken, Iraqis of all kinds, including the country's many civil servants, participated in the robust black market trade with Iraq's neighbors. This was especially true with Syria, where Saddam's regime encouraged the smuggling of Iraqi oil and other commodities in order to generate illicit revenues. The Iraqi population of the 1990s came to rely increasingly on the state to provide a subsistence level of food and electricity, with the former provided by the Iraqi Ministry of Trade under the supervision of the UN in the Oil for Food program.⁶⁷ "We are in the process of destroying an entire society. It is as simple and terrifying as that," observed Denis J. Halliday, UN humanitarian coordinator for Iraq, on the effect of the sanctions in 1998.⁶⁸ In retrospect, the sanctions appear to have increased Saddam's power inside Iraq by making the population dependent on his distribution of increasingly limited basic services, as the standard of living of the Iraqi middle class collapsed. Due to these underappreciated economic and social effects, the nation the U.S. military would occupy in 2003 was far more destitute and ravaged than was generally understood.

It was against this backdrop that the Iraqi regime came into conflict with the popular religious movement led by the Najaf-based Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, father of Moqtada Sadr, and the preferred spiritual guide of millions of Shi'a. The Ba'ath had viewed the elder Sadr as a useful Arab counterweight to the cleric-led Iranian regime during the Iran-Iraq war and the early 1990s. By the late 1990s, however, Sadr was an increasingly vocal critic of the Ba'ath. In February 1999, gunmen presumed to be acting for the regime killed Sadiq Sadr and two of his sons in Najaf. In the days following the assassination, Sadr's followers exploded in rage against the Ba'ath across the south and in Saddam City, the Baghdad district later known as Sadr City. The Baghdad uprising reportedly grew intense enough to require the regime to use military units to suppress it, while fighting in Basrah ended with the regime's execution of perhaps hundreds of Sadrist rebels. Within weeks, the Sadrists had succumbed to the Ba'athist counterattack, but not before mounting the most extensive resistance to the regime since the 1991 intifada and proving they were a force with which to be reckoned.⁶⁹

The CENTCOM Theater Posture

As the Clinton administration's policy shifted to regime change in Iraq, the Third Army, as the Army component of CENTCOM, expanded its footprint in the Persian Gulf region to prepare for any future ground operation against Saddam's regime. The same month the Iraq Liberation Act was signed into law, Third Army Commander Tommy Franks declared that all was in place to "deploy, command, control, and support major Army forces to deter Iraqi adventurism," with pre-positioned equipment and a pre-deployed command and control node. This would ensure that, in the event of hostilities, U.S. forces would not lose the "race for Kuwait."⁷⁰ Third Army had pre-positioned a heavy division's worth of equipment in Kuwait and Doha, Qatar, along with an extensive infrastructure to deliver the large quantities of fuel required to sustain operations deep into Iraq.

Meanwhile, CENTCOM and Third Army regularly conducted war games that tested the existing war plans.⁷¹ One such war game revealed the myriad difficulties that could follow any campaign to remove Saddam and his regime. Under CENTCOM Commander General Anthony C. Zinni, CENTCOM planners conducted Exercise Desert Crossing in spring 1999 to examine the security, political, social, and economic challenges that might ensue if the regime in Baghdad collapsed under the pressure of an assault such as Operation DESERT FOX. Zinni, no stranger to Iraq after having participated in Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, received unsettling findings from Desert Crossing. Political and military planning for an invasion and post-Saddam Iraq should begin immediately, Zinni's planners judged, because of the "contentious positions that must be reconciled and managed." An intervention in Iraq would be "costly in terms of casualties and resources," they concluded, adding, "regime change may not bring stability" because of factors including hostile neighbors, "fragmentation along religious and/or ethnic lines, and chaos created by rival forces bidding for power."⁷² Exercise Desert Crossing also recognized the dearth of information about what was actually happening in Iraq and recommended that efforts begin immediately to engage, or at least prepare to engage, key Kurdish and tribal leaders.



Source: DoD photo by Technical Sergeant James D. Mossman, USAF (Released).

**General Anthony Zinni (USMC), Commander in Chief,
CENTCOM (1997-2000).⁷³**

Exercise Desert Crossing outlined several criteria for a successful mission: elimination of WMD, a restructured Iraqi Army, a stable and growing oil economy, and an Iraqi Government that would observe international obligations and norms – but would not necessarily be a democracy, though the emergence of another dictator, Zinni’s officers noted, would be an “unspinnable contradiction.” Oil revenue might be one way of paying for a liberation, but there was the matter of Iraqi debt acquired during the 1990-1991 war, and stability in Iraq would depend on the successor state’s economic viability in any case. Regional powers were unlikely to support an enduring American presence in Iraq, CENTCOM planners judged, but if the United States had to return to Iraq, an extended presence was precisely what they predicted would be required. The outcome of a U.S. intervention would probably be a “Bosnia scenario,” they told Zinni, under which a 10-year U.S. military occupation was not unlikely.⁷⁴

THE POST-9/11 ENVIRONMENT

For the George W. Bush administration, the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11), lent urgency to the problem of the long conflict with Saddam. Al-Qaeda’s demonstration of the potency of state-sponsored terror networks, along with some U.S. leaders’ unsubstantiated suspicion that Saddam somehow had been involved in the attacks, meant that Saddam’s removal changed overnight from a notional U.S. policy goal to a security imperative for the Bush administration (see Chapter 2). The subsequent surprisingly brief

campaign to topple the Taliban in Afghanistan had a profound impact on U.S. decision makers as well. The apparent success of a tiny footprint of U.S. forces – mainly special operations forces – working with indigenous Afghan fighters from the Northern Alliance appeared to some in the U.S. national security apparatus, especially those who already espoused RMA, to point the way toward a similar method by which Saddam might be toppled with far less cost and trouble than the Clinton administration or CENTCOM's Desert Crossing had assumed. In other words, the experience of the 9/11 attacks and the weeks that followed them indicated to some U.S. leaders that the removal of Saddam was not only an immediate necessity, but also an easy prospect – a dramatic change from the outlook of the 1990s.

Back in Baghdad, for reasons well documented by the Iraqi Perspectives Project and other engagements with former Ba'athist regime insiders, the 9/11 attacks and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan made little impact on Saddam's strategic calculus. He continued to harbor a greater fear of an internal Iraqi uprising than of an attack by the United States and remained convinced that he had to maintain the fiction of possessing WMD in order to deter regional enemies, especially Iran. Saddam took from the Afghanistan example only those points that reinforced his assumptions about the United States, including his overarching judgment that the United States would never mount a large-scale land invasion to remove him from power, just as the United States had declined to do against the Taliban, relying largely on indigenous forces instead. Nor did the demonstration of U.S. military technology make an impact on the Iraqi Army's operating concepts. Saddam did not recognize that the U.S. will to use force to remove him had fundamentally changed after 9/11, and, as a result, he would fail to allow his military leaders to make professionally sound plans to resist a U.S. invasion.⁷⁵

The invasion of Afghanistan had a much more significant impact on other American adversaries. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who had commanded a group of Arab mujahideen in Afghanistan, led his organization into Iran as the United States and its Afghan allies toppled the Taliban in late 2001, proceeding from there to Iraqi Kurdistan. There they sheltered in a small enclave near Halabjah controlled by Ansar al-Islam, a militant group comprised of mainly Kurdish Islamists who had fought in Afghanistan and were actively fighting against local PUK peshmerga. From his Iraqi sanctuary, Zarqawi began to organize his Tawhid wal-Jihad terrorist group to carry out attacks in the region, including the 2002 assassination of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) official Laurence M. Foley, Sr., in Jordan, and to look for opportunities to expand his jihad.⁷⁶

On the eve of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the U.S. Army was much decreased from its Cold War size, while sustaining a high tempo of stability operations around the world. Defense thinkers concluded that Operation DESERT STORM marked a revolution in the nature of war, after which technology would enable the U.S. military to defeat any enemy with a relatively small force. The U.S. military of the 1990s, writ large, had developed a low tolerance both for casualties and for mistakes by tactical commanders. As it reduced its combat formations, the Army had outsourced much of its logistical services, including for contingency operations, on which it had become accustomed to deploying

in a somewhat non-expeditionary posture with large base camps and amenities. As its involvement in stability operations mounted, the Army found its real-world activities at odds with its doctrinal emphases, including the previous assumption that OOTW were a lesser included capability for forces that were trained and ready for major combat operations. There also lingered in many Army quarters the sense that OOTW were extraneous, if not detrimental, to the Army's core mission. Throughout the 1990s, the Army had evolved from a static, Europe-focused force to one accustomed to deploying in contingency operations worldwide, though it continued to judge its commanders mainly by their success in high-intensity conflict war games and training exercises—even as their units became increasingly involved in low-intensity conflicts in the real world. In Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo, the U.S. military had acquired the assumption that the cessation of hostilities in a conflict would lead naturally to a peacekeeping-type mission by an international force. After 9/11, many defense leaders believed the brief campaign in Afghanistan seemed to validate the RMA, and that meant that even more could be done with fewer U.S. forces.

Meanwhile, on the eve of the 2003 war, the Iraqi regime remained focused on internal threats to Ba'athist rule, fixed in its assumption that the external threat posed by the United States was not an existential one. However, even if Saddam and his regime had fully recognized the gathering threat, they had little with which to resist it, having hollowed out the conventional Iraqi military of 1991, and replacing it with numerous militias whose *raison d'être* was to preserve the regime against insurgency. Within the regime itself, the secular Arab socialism of the Ba'ath was replaced by a strange fusion of Ba'athists and Islamists, mirrored outside the regime by a seething Shi'a Islamist mass movement organized by underground leaders with links to the Iranian regime and its long-standing militant networks. Across Iraq, the country's infrastructure was in shambles, with state institutions devastated by the combined effect of sanctions and the rampant corruption the regime encouraged in response to them. The country's social fabric was frayed as well, with the middle class sinking into poverty and social divides among sects and ethnic groups deepening. Iraq was a country with a regime and population little aware of the changes about to be thrust on them.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 1

1. Eliot A. Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey, Summary Report*, Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, 1993, p. 2; Richard W. Stewart, ed., *American Military History, Vol. 2, The United States Army in a Global Era, 1917-2003*, Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2005, p. 413; John S. Brown, *Keular Legions: The Transformation of the U.S. Army, 1989-2005*, Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2011, pp. 61, 64; Steven Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy*, Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2008, p. 44. All unpublished documents in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, are in the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) Study Group archives at the Military History Institute (MHI) Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle, PA.

2. Department of Defense (DoD) photo by Sergeant Jose Trejo, "GEN. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander-in-chief, U.S. Central Command, and LT. GEN. Khalid Bin Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz, commander of Joint Forces in Saudi Arabia, sit across the table from an interpreter and Iraqi LT. Gens. Mohammd Abdez Rahman Al-Dagitistani and Sabin Abdel-Aziz Al Douri to discuss cease-fire conditions during Operation Desert Storm," National Archives Identifier 6471279, March 3, 1991, Released to Public, Unrestricted.

3. Iraqi TV, "Saddam Hussein Speech on Iraqi TV," July 17, 1996, still image created by Wikimedia Commons contributors, "File:Saddam Hussein in 1996.png," *Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository*, last revised November 7, 2017, available from https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Saddam_Hussein_in_1996.png&oldid=266421599.

4. Gordon R. Sullivan, "'Vital, Capable and Engaged,' Azimuths for America's Army," *Army 1992-93 Green Book*, October 1992, pp. 26-30; Richard W. Stewart, *American Military History*, Vol. 2, p. 424; Michael P. W. Stone, "Living Up to a Superb Force's Legacy, Goal Is to Sustain Momentum," *Army 1992-93 Green Book*, pp. 12-20. Europe alone lost more than 200,000 troops who either were dropped from the books or had returned to the United States. John Sloan Brown, *Keolar Legions*, New York: St. Johns University, October 2011, pp. 171-178. Using the excuse of military necessity during the Cold War, the Army managed to avoid the strictures of Office of Management and Budget Circular A-76, which directed the purchase of goods and services from commercial sources to the greatest extent possible.

5. Gordon R. Sullivan and James M. Dubik, *Envisioning Future Warfare*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1995, pp. 4, 7; William J. Webb et al., *Department of the Army Historical Summary, Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991*, Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1997, p. 108; Brown, *Keolar Legions*, pp. 104-106; Stewart, *American Military History*, Vol. 2, pp. 413, 424. Five and one-third divisions could deploy within 75 days.

6. Dennis J. Reimer, "Where We've Been—Where We're Headed: Maintaining a Solid Framework While Building for the Future," *Army*, October 1995, p. 5; Address to Dwight D. Eisenhower Luncheon, Annual Meeting of the Association of the United States Army, Washington, DC: October 17, 1995; "Force of Decision: Capabilities for the 21st Century," CSA White Paper, April 15, 1996; E-mails to General Officers, September 10, 1996, and October 13, 1996; and Address to Dwight D. Eisenhower Luncheon, Annual Meeting of the Association of the United States Army, Washington, DC: October 15, 1996; all in Dennis J. Reimer, *Soldiers Are Our Credentials: The Collected Works and Selected Papers of the Thirty-third Chief of Staff, United States Army*, James J. Carafano, ed., Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2000, pp. 9, 29, 63, 69, 74-75, respectively; Brown, *Keolar Legions*, pp. 159-160; Eric V. Larson, David T. Orletsky, and Kristin Leuschner, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change: Lessons from the Base Force, Bottom-Up Review, and Quadrennial Defense Review*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001, p. xxii. There was simply not enough money in the budget to modernize and maintain the necessary levels of readiness and training, especially given the operational tempo that demanded regular supplemental funding from Congress to cover the gap between what was authorized and what had to be spent.

7. Eliot A. Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey, Summary Report*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 1990, pp. 235-237, 243-247, 251. See also Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade, Jr., *Shock and Awe: Achieving Rapid Dominance*, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1996; Richard Hooker, Jr., H. R. McMaster, and David Grey, "Getting Transformation Right," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Vol. 38, July 2005, pp. 20-27.

8. David F. Melcher, John J. McGrath, and Douglas E. Lute, "What Shouldn't We Learn from Desert Storm," Folder 3, CSA Miscellaneous Papers, February 1992, box 08B of 16, Papers of Gordon R. Sullivan, MHI AHEC, Carlisle, PA.; Sullivan and Dubik, *Envisioning Future Warfare*, p. 23; Hooker, McMaster, and Grey, "Getting Transformation Right," pp. 20-27.

9. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sergeant Angela Stafford, "Gen. Eric K. Shinseki, Army Chief of Staff, testifies on U.S. Army readiness before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Capitol Hill, Washington D.C., Oct. 26, 1999. This is Gen Shinseki's first appearance before the committee since becoming chief of staff earlier this year. During the hearing each service chief, and the chairman, testified on their services readiness," DIMOC Identifier 991026-F-NO765-012, October 26, 1999, Released to Public.

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Are Our Credentials, pp. 63-67. The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) Net Assessment Office drove the Army to develop the Army After Next concept to define future requirements to satisfy OSD's vision of greater tactical and strategic mobility, lethality in light forces, operational dispersion, and new logistical system. The 2d Armored Cavalry cased its colors as part of the drawdown in Europe. Its colors reemerged on what was left of the 9th Infantry Division motorized experiment. Still an armored cavalry regiment in name, the only tracked vehicles within the formation were bulldozers and the only armored vehicles were for nuclear, biological, and chemical reconnaissance. In all its wisdom, the Army had decided that it would be a good idea to pit the 2d Armored Cavalry (Light) against the fully armored opposing force at the National Training Center in 1996 with predictable results: any unit can conduct a movement to contact at least once. Glen Hawkins and James Carafano, *Prelude to Army XXI: U.S. Army Division Design Initiatives and Experiments, 1917-1995*, Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1997, p. 27.

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17. Kretchik, "Uphold Democracy," pp. 191-192, 194.

18. John H. Tilelli, Jr., "The Army: America's Force for the Future," *Army 1993-94 Green Book*, October 1993, p. 138.

19. Gordon R. Sullivan, "America's Army Into the 21st Century," *Army*, October 1993, p. 18; Interview, Lieutenant Colonel Chesley Harris with Brigadier General Charles H. Baumann, 1995, pp. 15-16, Combat Maneuver Training Center (CMTIC) Project 1995-E, Combat Training Center Lessons Learned, box 1 of 1, Combat Training Center, Oral History Collection, MHI; Letter, Brigadier General Lawson W. Magruder to General Gordon Sullivan, November 29, 1993, November-December 1993 Correspondence/Flag Letters/General Office Acting Secretary of the Army Files, box 8A of 10, Sullivan Papers, MHI. See also Interview, Lieutenant Colonel William G. Webster with Colonel William S. Wallace, Commander, Operations Group, Army National Training Center, 1995, pp. 11-12, 14, Project 1995-E, Combat Training Center Lessons Learned, box 1 of 1, Combat Training Center, Oral History Collection, MHI; Interview, Lieutenant Colonel

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**PART I:
FROM INVASION
TO INSURGENCY, 2002-2003**

CHAPTER 2

REGIME CHANGE

IN THE SHADOW OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

The normally festive season between Thanksgiving and Christmas, in 2001, was a frenetic affair for U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). CENTCOM Commander General Tommy Ray Franks was supervising U.S. and coalition military operations in Afghanistan, where, since October, they had been fighting alongside members of the Northern Alliance to remove the Taliban from power. In addition to the battles in Afghanistan, Franks was overseeing planning for what the George W. Bush administration had coined the “War on Terrorism,” a campaign against major terrorist groups and the countries that supported them. Neither of these campaigns was conducted to the satisfaction of Franks or the administration of then-President George W. Bush. Despite the rapidity of the U.S.-led advance in Afghanistan, Osama Bin Laden, Mullah Omar, and other key perpetrators of the September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks and the Taliban leaders remained at large. Moreover, concerns about state-sponsored terrorist organizations acquiring and using weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and “dirty bombs” permeated U.S. national security decision-making during the latter months of 2001, driven in part by a public feeling of sudden vulnerability. Security policies and contingency plans under revision before the attacks suddenly received elevated amounts of attention. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, that attention became focused on another target well outside of Afghanistan: Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist regime in Iraq. Within days of the 9/11 attacks, senior officials in the Bush administration began exploring options to remove Saddam from power. Their efforts culminated in surprising instructions to the CENTCOM commander to formulate contingency plans to invade Iraq and destroy Saddam’s regime.¹

PLANNING FOR REGIME CHANGE

A New Mission for CENTCOM

As the events of 9/11 unfolded, Department of Defense (DoD) leaders scrambled to respond to the attacks whose origins were then unknown. Hours after the attacks occurred, the Joint Staff issued an order directing CENTCOM to begin contingency planning against five named countries in the command’s area of responsibility, one of which was Iraq. Franks and other CENTCOM leaders were too preoccupied to devote much attention to this tertiary planning effort, as, from October to November 2001, they were in daily contact with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) concerning information requests and orders about the prosecution of the wars against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Unlike Iraq and other long-planned contingency operations, there had been no prepared war plan for Afghanistan or for a nonstate actor with global reach like al-Qaeda. As a result, when Franks and his staff were not actively responding to requests for information

from the SECDEF, the national policy team, or the President, they devoted most of their organizational energy to building plans and campaigns around what were essentially piecemeal deployments to South Asia that were approved directly by the SECDEF. While Franks received periodic updates on events in the northern and southern no-fly zones, Iraq did not feature prominently in his thoughts.²

The situation changed on November 27, 2001, when SECDEF Donald H. Rumsfeld relayed to Franks the president's requests for revised military options on Iraq. Rumsfeld asked for an update on the existing contingency plan for Iraq—numbered 1003-98—the following week, and outlined the desired end state for an Iraq campaign as follows:

1. Iraq's regime enablers, leadership, and power base destroyed;
2. Iraq's WMD capability eliminated;
3. Iraq retains sufficient forces to defend itself but no longer has the power to threaten neighbors;
4. Iraq has an "acceptable provisional government in place;" and,
5. Iraq's territorial integrity remains intact.³

Rumsfeld's guidance marked a significant shift from previous contingency planning on Iraq, very little of which had envisioned an invasion to enact regime change and replacement in Iraq.⁴ The changes rendered Franks incredulous, as he was fully occupied by the new wars against the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and terrorism more broadly, but he and his operations director, Air Force Major General Victor "Gene" Renuart, Jr., duly assembled a small planning team to develop a concept for regime change in Iraq.⁵



Source: U.S. Navy photo (Released).

General Tommy R. Franks, Commander, USCENTCOM (2000-2003).⁶

As the CENTCOM commander, Franks was at the pinnacle of his career. He was one of the few who had risen through the enlisted ranks to become one of the Army's most senior general officers. After enlisting in 1965, and training as a cryptanalyst, he was commissioned as a field artillery officer in 1967 and served in Vietnam, Korea, and later, as assistant commander of the 1st Cavalry Division in Operation DESERT STORM. Before ascending to CENTCOM, he had commanded the Third Army, where, as the dual-hatted commander of the Army component of CENTCOM (ARCENT), he had been deeply involved in developing the 1998 version of the contingency plan for Iraq.⁷

When Franks took the helm of CENTCOM on July 7, 2000, the command was comprised of five service component commands: ARCENT, the Navy component (NAVCENT), the Air Force component (CENTAF), the Marine component (MARCENT), and the Special Operations Component (SOCCENT).⁸ However, with the onset of the Afghanistan war in 2001, Franks judged that CENTCOM "could not keep up with the operational demands of the fast-changing tactical situation in Afghanistan" and directed a reorganization of his service components into functional commands on November 10.

The result was the Coalition Forces Air Component Command (CFACC), the Coalition Forces Maritime Component Command (CFMCC), the Coalition Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC), and the Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC).⁹ CFLCC combined all of the ground forces—U.S. Army, U.S. Marines, and coalition ground forces—into a single command under a single commander. Its primary contributors were the Third Army, commanded by Lieutenant General Paul T. Mikolashek, and the I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), commanded by Lieutenant General Michael W. Hagee; although the two commanders were peers, Mikolashek became the overall commander for CFLCC.

Third Army's recent history had prepared it to be the ground component command for the planned invasion of Iraq, though it was already committed in Afghanistan. Franks relinquished command of the unit just before taking over CENTCOM and was familiar and comfortable with the unit's capability. He had also fought—and won—a battle to relieve the Third Army commander position of its other "hat" as the deputy commander for the U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM), making it entirely a CENTCOM component command. Third Army had small command posts already forward in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar, and, on 9/11, had placed personnel and equipment into position for Exercise Bright Star in Egypt.¹⁰



Source: DoD photo by Susan Norvick, Civilian (Released).

**General Paul T. Mikolashek, Commanding General, Third Army (2000-2002),
Speaks During a Commander's Conference
at Fort McPherson, GA.¹¹**

In November, Third Army was heavily engaged in responding to post-9/11 Joint Staff orders calling for updated plans for an invasion of Iraq. When finished, the new plans called for using a single Army corps with Marine augmentation to “seize terrain in southern Iraq in preparation for future operations.” This limited objective focused on Iraq’s southern oil fields near Rumaila and did not require any U.S. forces to maneuver north of the Euphrates River. It was this plan that Third Army and, eventually, CFLCC used as the basis for more expansive operations in Iraq.¹²

The Army had four different corps eligible to execute such a plan: III Corps based at Fort Hood, TX; the V (“Victory”) Corps based in Germany; the I Corps headquartered in Fort Lewis, WA; and the XVIII Airborne Corps based in Fort Bragg, NC. However, in the fall of 2001, the XVIII Airborne Corps was engaged in Afghanistan, I Corps was focused on the Pacific theater and Army transformation and lacked the proper composition to take on a large fighting role, and III Corps was dedicated to contingency operations for the Korean peninsula. As a result, V Corps was selected to serve as the major Army component of ground operations in Iraq and to participate in Exercise Vigilant Guardian in late 2001.¹³ The selection took V Corps Commander Lieutenant General William “Scott” Wallace by surprise. Wallace had taken command of V Corps 3 months before on July 18, 2001, expecting that his corps would remain focused on the Balkans and specifically Kosovo, where it maintained a large NATO peacekeeping mission. After 9/11, he recognized that the emphasis would likely change, but had thought V Corps would be given primarily defensive operations, including preventing another terrorist attack on U.S. soil

or interests abroad. Once the United States established a solid defensive posture, General Wallace expected that the Corps would then transition to offensive operations “on our terms against whatever enemy we were able to uncover thereafter.”¹⁴ However, he had not anticipated that V Corps would be named the main planning headquarters for invading Iraq and removing the Ba’athist regime from power.

The Initial Concept and Assumptions

As CENTCOM began to plan for regime change in Iraq, Franks and others started to note some assumptions that were driving expectations for the operation and its outcome. The first concerned military operations in Afghanistan, where the combination of air power and employment of Special Operations Forces (SOF) had seemingly validated the Office of the SECDEF’s views on the revolution in military affairs (RMA) and its determination to limit the number of American troops involved in close combat and stabilization. The SECDEF insisted that the Afghanistan model could be applied against the planned invasion of Iraq. Throughout the planning process, Deputy Secretary of Defense (DSECDEF) Paul Wolfowitz and others in the Office of the SECDEF pressed military commanders and planners to reduce the number of forces required and the timeline for mobilization, deployment, and redeployment.¹⁵ The back-and-forth exchanges among Franks, the Office of the SECDEF, the national policy team, and Bush continued throughout the planning process, affecting both the time spent on military planning and the manner in which forces flowed into theater.

The second major assumption influencing planning for Iraq, promoted by Wolfowitz and others, was that the United States and its partners could liberate Iraq rather than occupy it, much as they had liberated France in 1945. Defense leaders thought that Iraqis who were not loyal to the Ba’athist regime would welcome U.S. and allied forces with parades, flag-waving, and an eagerness for democratic government. These expectations were reinforced by members of the Iraqi expatriate community in exile such as Iraqi National Congress leader Ahmad Chalabi.¹⁶

Beyond these overarching assumptions, CENTCOM made planning assumptions of its own that had repercussions for both the invasion and efforts to stabilize Iraq afterward. The first was that CENTCOM would be able to open a northern front in the operation by sending a U.S. Army corps or division through Turkey. Franks and his commanders saw the operational value in surrounding Saddam’s forces in the push toward Baghdad. However, because they needed the support of the European Command (EUCOM) to make the proposal a reality, CENTCOM instead began planning operations merely to deceive Saddam into thinking coalition military forces would be maneuvering south toward Baghdad from Turkey. When EUCOM Commander General James L. Jones informed Franks in May 2002 that using Turkey was a real possibility, EUCOM and CENTCOM began looking at concrete options to move a division-sized element through Turkish territory.¹⁷

CENTCOM’s second major assumption concerned Saddam’s alleged WMD program. Although CENTCOM and U.S. policymakers did not believe Saddam had a nuclear weapon just yet, their judgment, matching the consensus position of the U.S. intelligence community, was that the Iraqi regime was seeking to enrich uranium in preparation for

building one. The fact that the Iraqi dictator had used chemical munitions during the Iran-Iraq war and against the Kurds in 1988 also loomed large in their minds.¹⁸ The third key assumption driving CENTCOM planning was that the bulk of the Iraqi Army would not fight, but would either surrender or capitulate during the invasion and, with the right treatment and messaging, could be recalled to active service after the regime fell. The recalled Iraqi forces could then be used to augment U.S. and coalition military troops to provide security while an interim Iraqi Government was being established.¹⁹

These assumptions, when taken together, were the lens through which the Office of the SECDEF guided military plans, resulting in a proposal for a relatively light ground force component for the invasion, a near-simultaneous air and ground attack, and few forces or detailed planning dedicated to the post-regime Iraq. Decision makers believed the United States would not need a large number of forces because of the seemingly successful precedent set in Afghanistan: that U.S. forces would be welcomed as liberators, and that the Iraqi Army would help provide security under a new, more enlightened Iraqi Government. Based on these two assumptions, there was no need for U.S. forces to conduct large-scale security operations. With these planning principles in place, Franks and his team briefed Bush and Rumsfeld at Camp David on December 28, 2001, outlining the invasion plan in four phases. Phase I involved building the coalition and international support necessary to conduct offensive operations in Iraq. Phase II was a shaping effort—a combination of psychological and military deception operations designed to encourage segments of Iraqi society and its armed forces not to resist. Phase III involved military operations to destroy Iraq's remaining armed forces and decapitate the Iraqi regime. Phase IV, or stability operations, addressed the transition to a new Iraqi Government. Franks's concept briefing also contained three potential force packages. A robust option assumed that basing was available from most of the U.S. partners in the Middle East and that the United Kingdom would contribute troops. A reduced option required approximately the same number of personnel but assumed that support was unavailable from Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. A unilateral option assumed that the United States would conduct operations without support from either its Middle Eastern partners or the United Kingdom. The U.S. contingent required for all three proposals was approximately 105,000 initial forces, with the size of the follow-on component ranging from 225,000 to 238,000 boots on the ground.²⁰ Because these two force figures were additive, the final projected strength on the ground was well more than 300,000.

The President's response at the Camp David briefing was clear: he strongly desired to remove Saddam from power, and sooner rather than later. The President even offered that invading Iraq on Saddam's birthday, April 28, 2002, might be an appropriate symbolic time to destroy the regime, a proposal that CENTCOM and its component commands determined would present too short a window in which to prepare and mobilize its forces.²¹ Regardless, CENTCOM's sense of urgency to build the plan increased, and the command's focus rapidly shifted from operations in Afghanistan to Iraq.

Tensions in the Iraq War Planning

The intense planning period that followed the Camp David briefing was colored by significant tensions between DoD civilian and military leaders. Rumsfeld arrived at the

Pentagon in 2001 determined to transform how the U.S. military prosecuted the nation's wars and to strengthen civilian control of the military. This agenda created tensions with senior officers.²² Other factors also contributed to difficult relationships among the civilian leadership in the Office of the SECDEF, the Joint Staff, the service chiefs, and the combatant commands. Stovepipes within the Office of the SECDEF, combined with some personality conflicts, distrust, and institutional intransigence, tended to inhibit joint and interagency situational awareness and caused inordinate amounts of planning time and energy to be spent on revisions to the plan.

Most of the previous contingency planning for limited military objectives in Iraq, including Desert Crossing, had been coordinated among CENTCOM, the Joint Staff, and the service chiefs as force providers. The new plans for regime change in Iraq, however, were highly compartmentalized, classified Top Secret with an additional caveat called Polo Step, access to which Rumsfeld limited to a small number of people in the Office of the SECDEF, the Joint Staff, and CENTCOM. Rumsfeld's restriction barred the Joint Chiefs and services from synchronizing and resourcing the early planning efforts, and it also prevented CFLCC and its subordinate corps elements from developing parallel plans in any detail until after Franks's first commander's "huddle" in Ramstein, Germany, in March 2002.²³

Rumsfeld's managerial style affected the war planning as well. According to Abram "Abe" Shulsky, a special assistant to Under Secretary Douglas J. Feith, Rumsfeld "was very reluctant to give a direct order," preferring instead to "nudge" people in the direction he wanted "without being direct about it" and by asking questions like, "do you need that," and "what are other ways of doing this?"²⁴ The secretary's aversion to definitive guidance was oddly juxtaposed with his tendency to micromanage. After serving nearly a year under Rumsfeld, Franks was accustomed to receiving the secretary's musings, ideas, and pointed questions in intermittent memoranda known as "snowflakes," so-called by DoD personnel because of the prolific white paper they generated in senior offices. A veritable blizzard had descended on CENTCOM since 9/11. The snowflakes, personal phone calls, and secure video teleconferences drew the secretary into the minutiae of tactical operations instead of the overall strategy and policy guiding them, a fact that bred resentment among military leaders.²⁵

From the beginning of his tenure, Rumsfeld's military transformation agenda and management style had alienated Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Henry "Hugh" Shelton and Chief of Staff of the Army General Eric K. Shinseki. Although Shinseki supported the idea of restructuring and transforming the Army, he gained a reputation, first with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) and, later, the SECDEF for being hard-headed over his decision to change the Army's headgear from service caps to a black beret. The seemingly trivial issue had grown to be significant when former and retired members of the Army Rangers (the only unit authorized to wear the black beret at the time) resisted the change, raised the issue with Congress and the President, and thus created political difficulties for the SECDEF. In meetings discussing the beret issue, Rumsfeld commented on Shinseki "making another bad decision," suggesting the relationship between the two had already soured.²⁶ For their part, Shinseki, Secretary of the Army Thomas E. White and, to a lesser extent, Shelton, saw themselves and the Army as a bureaucratic target of Rumsfeld's aim to reduce the size of the armed forces. Rumsfeld,

a former Navy fighter pilot, “seemed partial to the Navy and Marines,” they believed, and he also disliked the Cold War mindset and Balkans-type stability missions that were the main focus of the Army throughout most of the 1990s. The Army found itself engaged in a battle to limit further downsizing while the administration debated the feasibility and force structure required to engage in two land wars simultaneously.²⁷

Leaks of sensitive planning information gradually eroded trust in the already contentious relationships among CENTCOM, the Joint Staff, the service chiefs, and the Office of the SECDEF. The first major leak of war plans occurred at the same time as the March 21 “commander’s huddle” in Germany, leading CENTCOM planners and Franks to suspect that someone from the air component—frustrated with the proposed abbreviated bombing campaign discussed at the conference—had communicated their displeasure privately to the media. Relations were further strained in May 2002 when, during the height of war preparations for Iraq, *The Washington Post* journalist Tom Ricks reported that the Joint Chiefs were waging a “determined behind-the-scenes campaign to persuade the Bush administration” against war with Iraq. The Joint Chiefs and Franks, Ricks reported, had told the President that ousting Saddam’s regime would require at least 200,000 troops, and remained “shoulder-to-shoulder” against the SECDEF. Rumsfeld also believed Shinseki had implied to colleagues that Rumsfeld’s own office was leaking Iraq war plans to the press, which infuriated the secretary. In a harsh verbal reprimand to the Joint Chiefs, Rumsfeld accused the military leaders of not being forthright with him; told them that their complaints about not being consulted about war plans were unfounded; and declared that, if they had problems with any of the combatant commanders, they should confront that commander directly rather than via leaks to the press.²⁸

The “problems with combatant commanders” apparently referred to problems between the Joint Chiefs and Franks, with the latter’s direct line to Rumsfeld and the President effectively isolating the Joint Staff from the planning process. From Franks’s perspective, the service chiefs were mired in service parochialisms and jealous of the combatant commanders’ mission to “command forces in wartime,” and he had even referred to the Joint Chief of Staff representatives in public and private as “Title Ten Motherf—s.” Sensing that they were being marginalized and feeling distanced from the planning process, the Joint Staff often issued planning guidance and orders well after CENTCOM had already begun working on the guidance it received directly from the SECDEF.²⁹ Taken together, these factors tended to discourage collaboration among the services, the Joint Staff, and CENTCOM.

Generated Start, January–May 2002

Within 60 days of the Camp David briefing, the Joint Staff formally directed CENTCOM to transition from planning for a limited attack to planning for regime change. Through the winter and spring of 2002, CENTCOM developed six iterations of an invasion plan that, based on guidance from Rumsfeld, would contain ever smaller numbers of forces and shorter deployment timelines. This first series of CENTCOM plans—renumbered 1003V and eventually known as Generated Start, envisioned a rapid buildup from three divisions at the onset to between five and six Army, Marine, and coalition divisions as the campaign progressed. Movement of forces was to begin on N-day—the day

that the President notified the command to commence—after which CENTCOM would have 30 days to prepare its forces until C-day—the day the forces began flowing into theater. Deployment of the initial force of three divisions or two corps would take an additional 60 days, during which special operations forces would suppress Saddam’s long-range missile systems and link up with Kurdish militias in northern Iraq. D-Day—the beginning of combat operations on Iraqi soil—would commence while the remaining divisions deployed to Kuwait. Air and ground campaigns would commence nearly simultaneously in order to catch the Iraqi military by surprise, a stark contrast to the 5-week air campaign of 1991. The two corps worth of ground troops would also attack simultaneously to overwhelm Iraqi forces. Maneuvers to isolate Baghdad would take approximately 45 days, with regime destruction and the onset of stability operations occurring over an additional 90 days. The entire operation from start to finish would take approximately 215 days.³⁰

While Franks and his planners refined Generated Start in Tampa, FL, CENTCOM and service logisticians met at the U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) headquarters at Scott Air Force Base, IL, to develop unit deployment packages and timelines using the time-phased force and deployment list or data (TPFDL or TPFDD), a complex planning tool DoD developed for similar contingency plans. Because the TPFDD planning was concurrent with Generated Start refinements, each component was able to estimate the force structure that might be needed to support variations on the plan and to verify the logistical feasibility of their proposed timelines and maneuvers.³¹ It was a valuable innovation in the logistical planning that Rumsfeld would ultimately discard entirely.

“Shock and Awe” and Running Start, May–July 2002

Rumsfeld’s intent for Iraq was to enter with a light footprint, be able to move fast, and be able to exit Iraq very quickly, a vision that differed sharply from the initial CENTCOM plan. In response to Franks’s iterative concept briefings on Generated Start, Rumsfeld sent Franks a paper written by Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade in late April 2002. It outlined the concept of “shock and awe” and how it could be applied in devising war plans.³² Ullman and Wade advanced the idea of “rapid dominance” in which a comparatively small-sized military force could, through a display of military might, enforce its will on a powerful country and military to enact change. Some of the mechanisms to induce shock and awe included the use of “unstoppable, lethal” weapons like long-range air power to “impose a regime of unrelenting and ever-increasing stress.” Any of the relatively small number of ground forces used to enact the change must “arrive suddenly, strike without remorse, and terminate their presence quickly” before the adversary had the opportunity to recover. Rumsfeld had previously introduced Franks to Army Colonel Douglas A. Macgregor, an officer working on Army transformation for Shinseki who shared Rumsfeld’s vision for wars of the future. Both the shock and awe authors and Macgregor argued that the U.S. military could topple the Iraqi regime with a division-sized element or less, an idea that shaped the war planning guidance Rumsfeld provided to CENTCOM.³³

Some senior U.S. officers had difficulty envisioning a light footprint for an invasion of Iraq and opposed modifications to tried and tested processes for deployment and

conduct of major combat operations. Lieutenant General George W. Casey, Jr., then the Joint Staff J-5, recalled that there seemed to be no middle ground between what the Office of the SECDEF leadership envisioned for Iraq, and what the senior Army leaders and CENTCOM demanded in terms of time and resources. Casey believed that the President, the SECDEF, and some of the Joint Staff viewed the Army as overly tied to a deliberate and comparatively slow TPFDD process that Rumsfeld and others regarded as a Cold War-era relic. For his part, Casey believed “the [Army] was quick to cry ‘micromanagement’ instead of considering how to refine their processes.”³⁴ The ensuing tension would only be resolved once Rumsfeld decided to discard the TPFDD for Iraq and instead use the request for forces model DoD had employed in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan, in which commanders requested force packages piece by piece as the requirements for them arose.

Although CENTCOM’s proposed force numbers for Generated Start began at 385,000, by the time Rumsfeld and Bush were briefed again in the late spring, the numbers had been whittled down to 275,000, a force Rumsfeld insisted was still “way too heavy.” Rumsfeld suggested that the roughly two brigades for a routine training exercise with the Kuwaitis should suffice as an invasion force for Iraq. These units consisted of a brigade-sized Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), an Army brigade, and a special operations company whose teams were embedded with Kuwaiti military units. Franks strongly disagreed with this radical proposal, arguing that such limited forces would be unable to topple the regime and lacked the logistics to make it to Baghdad. Rumsfeld raised the idea again with Bush during a briefing at Camp David on May 11, 2002, but Franks persuaded the President and the SECDEF instead to give CENTCOM additional time to refine Generated Start into a faster deploying plan with a lighter force.³⁵

As these discussions about the size and speed of the ground forces unfolded in May and June, U.S. officials began to worry that Saddam might conduct a preemptive attack into Kuwait, complicating the planned U.S. invasion. U.S. officials had received indications that the Iraqi Army was on the verge of collapse, and they feared Saddam might decide to use his forces while he still could. The President, national policy team, and Office of the SECDEF were also concerned that, as U.S. and coalition forces flowed into theater in the middle of Iraq’s internal difficulties, the movement would provide Saddam with “unambiguous warning” about the U.S. intention to invade. This might provoke an attack on Kuwait, the Kurds, or the Shi’a; flood Iraq’s southern marshes; sabotage Iraq’s infrastructure; attack Israel; or, in the worst-case scenario, use WMD. U.S. leaders wanted a plan that would give them the flexibility to prevent these contingencies but still maintain the ability to remove Saddam from power. The new plan CENTCOM developed in response to these concerns was a branch plan Generated Start called “Running Start,” in which smaller ground forces would begin major combat operations, while the rest were still deploying. Unlike Generated Start, which called for a two-corps ground invasion in conjunction with an air campaign, Running Start planned for a Marine division and an Army division to lead ground operations, followed by a second corps-sized Army element, with the overall movement into theater shortened from 60 to 45 days or less. Running Start also contained three different options for the timing of an air campaign depending on what the immediate situation in Iraq demanded.³⁶

As CENTCOM developed the Running Start plan, the inevitability of the Iraq invasion began to hit home. When Franks returned from briefing Bush in June, he announced to his component commanders that the invasion of Iraq was no longer a matter of “if,” but “when.” He judged that the President wanted to conduct the invasion sometime in the late fall of 2002.³⁷

The Hybrid, August 2002

The Running Start concept had obvious flaws that CENTCOM planners were quick to highlight, most glaringly that it lacked enough troops to guarantee the destruction of the Iraqi regime. While the ground component of Running Start could probably arrive in theater and achieve some limited military objectives, there would not be enough support forces to sustain the maneuver force. In addition, Running Start, if executed as planned, would lack the near-simultaneous application of national power critical to executing the shock and awe concept. Because the initial thrust could not be sustained all the way to Baghdad, Saddam would probably be afforded the space required to reinforce Baghdad and sue for peace on the international stage. The short time horizon for Running Start would also shorten the time available for diplomacy to secure basing and overflight agreements with partner countries, jeopardizing deployment timelines. When Franks briefed Bush on Running Start in July 2002, he advised the President that it would be impossible to launch the plan by October 2002, because the requisite operational and strategic follow-on forces could not be mobilized in time.³⁸

With the Running Start creating concerns because of its low number of forces and the Generated Start too unwieldy, CENTCOM and its components began developing a “Hybrid” option, with a starting ground force similar to that of Generated Start entering theater sequentially as in Running Start, but in greater numbers. In the Hybrid, 30,000 Marines and Army Soldiers would enter Iraq on G-day, and the remainder of I MEF and V Corps would flow in over the next 18 days. By the time 2 months had elapsed in the ground campaign, the entire Generated Start force of 200,000 troops would be operating in Iraq. The proposed air campaign for the Hybrid was similar to an option in the Running Start in which ground operations would commence 16 days after the initial air strikes. The deployment timelines in the Hybrid were longer, too, to allow U.S. diplomats more time to finalize agreements for staging and basing in the region. Meanwhile, CFACC and CFLCC could use an expansion of Operations Northern Watch and Southern Watch and training exercises to increase their footprint subtly in Kuwait and the north.³⁹

In the Hybrid plan, CENTCOM aimed to minimize both the force footprint and the risks associated with putting maneuver forces into theater too quickly and maximizing opportunities to take advantage of Saddam’s behavior and achieve operational surprise. The Hybrid plan also contained a more detailed breakdown of Phase IV operations, outlining four discrete periods of stabilization, recovery, transition to security operations, and full transition to a stable Iraqi Government and redeployment of all U.S. forces over a period of 32–45 months. On August 14, Franks briefed the modified plan to the secretary of defense and, after gaining Rumsfeld’s approval, ordered his component commanders to develop execution details for the Hybrid plan on August 22.⁴⁰

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Iraq's WMD program had been a major U.S. and international security concern since the end of the Gulf war. After 9/11, U.S. policymakers worried that Saddam's WMD materials would fall into terrorist hands, and CENTCOM, along with the rest of the U.S. intelligence community, assumed that Saddam would, at a minimum, use chemical weapons against an invasion force.⁴¹ Interestingly, however, there were no specific plans to eradicate those materials or the sites at which they were suspected of being developed, as WMD elimination was not part of the deliberate planning process or joint military planning doctrine in the 1990s and the early 2000s. Consequently, although U.S. contingency plans for Iraq from the 1990s and the revisions in 2000 identified the elimination of Saddam's ability to make WMD as an end state, none of them assigned any units or organizations the responsibility for exploiting and destroying suspected WMD sites.

As planning for 1003V was finalized, CENTCOM realized that there was no inter-agency group or special operations plan to take on the task of finding and eliminating Saddam's WMD. By default, CENTCOM, as the combatant command, was stuck with the mission in a combat scenario. Franks and his planners realized they needed to incorporate the seizure of suspected WMD sites into the final war plan for Iraq. When CENTCOM requested a list of the suspected sites, they received a list of 900 potential WMD facility locations compiled by the Defense Intelligence Agency containing input from some of the other national intelligence agencies. CENTCOM planners then began to prioritize those suspected sites based on their size, composition, and assessed viability and lethality. The final product was entitled the Weapons of Mass Destruction Master Site List and was incorporated into the final war planning effort for operation plan 1003V.⁴²

The Result: Little Phase IV and WMD Planning

By late August 2002, Franks and CENTCOM had made headway in persuading U.S. leaders to accept the Hybrid concept but had become thoroughly frustrated with what they viewed as micromanagement from the Office of the SECDEF on all aspects of the plan. Rumsfeld's iterative demands for reductions in troop levels and deployment timelines had consumed 9 months of CENTCOM's planning time and yet had resulted in a prospective invasion force Franks and his commanders believed might be insufficient for the job. Despite the functional – if somewhat strained – working relationships Franks developed with the SECDEF and other senior decision makers, he was frustrated by his inability to educate them about the minimum requirements to ensure success in toppling Saddam Hussein's regime, a frustration Third Army leaders shared.⁴³ Most importantly, though, the intense focus in the planning process on the invasion itself meant that only a relatively small amount of attention had been paid to Phase IV, the period of post-conflict activities when the U.S.-led coalition would be shepherding a new Iraqi state into being. At the time 1003V was issued formally to the CENTCOM components in October 2002, there was only a sparse outline for post-hostility plans apart from redeployment operations and nascent plans to secure the Iraqi regime's suspected WMD stockpiles.

THE STRATEGIC SITUATION IN IRAQ

In retrospect, the most significant aspect of the Iraq invasion planning was not the shortage of troops or the lack of Phase IV planning, but rather the gaping holes in what the U.S. military knew about Iraq. This ignorance included Iraqi politics, society, and government—gaps that led the United States to make some deeply flawed assumptions about how the war was likely to unfold. One reason for the U.S. military's problematic intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) was the lack of reliable sources on the inner workings of the regime and Iraqi society. Analysis on Iraq in the interwar period focused principally on Iraq's WMD program and the positioning of large Iraqi military formations and major weapons systems. Little emphasis was placed on examining Iraqi society in anything more than a cursory sense. What little information available about the sustainability of the Ba'ath regime and the Iraqis' willingness to support regime change came primarily from the Iraqi expatriate community. Apart from having agendas that did not necessarily align with U.S. policy interests—or Iraqi national interests for that matter—the expatriates tended to be disconnected from the Iraqi population that had remained behind and suffered under Saddam Hussein's rule. The highly compartmentalized war planning also made it difficult for CENTCOM to integrate additional sources of information into assessments of Iraq's societal and military characteristics.

CENTCOM and its partners identified some groups and populations within Iraq that were probably willing to assist the ground invasion as it moved northward. Some were resistance groups in the Kurdish and Shi'a populations who had armed themselves against the Ba'ath, while most of Iraq's Shi'a were expected to provide at least passive support to military efforts to decapitate the regime. While U.S. military estimates pointed out some of the Iraqi opposition groups were "generally skeptical of the U.S. commitment to regime change," they expected that the coalition could take key actions to demonstrate its resolve and motivate latent opposition groups, such as the destruction of select, highly visible regime security forces, Ba'ath Party headquarters, and other symbols of regime power. Other actions that CENTCOM thought might embolden indigenous resistance groups involved efforts to encourage the capitulation of large segments of Iraq's Army and, of course, regime removal.⁴⁴

Not all of the military assessments of Iraqi society's likely response to the invasion were so sanguine. CENTCOM planners reviewed the reactions of Iraqi society to Operation DESERT STORM and discovered some unnerving lessons for the 2002 war plan. One was an invasion might ignite a sectarian bloodbath as the Iraqi factions retaliated against each other in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, with widespread reprisal attacks beginning immediately after the collapse of the regime.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, these dissenting assessments had little impact on planning for the invasion and its aftermath.

Iraqi Military Capabilities and Intentions

Despite some of the shortcomings in the IPB analysis, CENTCOM built an extensive assessment of the Iraqi regime's defense plans and capabilities based on Iraqi military defense plans in CENTCOM's possession. CENTCOM described Iraq's defense and security apparatus in terms of concentric rings of defense, the center of which was Baghdad. The outer ring was comprised of the Iraqi Army, while the interior rings were comprised

of the Republican Guard, Special Republican Guard, Special Security and Intelligence Organizations, and Ba'ath Party militia and special intelligence services at the center. The purpose of these forces was to protect Saddam Hussein, his inner circle, and Baghdad, in that order. CENTCOM also expected Saddam to use chemical weapons at various points to delay or fix coalition forces outside of Baghdad while the inner ring consolidated to defend the city. Thus, CENTCOM assessed that the operational center of gravity for the Iraqi defense was the Special Security Organizations, Special Republican Guard, and the Republican Guard forces in the vicinity of Baghdad, along with Saddam's surface-to-surface missile inventory. Even though CENTCOM judged that Saddam had a coherent defense plan for Baghdad, they believed his military forces had significant operational weaknesses. United Nations (UN) sanctions, Saddam's distrust of his own forces, and Operations NORTHERN WATCH and SOUTHERN WATCH may have degraded the capabilities of the Iraqi Air Force, Army, and air defense systems.⁴⁶ CENTCOM also had some information on what they labeled Saddam's "vanity forces," including the Quds force—not to be confused with the Iranian regime organization of the same name—and the Fedayeen Saddam. Some sources suggested that the Quds force was a national-guard-like force of lightly trained Iraqi volunteers whose purpose was to defend their locales from any outside incursion. The Fedayeen were another matter, as they were led by Saddam's eldest son, Uday Hussein, known for his sociopathic tendencies and mental instability. The Fedayeen did not seem to have a place within the tightly controlled security structure Saddam had built around himself. Some reports noted that the Fedayeen were an unconventional force trained in guerrilla tactics with a "golden company" devoted to suicide missions, but CENTCOM had few details about the unit's size, strength, and mission. Additionally, because the Fedayeen were managed by Uday, U.S. analysts considered them a token force with which Uday could cement his place in his father's regime, rather than a viable defense mechanism.⁴⁷

The Regime's Strategic Perspective

Political and military matters were intrinsically mixed in the Iraqi regime. Saddam Hussein's concerns about assassination and remaining in power translated into a focus on internal security and a proliferation of competing paramilitary and intelligence entities. Moreover, Iraqi society had undergone some fundamental changes since 1991 that affected both how it behaved and how Saddam prepared to respond to that behavior. In the early 2000s, Saddam's primary concern remained internal threats, both from disaffected segments of Iraqi society and from prospective insider coup attempts by Ba'ath Party rivals or the Iraqi military. Saddam's secondary concern was regional threats, Iran and Israel foremost among them.⁴⁸ The threat posed by an American-led coalition ranked only third on Saddam's list of dangers to his rule.

Because his first priority was to counter any further 1991-style uprisings from Iraq's Kurdish or Shi'a populations, Saddam distributed the bulk of the Iraqi Army and Republican Guard in northern and southern Iraq. He also sent his intensely loyal paramilitary forces to locations in southern Iraq to prevent the population there from rebelling. Saddam addressed his second defense priority—Iran—by deploying other regular army units along Iraq's southeastern border and highways to prevent Iran from taking advantage of any civil chaos.⁴⁹

In truth, the capabilities of Iraqi conventional forces were even more degraded than CENTCOM assessed. The more professional conventional military forces tried to modernize and reset their formations while dealing with continuous reductions in resources and the Iraqi military industrial commission's inability to deliver specialized secret weapons for Saddam. Because Saddam created an environment in which he generally received only positive information, Iraqi Army leaders were reluctant to communicate the true state of their diminished forces' capabilities. The command, control, and communications networks across different Iraqi security services, too, were not nearly as coherent or organized as analysts thought them to be, reflecting Saddam's wariness of any well-coordinated security force structure that might coherently mount a coup attempt. Instead, he deliberately inhibited communication between the regular army and the Republican Guard, and he forbade the Republican Guard from operating inside Baghdad. The Special Republican Guard—the only conventional military force he authorized to operate within Baghdad city limits—was expressly forbidden from communicating with other Iraqi forces.⁵⁰

U.S. military analysts may have overestimated some of Iraq's military capabilities, but they underestimated others. During the course of Operations NORTHERN WATCH and SOUTHERN WATCH, Saddam's forces became adept at using mobile weapons systems, hide sites, and caches that were not easily detected or tracked.⁵¹ It was, however, the overlooked so-called vanity forces that would create the most pressing difficulties for the coalition invasion. Movements and capabilities of paramilitary forces like the Fedayeen were also difficult to detect, and the secrecy in which they operated precluded adequate information on their composition, strength, and activities.

Finally, beyond the regime's politics and security apparatus, Iraqi society was not particularly well primed for a second American invasion. The U.S. failure to support the Kurdish and Shi'a uprisings in 1991 had left Saddam's regime free to brutally repress them. There had been no equivalent to Operation PROVIDE COMFORT for Iraq's Shi'a, many of whom remained deeply angry and skeptical about U.S. intentions. The UN sanctions on the regime had also taken a significant toll on the Iraqi public's goodwill toward the international community and the United States and the United Kingdom in particular. The sanctions not only reduced the amount of humanitarian aid that reached needed Iraqi citizens, but also allowed Saddam to control the delivery of aid and, in so doing, to solidify his power base. Saddam's propaganda placed much of the blame for the sanctions squarely on the United States; as a result, significant portions of the Iraqi population became embittered and hardened against the perceived source of their suffering, the United States. The sanctions also made it difficult for well-educated Iraqis to make a reasonable living, and many of them had no choice but to leave Iraq. The mass departures of Iraq's intelligentsia effectively removed most of the political opposition to the regime.⁵² Iraqis were not, then, a population that would necessarily welcome a coalition "liberation" with open arms. Instead, they were a segmented population with pockets of people who were very suspicious of Western intentions for their country.

Saddam's WMD Deception Program

Saddam had indeed used chemical weapons in the past, but, unknown to the rest of the world, had dismantled almost all of his WMD program and stockpiles by 1999. Why,

then, did he go to such lengths to encourage the world to believe that he still had them, or, at the very least, that he retained some clandestine WMD capability? We now know Saddam believed he had to convince both his rivals inside Iraq and his regional adversaries that he retained the capability to make and use WMD to deter attacks from inside and outside Iraq, even as he struggled to persuade the rest of the international community that the program no longer existed.⁵³ Saddam had used chemical weapons against Iran and the Kurds in the 1980s to demonstrate not only that he maintained a chemical weapons stockpile, but also that he would not hesitate to use them if he believed the survival of his regime was at stake. Privately, Saddam told his inner circle afterward that simply threatening to use chemical weapons would achieve the desired psychological impact on his adversaries:

I mean, sometimes what you get out of a [chemical] weapon is when you keep saying, 'I will bomb you'. It is better than bombing him actually. It is possible that when you bomb him, the material effect will be 40 percent, but, if you stick it up to his face, the material and spiritual [psychological] effect will be 60 percent, so why hit him? Keep getting 60 percent!⁵⁴

Saddam frequently reminded his close advisers that Iraq was in an environment where even perceived vulnerabilities could draw attackers. Ultimately, he wanted to retain the ability to reinstate his WMD program once the sanctions had ended in order to maintain the internal and external security of his Ba'ath regime. Thus, his goal between 1991 and 2003 was to encourage the international community to remove the UN sanctions and simultaneously keep a repository of scientific expertise. He organized several front companies, engineered UN Oil for Food program contracts, and created separate protocols outside of the UN with other countries to continue trade under the sanctions regime. The UN sanctions also permitted Iraq to maintain and build weapons delivery systems with a range under 150 kilometers, thereby allowing Iraq to keep its weapons manufacturing infrastructure intact and to keep the human capital to run it. Saddam also kept all of his nuclear weapons scientists in the country and continued researching a nuclear weapons capability in the 1990s. Finally, Saddam did take steps to destroy his chemical weapons stockpile after the 1991 Gulf war, but he maintained the expertise necessary to create chemical agents and construct chemical weapons.⁵⁵ The invading U.S. and coalition troops would later discover remnants of these Iraqi chemical weapons stockpiles.

Iraq and Terrorism

In the interwar period, Saddam dabbled in financing terrorist organizations and preparing his special intelligence and security services to conduct terrorist attacks. As he did so, Saddam was careful to avoid overt relations with terrorist groups and provided no direct support to al-Qaeda, whose ambitions for an Islamic caliphate clashed with his own desire to preserve his regime in Iraq. Saddam had better relations with other terrorist organizations. Although he did not sponsor terrorist organizations on his own soil, he did provide financial support to some terrorist groups in the decade prior to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, including the Abu Nidal organization, Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the Palestinian Liberation Front, and Hamas. Saddam was particularly interested in supporting Palestinian terrorist groups and had a long-standing relationship with Hamas, through whom he funded families of suicide bombers who attacked Israel. In exchange

for Iraqi support, Saddam expected these groups to follow guidance from Baghdad when required.⁵⁶

In the early 2000s, Saddam and his security and intelligence directorates became keenly interested in using assassinations, suicide bombings, and improvised explosive devices (IED) against Iraqi opposition groups and Iranian targets. To that end, Saddam's "Ghafiki Project," nested within the Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS), began recruiting suicide bombers from other countries, while special mission units in the IIS criminology (M16) directorate received training on building car bombs and other IEDs. The IIS worked extensively to perfect IED construction, analyze the technical aspects of terrorist attacks, and conduct lessons learned sessions for failed operations and explosive uses. At the same time, the IIS Directorate of Liberation Movements (M8) hosted Palestinian, Lebanese, Libyan, Syrian, and North African fighters in paramilitary training camps and proposed in its 2002 annual report to activate another training camp for an Arab Liberation Front inside Iraq.⁵⁸

The Fedayeen Saddam benefited from Saddam's growing interest in using terrorism domestically and abroad. In 1999, Saddam decided that he would assign the top 10 recruits from each Fedayeen class to conduct operations in Europe against Iraqi opposition leaders, with Ahmad Chalabi explicitly among the targets. Other Fedayeen were designated for operations in the Kurdish regions of Iraq and Iran. Saddam later outfitted the Fedayeen's Golden Company to wage war against any rebellion or uprising that might occur inside Iraq, to include one that might arise with support from an American invasion. The Golden Company's primary tactic was suicide bombings using vests or other similar mechanisms.⁵⁸

There was one independent Islamist terrorist organization known to be operating on Iraqi territory. Ansar al-Islam, an affiliate of al-Qaeda, was engaged in an active war with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) as the terrorist group attempted to expand its territory beyond a small corner of Sulaymaniyah Province. After Saddam attacked the northeastern Iraqi Kurdish town of Halabjah with chemical weapons in 1988, many of the Kurds in the area fled across the border to Iran, where an extremist Sunni Kurdish cleric, Sheikh Abd al-Latif, convinced a number of the refugees that jihad was the proper response. His adherents returned to Halabjah under the leadership of another extremist cleric, Mullah Bin Abdulaziz, and together they formed the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK). In the 1990s, the IMK took advantage of the civil war between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and PUK to expand its influence from Halabjah into other areas of Sulaymaniyah and eventually into parts of Erbil. Military pressure from the PUK later fractured the IMK into several splinter groups, some of which became hardened Salafis and developed relationships with al-Qaeda. With al-Qaeda's encouragement, these organizations merged in September 2001 into a single group that eventually became known as Ansar al-Islam.⁵⁹

Al-Qaeda leaders viewed the emergence of Ansar al-Islam as an opportunity to expand their foothold in the Middle East. Ansar al-Islam's leaders, Mullah Krekar and Abu Abdullah al-Shafi, worked openly with al-Qaeda, and al-Qaeda, in turn, provided resources, training, and guidance to the group, enabling it to carve out a miniature Islamic state in the Halabjah area. From there, Shafi used his ties with Iraqi Salafis to grow Ansar al-Islam's support base further by incorporating underground Sunni extremist networks in Ninawa Province.⁶⁰

With the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, Ansar al-Islam sheltered a number of al-Qaeda members and affiliates fleeing Afghanistan. One of those who sought refuge with Ansar al-Islam was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who had served with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan but had been reluctant to swear fealty to al-Qaeda's senior leadership. Zarqawi's stubborn independence and international ambitions complicated Ansar al-Islam's efforts to establish an Islamic emirate in Kurdistan. The secular PUK viewed Ansar al-Islam and Zarqawi as a threat, particularly after the organization began targeting Kurdish civilians and PUK affiliates. Zarqawi also used the Ansar al-Islam infrastructure to conduct crude experiments with chemical and biological weapons, though the limitations of the group's facilities and his peoples' lack of chemical expertise constrained his efforts. One unintended consequence of these experiments was that they attracted the attention of Western and Middle Eastern security services that began targeting and detaining members of Zarqawi's network.⁶² The experiments brought Ansar al-Islam unwanted attention that would eventually lead the coalition, with support from the PUK, to destroy the group's Halabjah safe haven, though the alliance between Ansar al-Islam's survivors and Zarqawi's fledgling Salafi group would become the core of al-Qaeda in Iraq.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository by Frida Tørring.

Ansar al-Islam Leader Mullah Krekar.⁶¹

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The dearth of information about Iraq's social dynamics and internal turmoil since the 1991 Gulf war led the United States to misjudge Iraqi military activities and to formulate policies and plans at odds with the reality of a deeply segmented and traumatized Iraqi society. U.S. policymakers and CENTCOM failed to account for the amount of distrust Iraqis felt toward the United States because of the 1991 uprising and the 1990s sanctions regime. Flawed U.S. assumptions about how the Iraqi people and state institutions would respond to regime decapitation led to inadequate preparation for post-regime governance and stability requirements. At the same time, while the national intelligence agencies and

CENTCOM were aware that Saddam had no direct ties to al-Qaeda at the time of the 9/11 attacks, they were largely unaware of his indigenous paramilitary capability to conduct terrorist attacks. They were also unaware that he had focused his regime's security forces almost exclusively against internal threats rather than against external adversaries. Finally, CENTCOM was aware of Ansar al-Islam's activities in northern Iraq but did not appreciate how far the group's networks extended into the broader Iraqi Salafi community or that Islamist militancy had gained a significant foothold in northern and western Iraq.

Within the DoD itself, structural stovepipes inhibited information sharing and inclusive planning and, when combined with Rumsfeld's managerial style and the personality conflicts among key leaders, resulted in a tightly compartmentalized planning process that focused too heavily on major combat operations and was not coordinated across DoD or the broader U.S. Government. The quick tactical victory over the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in late 2001 seemed to validate Rumsfeld's views about the future of warfare and convinced him and others that a small U.S. force aided by indigenous fighters and air power could replicate the feat in Iraq.⁶³ The secretary's continual downward pressure on CENTCOM's force requirements for the invasion and its aftermath resulted in a plan that, when executed, would speedily topple Saddam Hussein's brittle regime but would prove unequal to the task of consolidating a tactical military victory.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 2

1. Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision*, New York: HarperCollins, 2008, pp. 68–81. It is clear from Feith's account that WMD and state-sponsored terrorism loomed large in national security thinking after 9/11. Conference Call Interview, Major Jeanne Godfroy, Chief of Staff, Army (CSA), Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) Study Group, with former Secretary of the Army Thomas White, Washington, DC: National Defense University (NDU), October 16, 2014. All unpublished documents in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, are in the CSA OIF Study Group archives at the Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle, PA. White was present in the room when Bush ordered the SECDEF to begin contingency planning for Iraq circa early October 2001. The order also reportedly came as a surprise to Rumsfeld.

2. Interview, Godfroy with Colonel (Ret.) John Agoglia, March 14, 2014, NDU. In 2001, then-Lieutenant Colonel John Agoglia was one of a handful of planners in the CENTCOM J-5 assigned the task of writing Iraq war plans. Interview, Godfroy with Major General Patrick Higgins, April 29, 2014, Reston, VA. Then-Colonel Higgins was a J-3 operations officer for U.S. Special Operations Command working with the U.S. Army Central Command (CENTCOM) on contingency and operational planning for the theater. General Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, New York: HarperCollins, 2004, pp. 268, 329.

3. PowerPoint Briefing, CENTCOM, POTUS [President of the United States] Brief, December 28, 2001. The objectives identified in the PowerPoint briefing were the same as those provided to CENTCOM Commander Franks during the first week of December 2001.

4. Gregory Hooker, "Shaping the Plan for Operation Iraqi Freedom: The Role of Military Intelligence Assessments," rev. ed. in *Military Research Papers*, No. 4, Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2003, available from www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/shaping-the-plan-for-operation-iraqi-freedom-the-role-of-military-intelligence.

5. Interviews, Godfroy with Agoglia, March 14 and April 16, 2014, NDU.

6. U.S. Navy photo, "U.S. Army Gen. Tommy R. Franks, Commander in Chief of U.S. Central Command, holds a press conference with embedded media in the media center in the Qatar. Gen. Franks

briefed media on the status of Operation Iraqi Freedom and the forces used thus far, March 22, 2003. Gen. Franks opened the press conference saying, 'The heart and prayers of this coalition go out to the families of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.' Operation Iraqi Freedom is the multinational coalition effort to liberate the Iraqi people, eliminate Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and end the regime of Saddam Hussein," DIMOC Identifier 030322-N-FK853-030, March 22, 2002, Released.

7. Franks, *American Soldier*, pp. 34-198; Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*, New York: Vintage Books, 2007, pp. 29-31.

8. CENTAF became U.S. Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT) in March 2008.

9. Interview, Major William Shane Story with Lieutenant General David McKiernan, June 30, 2003, Camp Doha, Kuwait.

10. Interview, Story with Terry Moran, Special Assistant to the Commanding General (CG), Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), August 23, 2003, Camp Doha, Kuwait.

11. DoD photo by Susan Norvick, Civilian, "Commanding General 3rd US Army (USA) Lieutenant General (LGEN) Paul T. Mikolashek speaks during the 3rd USA Commanders Conference, at Fort McPherson, Georgia, 2/10/2001," National Archives Identifier 6596841, February 10, 2001, Released to Public, Unrestricted.

12. Quote from Colonel Gregory Fontenot, Lieutenant Colonel Edmund J. Degen, and Lieutenant Colonel David Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004, p. 45. Isaiah Wilson, "Anabasis," Thomas G. Mankhen and Thomas A. Kearney, eds., *War in Iraq: Planning and Execution*, New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 13; Interview, Charles E. Kirkpatrick, V Corps Historian, with Major Kevin Bruce Marcus, V Corps G-3 Plans Contingency Plans Officer, August 26, 2003.

13. Interviews, Godfroy with Agoglia, April 16, 2014; Godfroy and Major Wilson Blythe with General (Ret.) William S. Wallace, March 14, 2014, NDU.

14. Interviews, Kirkpatrick with Lieutenant General William S. Wallace, V Corps Commander, November 2002, Germany, and February 2003, Kuwait.

15. Interviews, Godfroy with Lieutenant General David Halverson, Arlington, VA, June 8, 2015; with Agoglia, March 14 and April 16, 2014. Then-Colonel Halverson was the head of the J-3 plans section at CENTCOM, 2001-2003.

16. Interviews, Lieutenant Colonel Jason Awadi and Godfroy with Condoleezza Rice, July 7, 2014, National Harbor, MD; CSA OIF Study Group with General (Ret.) John P. Abizaid, September 19, 2014, NDU.

17. Interviews, Godfroy with Agoglia, November 7, 2013, NDU; with Halverson, June 8, 2015; Godfroy and Blythe with Colonel Edmund J. Degen, May 22, 2014, Arlington, VA.

18. PowerPoint Briefing, CENTCOM to the President, Compartmented Plan Update, May 11, 2002, slide 4; Information Paper, Mike D. Fitzgerald for CENTCOM CG John P. Abizaid, "to provide GEN Abizaid key elements of information on Phase IV Planning for 1003V." This assumption that Saddam would use chemical weapons against invading forces and neighbors persisted until the invasion itself was underway in 2003.

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CHAPTER 3

MANEUVERING INTO POSITION

Throughout the fall of 2002, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), and V Corps refined and rehearsed their war plans for regime change in Iraq. In the last few months before the invasion, CENTCOM and CFLCC confronted some mandated additions and challenges that consumed a substantial amount of their planning energy. The focus on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as the *casus belli* for war would require additional forces to secure Saddam Hussein's suspected WMD sites, while a late-breaking early regime collapse scenario would alter the force structure for the invasion and change how the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) deployed forces to the theater. A policy decision to develop an expatriate Iraqi military force to serve as an Iraqi face on the liberation would draw a mixture of support and ire from the agencies and military units planning the invasion. Turkey's 11th-hour refusal to allow the coalition to cross Turkish territory would have profound consequences for the invasion and its aftermath. In light of these distractions, military planning for Phase IV was a late, uncoordinated effort, with U.S. strategic and operational headquarters so consumed by moving forces and finalizing plans that they gave little attention to what might occur after the fall of Baghdad.

In contrast, Saddam's preparations to confront the coalition forces were virtually nonexistent until December 2002. Although Ba'athist militias and Iranian regime-sponsored militant groups were well prepared for the American-led offensive, Saddam failed to prepare his military until just weeks before the operation—a result of his disbelief that the United States would actually invade Iraq. Not until the eve of the invasion did Saddam reposition some of his forces south and reinforce the vulnerable Iraqi southern cities with his loyalist paramilitary forces, including the Fedayeen Saddam and the Ba'ath Party militia.

THE GROUND FORCES PREPARE FOR WAR

Lieutenant General David McKiernan Takes Command

As U.S. war planning intensified in the late summer of 2002, and the main effort began to shift to the tactical headquarters that would execute the invasion under the CFLCC, General Tommy Franks decided to remove his CFLCC commander, Lieutenant General Paul Mikolashek, who was responsible for overseeing the conflict in Afghanistan and preparing for combat in Iraq. Mikolashek had disagreed with Franks about the prosecution of the war in Afghanistan, and Franks had expressed his frustration with Mikolashek, considering him too cautious to oversee an aggressive invasion campaign.



Lieutenant General David D. McKiernan (left).

Source: DoD photo by Lance Corporal Bryan J. Nealy, USMC (Released).

**Lieutenant General David D. McKiernan, Commanding General,
Third Army/CFLCC (2002-2004) and Brigadier General Richard Natonski,
CG, 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB).¹**

Two important changes followed from the decision to remove Mikolashek. First, the Office of the SECDEF – seconded by Franks – proposed setting up a separate combined joint task force for Afghanistan and the War on Terrorism so that CFLCC could focus entirely on Iraq for the time being. Second, Franks received permission to replace Mikolashek as CFLCC commander with Lieutenant General David D. McKiernan. McKiernan, then serving as the Army’s operations officer or G-3, had most recently commanded the 1st Cavalry Division and was familiar with the Iraq invasion plan. He had also served in the Gulf war and Bosnia; although Franks and McKiernan had not previously worked together, McKiernan’s rapport with General Eric Shinseki combined with his reputation for being cool under fire had earned him Franks’s respect.²

McKiernan’s appointment as the new CFLCC commander signaled to CFLCC forces that the invasion of Iraq was near certain to occur. At the CFLCC headquarters, he welcomed a number of new senior staff officers hand-picked by the Army’s senior leadership to prosecute the war, including Major General William “Fuzzy” Webster as McKiernan’s deputy, Brigadier General James “Spider” Marks as his intelligence director, and Major General James D. Thurman as his operations chief. The I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) was also placed under CFLCC’s tactical control, meaning the MEF and its new commander, Marine Lieutenant General James “Jim” Conway, effectively worked for McKiernan, allowing the CFLCC commander to plan a land campaign as a coalition and a joint component command. By October 22, McKiernan relocated the entire CFLCC headquarters from Fort McPherson, GA, to Camp Doha, Kuwait. He then began a series

of exercises that led to CFLCC's operational plan for the invasion, which he named Cobra II after General Omar Bradley's operation to liberate France in 1944.³

CENTCOM, meanwhile, was finalizing operations plan 1003V. As CENTCOM officers worked with CFLCC and Coalition Forces Air Component Command (CFACC) on its details, it became apparent that the Hybrid plan did not afford the coalition the element of tactical surprise that Generated Start had offered. As a result, CENTCOM decided to revert to the original Generated Start plan that called for initiating the air and ground campaigns simultaneously in hope of building surprise back into the invasion.⁴

Shaping Operations

CENTCOM's plans for the shaping operations that would precede the main invasion consisted of three components: special operations to destroy the long-range ballistic missiles the coalition believed the Iraqi regime possessed; a link-up with indigenous militias and resistance organizations in Iraq; and strategic communications aimed at Saddam's regular army forces. Part of 5th Special Forces Group would enter western Iraq to find and neutralize Saddam's suspected long-range ballistic missile sites in order to prevent him from launching missiles at Israel. The remainder of 5th Group would move from Kuwait into southern Iraq to make contact with Iraqi Shi'a resistance groups and seize the bridgeheads near Nasiriyah in order to prevent Saddam's forces from destroying them and slowing the main invasion forces' advance. The 10th Special Forces Group would insert units into northern Iraq and link up with Kurdish peshmerga militias, secure the northern oil fields near Kirkuk, and prevent Kurdish incursions south of the Green Line.⁵

These unconventional operations were to be followed by a two-pronged supporting effort. First, CFACC would begin a bombing campaign to destroy Iraq's air defense systems as well as prominent symbols of the regime. The intent of destroying those key regime nodes was not only to create confusion and disarray among Iraq's command hierarchy but also to prevent a "Fortress Baghdad" scenario in which the regime might consolidate its forces in a defense-in-depth of Baghdad. Concurrent with the air campaign, the coalition would mount information operations to erode the resolve of the Iraqi military and encourage them to surrender. These efforts would set conditions for coalition maneuver forces to begin operations to destroy the Republican Guard and other loyalist military forces and topple the regime.⁶

Major Combat Operations

Although CENTCOM had overall responsibility for the timing of major combat operations and the plan to position units in theater, CFLCC, V Corps, and I MEF were ultimately responsible for developing the ground forces' scheme of maneuver.⁷ In CENTCOM's 1003V plan, the stated objective for the ground component was to isolate the regime and defeat the Iraqi Regular Army and Republican Guard forces. According to the operations order for CFLCC's Cobra II first issued in October 2002, I MEF was the main effort for the first part of the invasion. It was tasked to seize the Tallil airfield, establish a bridgehead on the Euphrates River at Nasiriyah, defeat or fix any remaining Iraqi III or IV Corps units in southern Iraq, and set conditions to conduct decisive operations north and west of the Euphrates River. At the same time, V Corps would continue flowing into

Kuwait and, upon I MEF's completion of these tasks, would become the main effort as V Corps advanced to defeat the Republican Guard's Medina Division and other security forces and isolate Baghdad. The CFLCC operations order also instructed V Corps to be prepared to exploit sudden regime collapse with rapid ground maneuver to Baghdad. The key task for both V Corps and I MEF after they isolated Baghdad from two directions was to remove the regime from power.⁸

The V Corps was tasked with defeating the Iraqi Army in southern Iraq and the Republican Guard near Baghdad. The Corps' scheme of maneuver would begin with Apache helicopter attacks against the Medina Division, followed by ground maneuvers to destroy the Medina and secure key terrain at the Karbala Gap, a critical avenue of approach to Baghdad from the southwest near Lake Razzazah. Because defeating the Medina Division and other Iraqi forces would require a rapid advance to the Karbala Gap and the Iraqis were expected to welcome the U.S. presence and offer little resistance, V Corps instructed its mechanized forces—the 3d Infantry Division and 1st Armored Division—to bypass the southern Iraqi cities quickly rather than enter them to clear enemy forces. V Corps also tasked the 101st Airborne Division to seize Saddam International Airport in Baghdad as a critical element of isolating the capital.⁹

Two wargames in December 2002 and late January 2003 convinced McKiernan to reconsider this scheme and make V Corps—the mechanized force—the main effort for the entire mission, given that it could cover Iraq's terrain more quickly than the I MEF's light infantry forces. The winter wargames also highlighted for coalition commanders that their advance could be delayed if the Iraqis destroyed the bridges along the main routes of attack in southern Iraq, and as a result, CFLCC and V Corps allocated additional forces to secure those bridgeheads. While the wargames proved useful in refining the tactical plan, they reinforced flawed assumptions about Iraqi capabilities. In particular, they overestimated the effectiveness of the Iraqi conventional military forces. CFLCC and V Corps did not account for the impact of sanctions on the capabilities of Iraq's military, and the simulated Iraqi units that CFLCC and V Corps fought in the exercises were full strength, fully coordinated formations that were assumed to be able to conduct brigade, division, and, on occasion, corps-level operations. As a result, the exercises led analysts, operations officers, and commanders to focus on finding and destroying conventional formations and equipment.¹⁰

The simulations used in the run-up to the invasion also pitted ground forces against a new enemy—the “contemporary operating environment opposing force” that departed from Cold War enemy models in that it was an amalgamation of conventional and paramilitary forces. The latter sought to draw U.S. forces into complex urban terrain to wear them down there rather than engage them in direct combat on a battlefield devoid of civilians. In addition to the greater numbers of unconventional forces, the new enemy simulations included fractured social institutions in an attempt to replicate the battlefield complexities U.S. forces had experienced in Bosnia and Kosovo. The new virtual opposing force was certainly more appropriate than the Cold War-era situations, but it had the side effect of reinforcing the U.S. military aversion to urban combat and seemingly validated a scheme of maneuver that called for coalition troops to bypass rather than clear Iraq's southern population centers en route to Baghdad.¹¹

The differences between the capabilities of the contemporary operating environment opponent force and the Iraqi military were significant enough to raise questions about the usefulness of the exercises and the time and energy spent adjusting the plans as a result of them. The exercises also tended to create unlikely scenarios, particularly where force composition was concerned. During Victory Scrimmage, the V Corps wargame of January–February 2003, all five Army divisions on the deployment list—the 3d Infantry Division, the 101st Airborne Division, the 1st Cavalry Division, 1st Armored Division, and 4th Infantry Division—participated in the exercise. This wargame was designed to train V Corps how to command and control the maximum number of units possible, even though, as 101st Airborne Division Commander Major General David Petraeus pointed out, it was becoming increasingly unlikely the invasion could involve more than three. In the end, Victory Scrimmage created confusion about the division of responsibility across an unrealistically crowded theater and even more uncertainty about deployment timelines.¹²

The late prewar exercises also favored the traditional idea of corps-level deep attacks with helicopters against major enemy formations. Despite the disappointing results of Task Force Hawk 3 years before, the aviation community believed a new training regimen, an upgraded aircraft in the form of the Apache Longbow helicopter. Better organization had eliminated the difficulties, and a V Corps exercise using live-fire munitions on a range in Poland was deemed to validate the deep attack concept. Consequently, CFLCC and V Corps retained deep aviation attacks as part of the scheme of maneuver.¹³

Planning for Baghdad

The Joint Staff issued planning guidance on May 20, 2002, directing CENTCOM to begin developing plans for the “liberation” of Baghdad, after which CENTCOM passed the task on to CFLCC. The task came as no surprise but presented some difficulties. The simulation exercises for Iraq had raised fears that urban combat in Baghdad could resemble that in the city of Grozny in the Chechen Republic or Mogadishu in Somalia. Two urban warfare conferences held separately by the Marines and Army in the fall of 2002 concluded that the invasion plans at that time did not sufficiently account for how to seize and secure Baghdad itself. McKiernan shared some of these concerns and, during the last 2 months before the invasion, instructed V Corps to draw up more detailed plans for urban operations in and around Baghdad. Within V Corps, the task eventually fell to Major General Ricardo Sanchez and the 1st Armored Division, a unit that SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld had apparently decided not to include in the initial invasion force. Drawing on exercises and works that included Roger Spiller’s *Sharp Corners*, V Corps and the 1st Armored Division developed a Baghdad security plan that included a graphical dissection of the city to allow air and ground units to pinpoint critical locations. It contained details about Baghdad’s subterranean landscape, the locations and conditions of electrical and sewer systems, and how money flowed in and out of the city. These extensive urban preparations for Baghdad provided a baseline for some of the missions V Corps and I MEF units would assume in the city after the fall of the regime.¹⁴

Turkey: The Northern Option

In spring 2002, CENTCOM had conceived an idea to use psychological operations to deceive the Iraqi military into believing that the United States would send ground forces through Turkey to attack Iraq, a mission that CENTCOM judged could be performed by the 10th Special Forces Group. However, after a May 2002 session with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) and some of the combatant commanders (held in the Joint Chiefs' Pentagon conference room known as the "tank"), CENTCOM recognized that more forces might be required in northern Iraq, particularly if the psychological operations failed to convince the Iraqi Army units there to capitulate. In conjunction with European Command (EUCOM), CENTCOM began to look at options to move another U.S. division through Turkey in order to augment the 10th Special Forces Group.¹⁵

Using Turkish territory to stage a large invasion force would require consent from the newly elected Turkish Government of Recep Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party, a group with long-time ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Because Turkey, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member, was within EUCOM's area of responsibility, EUCOM was in charge of Operation NORTHERN WATCH and for operations in northern Iraq. With the permission of Turkish authorities, EUCOM deployed 2,200 Soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division to Turkey by January 2003 to arrange maintenance, logistics, and other support for the U.S. and coalition troops that needed to move along a 700-kilometer-long supply line across Turkey to the Iraqi border, a major logistical challenge.¹⁶

Once the logistical basics were in place, it was then time to designate the forces to invade from Turkey and obtain Turkish Government support to use its territory for the invasion. The units designated for the Turkish front were the 4th Infantry Division from Fort Hood, TX, and the 173d Airborne Brigade based in Vicenza, Italy. The V Corps did not practice, exercise, or otherwise discuss operations with the 4th Infantry Division because of its assumption that those units would advance from the north and thus be out of the V Corps area of responsibility. It did, however, draw up contingency plans for the 4th Infantry Division's possible redirection to Kuwait in the event that the Turkish Government denied the use of its territory for the invasion. In that case, Wallace and McKiernan decided that they would "plug them in wherever they could plug them in."¹⁷

Alterations to the Plan: WMD, Regime Collapse, and the "Free Iraqi Forces"

Military planners and U.S.-based analysts had long believed a "Red Line" existed in Iraq that, once crossed by coalition forces, would trigger Saddam's use of chemical weapons. Therefore, the invasion plan allowed for the possibility that coalition units would need to undergo decontamination and react to attacks by WMD. However, CENTCOM and CFLCC did not assign an organization to secure Iraq's presumed WMD until 3 months before the invasion, even though the Iraqis' alleged nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons stockpiles were the U.S. casus belli. The U.S. interagency's list of 900 suspected WMD sites was too extensive for the CFLCC to secure with a small invasion force that needed to focus its combat power on destroying the Iraqi military and defeating the regime security forces in Baghdad. In December 2002, the 75th Field Artillery

Brigade was designated as the unit responsible for this mission and renamed the 75th Exploitation Task Force (XTF). Once assigned to CFLCC, the 75th brigade divided the 200 personnel assigned to the mission into sensitive site exploitation teams and mobile exploitation teams, then linking up with other U.S. Government agencies to gather the information necessary to fulfill its new mission. The 75th Field Artillery Brigade also participated in CFLCC's Lucky Warrior exercise in February 2003, but the late notice the brigade received, combined with its lack of WMD expertise and the sheer volume of the suspected sites, would quickly overwhelm the 75th once Saddam's regime fell. Like other postwar planning entities, the 75th Field Artillery Brigade was not sufficiently resourced or integrated within enough time to achieve its objectives.¹⁸

In December 2002, analysts again received increasing indications that the Iraqi regime was on the verge of internal collapse. These circumstances led CENTCOM to develop contingency plans for an early regime collapse scenario that was similar to Running Start. Among other things, the analysts suspected that the growing political pressure on the regime and the buildup of coalition troops in Kuwait were leading to a prospective coup attempt or internal revolt. They believed that, once Saddam was removed from power, the Iraqi Army would capitulate and Saddam's more loyal military forces, including the Republican Guard, would fall into disarray and confusion, providing CENTCOM with a small window of opportunity in which to complete the destruction of the regime. Coalition air strikes would sever Saddam's remaining command and control nodes and destroy any Republican Guard units that attempted to mount a defense. The V Corps would then race toward Baghdad as special operations forces moved to seize Saddam International Airport. A brigade of the 82d Airborne Division would relieve the special operations forces in place as V Corps units surrounded Baghdad. Once conditions were set, CFLCC would relocate its headquarters to the secured Saddam International Airport. Like 1003V and Cobra II, this branch plan assumed risk along the lines of communications near the urban centers because of the need for an expeditious movement to Baghdad.¹⁹

The introduction of the early regime collapse scenario at the operational level significantly affected the composition of the invasion force. The units selected to participate in the invasion were separated and sequenced for deployment in a manner that would fulfill CENTCOM and CFLCC's desire to have greater flexibility earlier in the campaign. The initial invasion force was reduced to only the 3d Infantry Division, the 11th Attack Helicopter Regiment, a reinforced brigade combat team from the 101st Airborne Division, and I MEF. These invading units would be followed by the 1st Armored Division, the rest of the 101st Airborne Division, the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR), and the 1st Cavalry Division. Continual changes to the forces available for additional contingencies made it unclear what units came under V Corps' direct command.²⁰

Another alteration to the invasion plan concerned an effort to create an Iraqi contingent for the invasion force. In spring 2002, Under SECDEF for Policy Douglas Feith—in consultation with Iraqi expatriate leaders—became concerned about putting more of an Iraqi face on the invasion so that it would truly be seen as liberation rather than an occupation. Feith's idea was to recruit Iraqis living abroad to fight alongside the invading coalition forces, much like the Free French had helped liberate France in 1944, and, in fact, the Department of Defense (DoD) dubbed the Iraqi unit the Free Iraqi Forces (FIF). Recruitment efforts were directed at Iraqi expatriates in America and Western Europe,

where thousands initially volunteered, including some from groups led by expatriate leaders Ahmad Chalabi and Ayad Allawi. However, turning volunteers into soldiers proved difficult. There were legal problems concerning how much the recruits could be paid, as well as law of war considerations about whether the FIF were legal combatants. These issues were superimposed over efforts to build a transitional Iraqi Government in exile, also involving Chalabi and Allawi, and to link the FIF into that government. The amount of vetting required for each recruit was considerable, reducing the number that could be processed properly. Franks was not supportive of the effort, allocating little of his command's time or energy toward it and asking the Office of the SECDEF why he should be responsible for "5,000 Iraqis who would have given him the combat power of 150 U.S. soldiers." Of the 5,000-7,000 FIF soldiers envisioned in Feith's original concept, only a few hundred were ultimately vetted, trained, and sent to Iraq in time for the invasion and the post-regime stability phase.²¹

Deployment of the Invasion Force

As CENTCOM and CFLCC finalized their plans, coalition commanders waited anxiously for N-day—the day that the President would notify them when the invasion would occur, with the deployment order that would initiate movement into Kuwait in accordance with the time-phased force and deployment data (TPFDD) to follow shortly thereafter. Uncertain of the operation's start date, the coalition's ground force commanders were concerned they might not be able to build up the required force in time to conduct the invasion on the President's timeline. Therefore, they used some innovative ways to pre-position forces in Kuwait in advance of N-day. Beginning in September 2002, CFLCC, V Corps, and I MEF used a series of scheduled exercises as cover to move units into theater ahead of the expected deployment order. By October 2002, portions of the 3d Infantry Division and I MEF were in place in Kuwait to participate in scheduled training exercises and maneuvers. In October and November, CFLCC's Exercise Lucky Warrior and CENTCOM's Exercise Internal Look in Kuwait provided an opportunity for headquarters to prepare using an Iraq-based scenario and for the 3d Infantry Division and portions of I MEF and V Corps to remain. While CFLCC and V Corps moved the key components of their ground forces into theater, CENTCOM worked to get its strategic-level assets in place. Under the cover of Internal Look, CFLCC's Lucky Warrior, and a V Corps exercise called Juniper Cobra, CENTCOM discreetly deployed Patriot air defense batteries into Kuwait and Israel to defend against the Iraqi regime's short-range ballistic missiles and its suspected medium-range Scud and Husayn missiles. Finally, the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC) used Operation DESERT SPRING to place part of 5th Special Forces Group in Kuwait.²²

This flow of forces was interrupted, however, when Rumsfeld decided in early 2003 not to use the TPFDD and instead chose to deploy troops in a series of force packages as he had done for Afghanistan. His decision to discard the TPFDD was driven by several factors. First, in order to forestall a preemptive Iraqi attack as well as to show domestic and international audiences that the United States had given diplomacy every chance of success, Rumsfeld and Bush wished to delay any formal announcement of their intent to use military force in Iraq until the last possible moment. This was difficult to do once the

very noticeable machinery of the TPFDD had been set in motion. They both also wanted to provide CENTCOM with greater flexibility earlier in the campaign to respond to the early regime collapse scenario if necessary. Finally, despite the value U.S. military leaders placed on the TPFDD, Rumsfeld believed the process was too cumbersome for the mobile, versatile force he envisioned.²³

In Rumsfeld's view, the TPFDD was a symbol of some military leaders' stubborn resistance to his efforts to implement the revolution in military affairs—he "always thought the [military's] requests for forces were off by a factor of two or three; he saw himself as bringing discipline to the force deployment process," Secretary of the Army Thomas White later recalled.²⁴ In order to control and limit the size of the invasion force, Rumsfeld required his commanders to submit a series of requests for forces (RFFs) for his approval. The SECDEF believed using RFFs would enable DoD to rearrange the flow of forces into theater more responsively so that any units that were not needed could be easily scratched from the deployment list. The force package in each RFF was built around a U.S. Army division, armored cavalry regiment, or a Marine Corps equivalent. Enabler units, such as combat service support, field artillery, or military police, could be added or removed to the base force packages as needed. Each force package would require the approval of both Rumsfeld and Franks before its deployment.²⁵

The RFF and force package model had some significant flaws, the biggest of which was that changes to the order in which combat units were scheduled to arrive would also alter the flow of logistical units and other enablers critical to building and sustaining CFLCC's combat power in theater. The sequence of arriving combat and sustainment forces changed numerous times based on when various divisions were required for the campaign. When Franks decided that he needed the 101st Airborne Division on the ground before the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, for example, the enablers for each unit could not be correspondingly rearranged. As a result, the enablers for the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment were in place when the 101st arrived in theater, but those for the 101st were not. The force package method also meant that Army units could be shuffled in the deployment order without accounting for the fact that many Army sustainment units were in direct or general support of CFSOCC or Marine units.²⁶

By late February 2003, the 3d Infantry Division, the 11th Attack Helicopter Regiment, two brigades of the 101st Airborne Division, portions of I MEF, and the British 1st Armored Division had arrived in Kuwait, though some key pieces of those units were still moving into position. Portions of the 4th Infantry Division and the 1st Infantry Division were loading onto ships ahead of anticipated authorization to traverse Turkey for the invasion. The gathering of forces in Kuwait enabled the invasion force to begin rehearsals for N-day. Although CENTCOM, CFLCC, and V Corps had conducted extensive rehearsals and exercises with each other, they had only infrequently incorporated the Marines and the British forces into joint and coalition rehearsals of the plan. Throughout February and March 2003, first CENTCOM and then CFLCC held a series of rehearsal of concept drills to ensure all U.S. components and the British forces were familiar with the plan, its changes, and its contingencies.²⁷

On the eve of the invasion, CFLCC had slightly more than three divisions with which to destroy Iraq's military, topple the regime in Baghdad, and secure the country until follow-on forces and transitional authorities arrived in an incremental fashion. Despite

McKiernan's request that the follow-on forces should be included in the invasion force, Franks and Rumsfeld decided in February 2003 that the 1st Armored Division and 1st Cavalry Division would not participate in the invasion itself, but would be used in its wake. The 1st Armored Division would deploy after the invasion, while the 1st Cavalry Division—unknown to McKiernan at the time—would not deploy to Iraq at all, but would be held for future contingency operations arising from escalating tensions on the Korean peninsula.²⁸

Planning for a Post-Regime Iraq

The responsibility for a post-regime Iraq was a contentious topic as invasion plans circulated among various government agencies. Not until summer 2002 did the National Security Council establish an executive steering group to manage planning for Iraq after Saddam. Participants included the Department of State, DoD, intelligence agencies, and the Office of the Vice President. The executive steering group loosely coordinated several initiatives to create the conditions for a democratic and stable post-Saddam Iraqi Government. The State Department's Future of Iraq project aimed to identify Iraqi oppositionists who could help build a successor government and to study issues expected to be important in the new Iraq, such as oil and energy infrastructure, security forces, legal and judicial systems, and economics and trade. Alongside the Department of State, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) formed another working group focused on post-regime reconstruction tasks.²⁹

Some leading Iraqi oppositionists, including Ahmad Chalabi, refused to participate, thus hampering these U.S.-led working groups. More importantly, the conferences and working groups themselves produced no plan, but rather a series of papers on Iraq that, while informative, were not linked directly to any action arm. Many of the working papers were based on the same flawed assumptions that influenced military plans for Phase IV: that Iraqis would welcome the United States as a liberating force, and that the Iraqi Government would retain some functionality after the senior Ba'ath leadership was removed. As a result, the executive steering group and its supporting working groups spent extensive time on building a humanitarian assistance package for Iraq, but comparatively little time on the functions of a post-regime government outside of the oil ministry.³⁰



Colin Powell (second from right), Abdul Aziz Hakim (second from left) and Ahmad Chalabi (right). Source: U.S. State Department photo by Michael Gross (Released).

Secretary of State Colin Powell After the Invasion of Iraq With Members of the Iraqi Governing Council, Including Abdul Aziz Hakim and Ahmad Chalabi.³¹

As the executive steering group did its work, the Office of the SECDEF was simultaneously working on its own postwar plan. Feith formed an Office of Special Plans under William “Bill” Luti to study the requirements of a successor Iraqi Government—a task redundant and uncoordinated with the State Department’s Future of Iraq project. Among other requirements, Luti’s group judged that the U.S. military would need to remain in Iraq to support stability, governance, and reconstruction for several years.³²

To remove the conflict of overlapping efforts, on January 20, 2003, Bush issued National Security Presidential Directive–24, designating DoD as the lead agency for postwar Iraq. The State Department and Powell were not pleased with this arrangement, particularly when DoD leaders declared their intention to put a U.S. Embassy in Iraq under its control, a plan that the Office of the SECDEF did not synchronize with any of the ongoing military planning for postwar Iraq.³³

National Security Presidential Directive–24 also instructed DoD to establish an Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) that would oversee humanitarian assistance and some initial reconstruction efforts immediately following the invasion. To head ORHA, Rumsfeld selected retired Lieutenant General Jay M. Garner as commander of Operation PROVIDE COMFORT, who had experience with humanitarian assistance in Iraq.³⁴ As it formed in February–March 2003, Garner’s group focused mostly on reconstruction planning, but without the resources of the U.S. interagency at



Source: DoD photo by R.D. Ward (Released).

Lieutenant General (Ret) Jay M. Garner, Director, ORHA (April-May 2003).³⁵

Iraqi Army units assisting the civilian authority and civil affairs commands in providing security during the transition period after the collapse of the regime.³⁶ As General Richard Myers saw it, however, Franks had little interest in Phase IV. In one December 2002 meeting, Myers was astonished by Franks's insistence that the invasion force's focus would not extend beyond taking Baghdad.³⁷

CFLCC's post-invasion plan was more advanced than any of the other Phase IV efforts. McKiernan and Wallace both assumed that CFLCC was the lead command in Iraq after major combat operations concluded. They expected that CFLCC would provide support to a joint and interagency coordination group to sustain humanitarian assistance operations, conduct critical life support infrastructure repair, destroy pockets of resistance, support an interim Iraqi security assistance force, and provide overall maintenance of general and public order as key Iraqi institutions were rehabilitated over a period of 5 to 7 months. After that period CFLCC expected to become or to hand over its duties to the Combined Joint Task Force-Iraq (CJTF-I), which would eventually transition its operations to Iraqis, nongovernmental organizations, or international control over an additional 4 or 5 years. This CFLCC plan, upon which work was well underway in January 2003, was named Eclipse II after the Allied plan to occupy Germany in World War II.³⁸

its disposal. Instead, ORHA was expected to link its efforts with the Phase IV planning already ongoing at CENTCOM and CFLCC.

Late Military Planning for Phase IV

As the invasion approached, CENTCOM and CFLCC began to pay more attention to Phase IV of the operation. However, the bulk of their planning remained staunchly based on deployment efforts and major combat operations, resulting in a number of belated, overlapping plans for Phase IV at higher echelons and almost no preparations for Phase IV at the Corps level and below, where neither V Corps nor I MEF made time to develop Phase IV plans.

CENTCOM's planners expected Phase IV to last approximately 2 years, and its concept was one of a military occupation force operating under an unspecified civilian authority. As CENTCOM envisioned it, the military occupation would consist of all four of the Army's civil affairs commands—the majority of which were Army Reserve units—arranged in geographical sectors covering Baghdad, western Iraq, northern Iraq, and southern Iraq. These civil affairs commands would assist the civilian authority with reconstruction and humanitarian assistance, with



Source: DoD photo by R.D. Ward (Released).

**General George W. Casey, Joint Staff J5
(Later Director, Joint Staff, 2001-2003).³⁹**

ORHA, meanwhile, was just getting on its feet when CFLCC issued its Eclipse II plan. Franks was delighted to have found someone willing to take responsibility for Phase IV, and equally pleased by the prospect of “getting the inter-agency off his ass.” Interestingly, Garner saw regime replacement—rather than humanitarian assistance—as the coalition’s fundamental postwar task, and ORHA accordingly began developing plans to reform Iraq along political, economic, and security lines of operation.⁴⁰

At the Pentagon, the sparseness of CENTCOM’s Phase IV planning had concerned Lieutenant General John Abizaid, director of the Joint Staff, who noted in September 2002 that CENTCOM’s rudimentary plan was not sufficiently detailed or resourced to achieve the President’s end state. He also noted the CENTCOM plan required every civil affairs Soldier in the Army. To come up with something more effective, Abizaid detailed the Joint Staff J-5, Lieutenant General George Casey, to work with CENTCOM to develop a more in-depth plan. At Casey’s direction, the Joint Staff sent more than 50 personnel to CENTCOM under Brigadier General Stephen R. Hawkins to take charge of planning for post-major combat operations for Iraq. Designated as Joint Task Force-4 (JTF-4), Hawkins and his team arrived at CENTCOM in the third week of January 2003. JTF-4 and CENTCOM were immediately at odds owing to Hawkins’s difficult manner and the challenges of integrating planning at so late a stage. JTF-4 deployed to Kuwait in late January and, after declining an offer from Garner to work under ORHA’s auspices, Hawkins’s group was eventually absorbed by CFLCC to augment its Phase IV planning efforts.⁴¹

Other military Phase IV efforts also began and ended in isolation as the United States ramped up for war. In October 2002, the Army G-3 directed the Strategic Studies Institute

(SSI) to identify and evaluate prospective missions for ground forces in a post-regime Iraq. SSI responded with a report published in February 2003 that superimposed lessons learned from reconstruction operations in the Philippines, Germany, and Japan with some of the unique characteristics of Iraq's physical and social infrastructure to distill the most likely challenges ground forces would face after the fall of Saddam. In a detailed mission matrix for Iraq, the report identified probable key tasks for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction operations, and recommended military and civilian organizations to achieve them. Unfortunately, the report came out less than a month prior to the invasion and was not incorporated into the ongoing Phase IV planning efforts. By March 2003, EUCOM created its own Phase IV organization, the Military Coordination and Liaison Command (MCLC), to work with military and humanitarian assistance organizations and organize the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Iraq from the north. The MCLC was a small team commanded by Marine Lieutenant General Henry "Pete" Osman with two offices pre-positioned in the Kurdish region.⁴²

These six overlapping military planning efforts for Phase IV were insufficiently detailed and largely uncoordinated with interagency efforts or with each other. Most of the plans were based on the same flawed assumptions about the Iraqi Government, people, and military that were contained in the larger invasion plan. The redundant groups created by DoD and the Joint Staff caused confusion about which one had primacy for postwar Iraq and, consequently, diffused responsibility for the planning effort across commands.⁴³

The Rumsfeld-Shinseki Showdown

While relations between the SECDEF and the Army's senior leaders were already tense, Shinseki's February 24, 2003, testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee brought them to the breaking point. In response to a question from Senator Carl Levin about the number of troops required for a post-invasion occupation force in Iraq, Shinseki estimated that the force required was "something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers." He later explained to the SECDEF that this open-ended answer was designed to permit him and Franks the "maximum flexibility in arriving at the final number" of required forces.⁴⁴ For Shinseki, the estimate was a simple matter of taking the force ratio he had seen that was required to secure Bosnia in 1997 and extrapolating it to the much larger Iraqi population and territory. Appearing before the same committee 2 days later, after privately requesting that Levin ask him the same question, White publicly endorsed Shinseki's estimate. The Army leaders' public opinions differed sharply from those of Rumsfeld and Deputy SECDEF Paul Wolfowitz and quickly caused a political storm. The following day, House Democrats accused Wolfowitz of "concealing internal administration estimates on the cost of fighting and rebuilding the country," prompting the deputy secretary to retort that Shinseki's estimates were "wildly off the mark."⁴⁵

The very public disagreement between the Army and the Office of the SECDEF over Rumsfeld's judgment that Iraq could be won with minimal money, energy, and forces ended with the removal of senior Army dissenters from the equation. The same day Wolfowitz rebutted Shinseki's troop estimate, Rumsfeld summoned White into his office and fired him, though White would nominally retain the post for a 2-month transition period. Shinseki, instead of being fired, was allowed to retire as scheduled in June.⁴⁶



Paul Wolfowitz (left). Source: DoD photo by Donna Miles (Released).

Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz With Lieutenant Colonel Steven Russell in Tikrit.⁴⁷

The Shinseki-Office of the SECDEF dispute came during a stormy week for the invasion's architects. On March 2, the day after Rumsfeld fired White, the Turkish Parliament voted to deny the U.S. request to send ground forces through Turkey to attack across Iraq's northern border. Throughout January and February 2003, U.S. diplomats and representatives from EUCOM, CENTCOM, and Special Operations Command (SOCOM) had worked with the Turkish military to define a package of benefits and concessions to entice Turkey to authorize the United States to use its territory without allowing the Turkish military to expand its military footprint in northern Iraq. However, a series of miscommunications and a fundamental misunderstanding of the ongoing internal power struggle between Recep Erdogan's Islamist government and the Turkish military resulted in U.S. leaders watching as the Turkish Parliament unexpectedly disapproved U.S. basing rights by a mere three votes. Though CENTCOM and EUCOM were able to keep troops of the 1st Infantry Division along the Turkey-Iraq border, Turkey's denial of a northern route had a profound impact on the invasion and its aftermath.⁴⁸

IRAQ PREPARES FOR WAR

As coalition units moved into position in Kuwait, CENTCOM, CFLCC, and V Corps refined their assessments of the Iraqi regime's likely defense plans. Upon the initiation of coalition air and ground attacks, they expected Saddam to disperse his forces, initiate his plan to defend Baghdad, activate the Iraqi Quds force, and conduct either a defense of Baghdad in-depth or a deliberate attack. They assessed that the most dangerous Iraqi course of action was a deliberate attack against Kuwait as coalition forces flowed into that country. The most likely course of action, however, was a defense-in-depth across

southern Iraq, a scenario in which Saddam's main effort would likely consist of six of the regular army divisions positioned along the major highways leading to Baghdad. The 13 regular army and Republican Guard divisions positioned along the Green Line would defend against any coalition attack from the north. CENTCOM anticipated that Saddam would use controlled flooding to delay the coalition ground forces, and, after stopping them with flooding, use artillery and short-range missiles against them. CENTCOM also believed that Saddam would launch missiles against Israel to fracture the coalition politically and to attack the Kurds and Shi'a at any signs of uprising or collusion with the coalition ground attack. Finally, CENTCOM expected that, as coalition forces approached Baghdad, Saddam would authorize the use of chemical weapons against them.⁴⁹

CENTCOM and CFLCC were convinced that Saddam and his inner circle would fight intensely once coalition forces entered Baghdad, but that Iraqi forces outside of Baghdad would vary widely in their capability and will to fight. CENTCOM expected the Republican Guard to fight in company-sized units and perhaps even battalion formations, while the paramilitary forces would bolster the Iraqi Army's smaller formations. The general expectation was that, even with a reduced invasion force, coalition military forces could achieve a rapid and decisive victory over the Iraqi security forces. Coalition leaders judged the most challenging fight would be the battle for Baghdad.⁵⁰

Saddam's Expectations

Saddam did not significantly alter Iraqi Army and Republican Guard plans for the defense of Iraq until the end of 2002. Although it was becoming apparent that a coalition invasion was imminent, Saddam's primary concerns remained: preventing internal regime collapse and preparing for a popular uprising. If the coalition did invade, Saddam expected only limited coalition military operations that would seize key terrain but not necessarily remove him from power. Therefore, while he anticipated some initial military defeats, he expected they would be followed by protracted military operations during which he could buy time and sue for peace with support from the international community. Saddam told his commanders to expect a considerable air campaign followed by a limited ground war, as in 1991, and warned them not to expect to be very mobile because of the air campaign. Once the air attacks and limited ground maneuvers concluded, however, Saddam anticipated that coalition operations would slow or come to a halt as the United States gauged the Iraqi regime's next move.⁵¹

On December 18, 2002, Saddam, through his second son, Qusay, ordered the Republican Guard to reorient their defensive posture along a series of concentric rings around Baghdad based on the assumption that coalition forces would be worn out with fighting by the time they reached the outer ring. Qusay instructed the Republican Guard leadership to engage the American forces on the outer rings and gradually withdraw to the inner rings if defeated on the outer ones. If forced to withdraw into the city, the Republican Guard was directed to fight to the death.⁵²

Despite these defensive orders, Saddam remained confident that he and his forces would survive long enough for him to encourage the United Nations or other international powers to intervene and halt the coalition advance. Saddam's optimism was reinforced by his ignorance of how decrepit and ineffective were his own forces. Over the

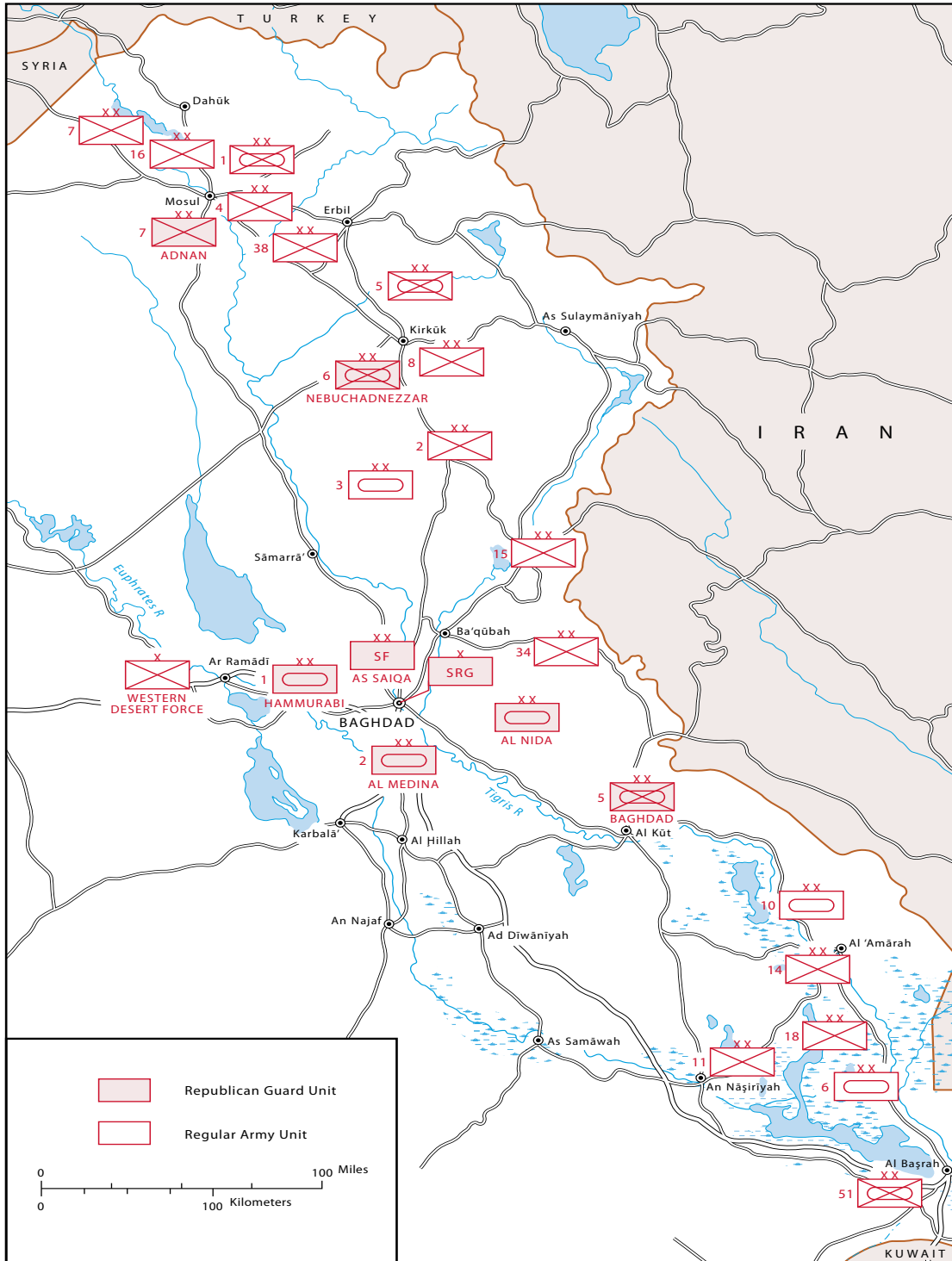
years, his demands for positive information from his commanders had created a culture of rhetoric and reporting that was detached from reality, in which commanders who reported problems were seen as unfit. Thus, the true state of affairs—that most of the conventional forces under his command were not properly resourced, trained, staffed, or otherwise prepared to engage the coalition military—seems never to have entered his mind.⁵³

Not until the final weeks before the invasion did Saddam consider some of the defensive measures the coalition had expected. In March 2003, Saddam received intelligence reports about U.S. intentions to set up coalition military rule and a democratic government after dismantling the Ba'athist regime. Saddam subsequently reviewed military assessments that the United States would likely target in order—Saddam himself; his air defense systems; the military command, control, and communication infrastructure; and his suspected WMD sites—with an extended bombing campaign. Because he anticipated his forces would be immobilized by coalition bombings, Saddam gave orders to stockpile arms, munitions, and equipment in military schools, training areas, and similar locations inside Iraq's cities, after which Iraqi military units built large caches of weapons and ammunition.⁵⁴ In order to further slow any coalition advance on Baghdad, Saddam made plans to destroy the northern and southern oil fields, as CENTCOM had long projected he would—although in the course of events Iraqi troops and officials would obey few of his instructions for this scorched earth approach.⁵⁵

Saddam also decided to reinforce his military defense with paramilitary and terrorist operations. In January 2003, Saddam issued an emergency order for the Ba'ath Party militia and the Fedayeen to prepare to defend against internal uprisings in the event of limited attacks on Iraqi soil.⁵⁶ This was the first of a series of orders directed at his paramilitary forces in advance of the coalition invasion. (See Map 8.) He subsequently directed the Fedayeen to work with its foreign affiliates and use a combination of coercion, intimidation, and propaganda to induce collaboration from Iraq's citizens in key population centers. Trained on "small-unit tactics, sabotage techniques, and military surveillance and reconnaissance tasks," the Fedayeen were adept at guerrilla and sabotage techniques. As the invasion approached, they also began planning suicide operations against the coalition. Less than 30 days prior to the start of the war, the special mission unit of the Iraqi military intelligence directorate took charge of a group of Fedayeen volunteers to form into "small kamikaze combat groups" equipped with weapons and munitions suitable for use behind enemy lines and on the flanks by damaging enemy armor and helicopters. These volunteers attended a 30-day course to prepare for these missions beginning in March 2003. With its heavy presence in Iraqi cities and its new mission to resist the coalition through terrorist-type activities, the Fedayeen had effectively become the Iraqi regime's first line of urban defense.⁵⁷

Iraqi Military Expectations

Iraqi Army leaders were much more concerned about the American military capabilities and intentions than was the overconfident Saddam. According to a report written by senior Iraqi military leaders, the Iraqi Army believed that the United States would likely use airborne assaults, psychological operations, and technologically superior maneuver



Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 8. Disposition of Iraqi Army Prior to 2003 Invasion.

forces to move quickly to Baghdad. They believed that the U.S.-led invasion force would “avoid capturing whole cities,” and would focus instead on “important [routes] to control entry and exit points for towns and cities with the objective of preventing the arrival of [Iraqi] reinforcements in order to create a strict siege against cities.”⁵⁸

Many Iraqi military leaders were familiar with U.S. military superiority and were pessimistic about the outcome. Lieutenant General Kenan Mansour Khalil al-Ubaydi, the dean of the Iraqi military academy, later commented that “[we] military officers knew that the war was coming and that it would be the end. . . . I knew U.S. forces would go for Baghdad and that those forces would go all the way . . . we knew also of the U.S. fighting capabilities.”⁵⁹ Elsewhere, some Republican Guard leaders expressed veiled concerns about the “ring defense” plan as operationally unsound, but were told by Qusay that Saddam had approved the new plan, effectively ending the discussion.⁶⁰

Even as the Iraqi Army continued to fortify its defensive positions, its senior leaders generally believed that the invasion and their defeat were both imminent. Gathering scores of Iraqi general officers at a base near the Baghdad airport in March 2003, army chief of staff General Sultan Hashim told his assembled officers that diplomacy had failed, a coalition invasion was imminent, and Iraq’s military defeat was certain. Nevertheless, Sultan told the generals their duty was to fight hard and stave off defeat as long as possible. Iraqi Major General Najim Jabouri recalled that Sultan’s intended pep talk had the opposite effect; it caused the senior officers’ morale to plummet. Iraqi military officers assessed that the U.S.-led invasion forces would first seize Basrah and move into Maysan and Qadisiyah Provinces from the south and east before moving from Fallujah into Baghdad from the west. This estimate did not deduce the coalition’s eventual main northward thrust west of the Euphrates, but was much closer to reality than Saddam’s expectations. Unlike Saddam, the Iraqi military thought these maneuvers would take the U.S. military a week or less rather than months.⁶¹

Like Saddam, however, the Iraqi military expected that, much like Operation DESERT STORM, the coalition would conduct a lengthy air campaign prior to any ground campaign; the early leaflet drops only reinforced that assessment. Iraqis obtained intelligence that suggested the air campaign would begin between March 18 and 20, 2003, and the first targets would be Saddam’s suspected locations.⁶² They then expected that the air campaign would be followed by a ground assault from the north, south, and west. The northern avenues of approach were the highways heading south from Mosul and Kirkuk; those in the west and southwest went through Rutbah to Ramadi and through Karbala, respectively; and the approaches from the south split from Basrah toward Amarah and Nasiriyah and converged at Kut before continuing up the Tigris to Baghdad. The invasion forces would then move along these major highways, securing urban centers as they went. Because Iraqi military leaders expected the targets of the air campaign would be active military forces, known headquarters buildings, and ammunition depots and warehouses, they intended to disperse their supplies and units as widely as possible to avoid losing large amounts in a single bombing. They aimed to do the same with their military command and control.⁶³

The Iraqis had long expected that the coalition invasion would include a western front from Jordan, and a number of indicators seemed to validate their assessment. The Iraqi M4 intelligence directorate kept a close watch on the coalition force buildup in Jordan,

where the arrival of additional aircraft and medical equipment coupled with indicators that the Jordanian Government was reassuring foreign embassies that they were protected, all seemed to point to a coalition western front. The Iraqis also expected that the coalition would conduct reconnaissance missions in western Iraq to locate any missiles that could be fired at Israel and to evaluate the security at Iraq's western airfields. Iraqi officers believed these missions would be followed by airborne assaults of combat troops onto the airfields near Rutbah, Nukhayb, and Al Walid, among other locations, and then continue toward key terrain on the outskirts of Baghdad. Beginning in mid-February 2003, the Iraqi military was aware that U.S. and British special operations forces were in western Iraq, and they believed those forces were the early reconnaissance element they anticipated from the west. In mid-March, coalition troops inside western Iraq captured an Iraqi special mission unit whom they mistakenly assumed to be an Iraqi conventional force, after which the U.S. special operators agreed to release the Iraqis on condition that they would capitulate once the invasion commenced. The presence and demands of those forces, combined with other reports of coalition vehicles near Al Qa'im, Rutbah, and elsewhere in Anbar, seemed to confirm an impending invasion to the west. The Iraqis were also aware of U.S. special operations outreach to the Kurds in northern Iraq but believed that the Kurds would only be acting as scouts for the coalition follow-on invasion force from the north. They did not expect the Kurds, at least not the KDP peshmerga, to participate in the fighting. They expected that the U.S. special operations forces in the north would move quickly to "carry out assassinations in Iraqi cities upon the commencement of the invasion."⁶⁴

The Iraqis' Final Preparations

Once it became clear in early March that Turkey would not permit the coalition to transit through Iraq's northern border, Saddam and his military commanders, at last, reinforced their defenses in the southern, south central, and central zones along southern and western avenues of approach to Baghdad. Just days before the invasion began, Qusay ordered the Fedayeen to reposition from Baghdad, which they originally intended to defend, to cities in the southern zone to mount a defense from those locations instead. The Iraqi regime reinforced these Fedayeen with volunteer fighters (called mujahideen) and suicide bombers from Egypt, Sudan, and other Arab countries with terrorist organizations or entities sympathetic to the Iraqi cause. The Fedayeen were also likely to be tasked to assist the local Ba'ath Party headquarters, the Iraqi Quds forces, and intelligence services with preventing the large-scale desertion or capitulation of the conventional Iraqi military forces. Saddam, likely in coordination with Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, also arranged for the Nebuchadnezzar Division of the Republican Guard – assigned to the northern zone – quietly to leave its vehicles in place in the north but move its soldiers south to Babil Province the week prior to the invasion, a large-scale troop movement that went undetected by the coalition.⁶⁵

Iranian and Badr Corps Militia Preparations

The Iraqi regime and its troops were not the only military actors preparing to respond to the invasion of Iraq. Documents captured from members of the Islamic Revolutionary

Guard Corps of Iran operating in Iraq in the summer of 2003 revealed Iran's detailed courses of action for military operations in Iraq in the event of an American invasion. The Iranians intended to use the Badr Corps—expanded from its original brigade size and directed by Iranian agents—to subvert American efforts to occupy Iraq successfully, with the subversion including military, political, and social means. In the months before the coalition invasion, Badr Corps units accompanied Iranian infantry and missile brigades as they moved into positions along the border. The Badr Corps also developed assassination lists of Sunni military personnel, Ba'athists, and others who collaborated with the regime that they intended to execute systematically once the opportunity presented itself. The leadership of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq intended for the Badr Corps to enter Iraq surreptitiously as Saddam's regime collapsed and to seize towns and government offices to fill the vacuum. Establishing local control and carrying out reprisal attacks would set the conditions necessary for SCIRI to mobilize their political base in the aftermath of the regime.⁶⁶

* * *

After months of hard planning, wargaming, and rehearsals, the coalition ground forces assembled in Kuwait in March 2003 were confident they could defeat Saddam's military and topple the regime. Although getting the forces into theater quickly using the RFF packages proved to be challenging logistically, the pre-positioning of maneuver forces and Patriot missile batteries made McKiernan and Wallace comfortable with the smaller contingent of forces they had available for the invasion. They also knew that the 4th Infantry Division and 1st Armored Division were moving toward Kuwait and presumably would be available well before the main invasion force was expected to reach Baghdad.⁶⁷ Despite the fact that Phase IV preparations and new Phase IV entities like ORHA lagged far behind in the planning office, Franks and other senior leaders expected that those plans and organizations still had 2 or 3 months in which to prepare before stability operations and a civilian authority would be needed. In any case, Franks and other commanders believed stability operations were a far less pressing matter than the major combat operations at hand.

Saddam's focus on positive information and his own wishful thinking led his military leaders to provide him with assessments that were highly unrealistic. As a result, the Iraqi dictator expected some early defeats but was confident his forces could hold Baghdad long enough for him to appeal to international allies to halt the American invasion. At the last minute, however, the massing coalition forces in Kuwait caused Saddam to panic, and he deployed the Fedayeen and Ba'ath Party militias south, throwing his own military plans to defend Baghdad into disarray.

Iraq's actual military preparations sharply contrasted with coalition estimates of what the Iraqis were likely to do, which focused on Iraq's Republican Guard units and Saddam's expected use of chemical weapons as the principal threats against the coalition ground force advance. These threat projections, combined with unrealistic exercises, led the coalition to underestimate Iraq's paramilitary forces and employ a scheme of maneuver that used helicopter deep attacks as the primary shaping operation, while assuming risk around the urban areas in southern Iraq that Saddam's regime at the 11th

hour effectively had made its main effort. These choices would create surprises for the coalition in the invasion to come.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 3

1. DoD photo by Lance Corporal Bryan J. Nealy, USMC, "US Army (USA) Lieutenant General (LTG) David D. McKiernan, Commander, Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), and US Marine Corps (USMC) Brigadier General (BGEN) Richard F. Natonski, Commander, Task Force Tarawa, enter the Combat Operations Center (COC) of Task Force Tarawa at Blair Field in Iraq, during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, 5/4/2003," National Archives Identifier 6650578, May 4, 2003, Released to Public, Unrestricted.

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8. Interviews, Charles E. Kirkpatrick, V Corps Historian, with Lieutenant General William S. Wallace, November 2002, Germany, and February 2003, Kuwait.

9. Interviews, Godfroy and Blythe with General (Ret.) William S. Wallace, June 17, 2014, NDU; with Degen, May 22, 2014; with Colonel Louis B. Rago II, June 12, 2014, Arlington, VA.

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CHAPTER 4

THE INVASION OF IRAQ, MARCH-APRIL 2003

On March 21, 2003, the main coalition force in Kuwait launched its attack into Iraq, beginning an operation that toppled Saddam Hussein's regime in just 20 days, much less time than anyone, especially Saddam, had anticipated. There were other surprises on the way to Baghdad as well. The coalition's maneuver forces expected to defeat and bypass depleted or capitulated Iraqi Army units in southern Iraq en route to the more robust Republican Guard units protecting the main avenues of approach into Baghdad. Instead of Iraqi armor and infantry, however, Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) units found themselves engaged in fierce firefights with the Fedayeen and other paramilitary forces Saddam sent to reinforce the defense in and around Iraq's southern cities. This unexpected enemy attacked from the urban centers CFLCC intended to bypass, ambushed a transportation company on the second day of the invasion, and derailed the first scheduled helicopter deep attack against the Medina Division of the Republican Guard. U.S. special operations forces in western Iraq fought additional battles with paramilitary forces in the vicinity of Rutbah and the Hadithah Dam, while the special operations task force in northern Iraq worked with Kurdish peshmerga and the Coalition Forces Air Component Command (CFACC) to defeat a stubborn defense by Iraq's northernmost conventional forces. Amid these unexpected circumstances, a major sandstorm halted the invasion for days but gave CFLCC units an opportunity to gather themselves for an unexpected quick push to Baghdad. As the outgunned Iraqi forces defending Baghdad collapsed in disarray, troops from the 3d Infantry Division conducted armored raids termed "Thunder Runs" into the capital city between April 5 and 7, 2003. After this, the regime collapsed, although most of northern and western Iraq remained uncontrolled by the coalition forces.

THE INVASION BEGINS

Shaping Operations, March 17-19, 2003

By March 17, 2003, the last of the United Nations (UN) weapons inspectors departed Iraq, and intelligence suggested that Iraq ceased its destruction of the Samoud missiles it possessed, apparently in violation of the agreements it had made to destroy them. That evening, then-President George W. Bush announced that Saddam and his sons had 48 hours to step down or face "military conflict at a time of our choosing," signaling to the world and his military commanders that the long-expected attack was imminent.¹

On March 19, 2003, Bush announced that coalition forces had begun operations to remove Saddam's regime from power. As the President made his announcement, multiple special operations units were conducting shaping operations in preparation for the CFLCC invasion, scheduled to begin on the evening of March 21. Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-West (CJSOTF-W), under the command of Colonel John F. Mullahland, was responsible for southern and western Iraq, Baghdad, and the area northwest

of Baghdad to Tikrit. They were to find and destroy Saddam's suspected long-range ballistic missiles and launch sites in order to prevent attacks against Israel that might provoke the Israelis to enter the war. Some of the first coalition troops to enter Iraq consisted of special operations detachments who infiltrated through Iraq's southwestern desert to link up with tribes and resistance groups. They also secured an airfield at Wadi al Khirr, approximately 80 kilometers west of Najaf, as a launch point for further infiltrations into western and southwestern Iraq. On March 19, CJSOTF-W units breached the berms along Iraq's border with Jordan to begin their Scud-hunting mission.²

Meanwhile, in southern Iraq, Captain Robert S. Harward's Naval Special Warfare Group (NSWG) was responsible for securing Iraq's southern gas and oil platforms and for supporting I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) operations. On March 19, at 9 p.m., the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR) attacked Iraqi observation posts across the Kuwait border, while the Naval Special Warfare Task Force, along with British and Polish commandos, secured the oil platforms off the shore of the Faw Peninsula, Umm Qasr, and Rumaila. Special operations detachments from CJSOTF-W simultaneously positioned themselves near key crossing sites and bridges in the vicinity of Nasiriyah and Samawah as CFLCC forces moved northward and another special operations detachment began moving toward the Karbala Gap. Colonel Charles Cleveland's Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (CJSOTF-N), which was responsible for all territory north of the Green Line, Ninawa Province, and Kirkuk, ordered elements of the 10th Special Forces Group to make their way to the peshmerga leadership in advance of the CJSOTF-N main body. Their task was to expand relationships with the Kurds that had existed since Operation PROVIDE COMFORT and to develop a northern front despite Turkey's refusal to authorize coalition transit across its borders.³ Elements from CJSOTF-N also began working toward one of their non-Iraqi military targets—the Ansar al-Islam enclave in northeastern Iraq.

The President's March 17 ultimatum had also triggered a large-scale coalition psychological operation designed to encourage specific behaviors from Iraqi soldiers. Leaflets dropped on Iraqi military positions urged the soldiers to capitulate, but to remain available for recall once the regime was no longer in power. Tape-recorded phone calls to specific Iraqi military leaders sent the same message, while also discouraging Iraqi commanders from using Saddam's suspected chemical weapons stockpile against the coalition.⁴ Separate leaflet drops in Baghdad emphasized to the population in the capital that the coalition's targets were Saddam and the Ba'ath Party regime, not the Iraqi people. Leaflets dropped on the Rumaila oil fields in southern Iraq urged the Iraqis there not to destroy the oil infrastructure, the heart of Iraq's wealth. CENTCOM also prepared a letter for the northern Iraqi Army commanders, signed by Deputy Commander Lieutenant General John Abizaid, stating, "If you deliver Northern Iraq to us, you will be absolved and given immunity." The letter was passed by special operations forces in northern Iraq to couriers who were supposed to provide it to the Iraqi corps commanders in the north.⁵

These operations had varying degrees of success. The leaflets in southern Iraq may have achieved part of their intended result, as the Iraqis ultimately destroyed only a handful of wells in the southern oil fields. Later evidence indicated Iraqi regime officials might have simply ignored instructions from Baghdad to destroy oil infrastructure.⁶ The accuracy with which the leaflets landed on regime targets and Iraqi military formations

“shook [some of] the Iraqi military commanders” to their core, leading them to conclude that if the Americans could attack their positions with paper so accurately, then lethal munitions would be just as precise.⁷ Some of the Iraqi units in southern Iraq began to experience large numbers of desertions after the leaflets fell, but the anticipated large-scale capitulations or whole-unit surrenders did not occur. Iraqi units in northern Iraq, however, did not appear to be capitulating at all. Interrogations of captured Iraqi military leaders later established that, while the leaflets were received, Iraqis in the north did not follow the leaflets’ instructions because of a combination of miscommunication and threats. Some Iraqi soldiers who fought in northern Iraq were coerced into fighting by the Iraqi military leaders who threatened to shoot deserters. Interrogations also revealed that the quality of the Arabic on the leaflets was so poor that Iraqi soldiers reading them were confused about what the coalition wanted them to do. Turkey’s very public refusal to authorize U.S. forces to invade from Turkish territory limited northern capitulations as well because it left the Iraqi divisions arrayed on the Green Line with the belief that they would not be facing a significant coalition threat from the north and would pay no price for remaining in place.⁸

DISPOSITION OF IRAQI FORCES

In the week prior to the invasion, the Iraqi military was only partially prepared for what was to come. After months of misplaced confidence that the U.S.-led coalition would not invade Iraq at all, Saddam finally began to prepare to defend against an increasingly likely coalition offensive just weeks ahead of the actual invasion. Nevertheless, the Iraqi leader’s defensive preparations were as unrealistic as his previous assumptions about U.S. intentions. Despite the massive U.S. buildup in Kuwait, Saddam believed that the main coalition attack would come from the west and, therefore, most of his Republican Guard forces were oriented toward Jordan rather than to the south. He also left his 1st Army Corps in Kirkuk and 5th Army Corps in Mosul, though both were available to be moved, and many of his conventional army forces remained facing toward the east to guard against opportunistic attacks from Iran.

Saddam and his military leaders divided Iraq’s forces into four zones: northern, central, central Euphrates, and southern (see Map 8 in Chapter 3). The northern zone was spread across Ninawa and Tamim (Kirkuk) Provinces and was commanded by Saddam’s Vice President, Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri. The central zone consisted of Baghdad, Anbar, Salahadin, and portions of Wasit Province and was commanded by Qusay Hussein, who controlled four Republican Guard divisions and the 2d Iraqi Army Corps. The Fatah Corps of the Republican Guard, which included the Medina, Nida, and Baghdad Divisions, was positioned to defend Baghdad from the west and south; with the Medina Division arrayed in the vicinity of Suwayrah, Musayyib, and Karbala; and the Nida Division east of the Diyala River and in Baqubah. The Allahu Akbar Corps of the Republican Guard was deployed to defend northern Baghdad with the Hammurabi, Adnan, and Nebuchadnezzar Divisions of the Republican Guard. To the west, the Iraqi border command defended the frontier and the western approaches with a few border brigades reinforced by a special forces regiment. While not capable of mounting a significant military

defense, the border brigades had the ability to observe and report on enemy forces in their sectors.⁹

The central Euphrates and southern zones were much more sparsely manned. The former – which included Babil, Karbala, Qadisiyah, Najaf, and Muthanna Provinces – was only defended by the Iraqi regime’s Quds forces and Ba’ath Party militias. The southern zone (Basrah, Maysan, and Dhi Qar Provinces), contained the III and IV Iraqi Army Corps, as well as some naval forces. Like the II Army Corps in the central zone, however, the primary task for these conventional forces was to defend against an Iranian attack. While Saddam’s idea of a reserve was unclear, Iraqi military leaders recommended using the Quds force as a reserve in the southern zone.¹⁰

An Early Start, March 19-23, 2003

After Bush’s March 19 announcement that an invasion was imminent, G-hour – the time at which CFLCC ground forces would cross the border between Iraq and Kuwait – was set for 9 p.m. on March 21, 2003. However, two intelligence indicators caused the President and secretary of defense (SECDEF) to initiate ground operations before the planned hour. On March 19, intelligence reports suggested that Saddam and some of his key advisers were at a location in southern Baghdad called Dora Farms. CFACC launched cruise missiles at that location to destroy the regime’s leadership, marking the first attack on Iraqi soil, and effectively alerting Iraq’s leaders that the invasion had begun. Although the reports were inaccurate – Saddam, in fact, had last visited that site in 1995 – and the missile strike ineffective, the message was clear: coalition forces were coming for Saddam. The Iraqi regime responded with a series of 17 missile strikes on CFLCC encampments in Kuwait, all of which either missed their intended targets or were destroyed by coalition air defenses.¹¹

During this missile barrage from the Iraqi military, US Central Command (CENTCOM) and CFLCC encountered a difficulty with the British contingent. The invasion plan called for the British to advance alongside the Marines and “pass through Al Basrah and continue up the eastern flank.” However, less than 24 hours before the ground attack, Abizaid and General Tommy Franks received a letter from the British Command indicating that officials in London were unsure whether combat operations in Iraq were legal and might not allow British troops to cross the border. The date of the invasion came close on the heels of a key vote in the United Kingdom that could have lost Prime Minister Tony Blair his government and, consequently, the British military’s authorization to support the invasion. While Franks’s initial thought was to continue the invasion without the British forces, Abizaid convinced him that CFLCC was already short one division and that removing the British forces put the mission at risk. Franks then approached SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld, and, within hours, the senior British commander informed CENTCOM that the British forces would, indeed, participate in the invasion.¹²

The other trigger for the early onset of ground operations was the detection by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) of Iraqi forces preparing to sabotage the oil infrastructure in southern Iraq. Because preserving Iraq’s oil infrastructure was one of his key tasks, General David McKiernan decided to initiate ground operations as quickly as possible. In the late hours of March 20, the 3d Infantry Division, 101st Airborne Division, and

I MEF moved into their attack positions in Kuwait. As soon as the sand berm between Iraq and Kuwait was sufficiently reduced, CFLCC ground forces, led by the 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, crossed the border and moved immediately to the Rumaila oil fields.¹³ The time was approximately 4 a.m. on March 21, 2003.

The coalition's early move into Iraq took senior Iraqi regime leaders by surprise. The leaflet drops had reinforced Saddam's assumption that the coalition had planned for a lengthy air campaign, perhaps to be followed by a limited ground incursion. Because CFACC could not adjust its complicated targeting mechanisms in time to conduct their operations simultaneously with the ground forces, they began their bombing campaign at the scheduled G-hour of 2100 on March 21, 17 hours after the ground forces had begun their advance, targeting the regime's top leaders, air defenses, and artillery and ballistic missile sites. As coalition units moved farther into Iraq, CFACC's targeting transitioned to focus on close air support. Ultimately, the delayed air campaign assisted the ground forces in achieving tactical surprise: the Iraqis were convinced that the coalition would not commence ground operations until after a lengthy air campaign and were unprepared when coalition ground forces materialized in southern Iraq. Thus, as V Corps and I MEF approached the Iraqi 1st Infantry Division and 51st Mechanized Division, respectively, they encountered far fewer Iraqi troops than they anticipated, with the Iraqis mounting only a disorganized, sporadic defense. CFLCC later determined that some of the Iraqi forces had deserted after the leaflet drops, while others fled to the surprising sound of approaching tanks and mechanized vehicles instead of the coalition air campaign they expected.¹⁴

As soon as I MEF and V Corps forces crossed the berm, they began maneuvering toward their initial objectives. I MEF and the British 1st Armoured Division moved to the east of V Corps toward Al Faw, Umm Qasr, and the Rumaila oil fields. According to Iraqi Lieutenant General Raad al-Hamdani, the first attackers to come in direct contact with the Iraqi forces were British troops who, in conjunction with I MEF, seized the port of Umm Qasr and the bridges over the Shatt al Arab from the Iraqi 51st Mechanized Division, which had only arrived in the area about 72 hours earlier. The British 3d Royal Marine Commando Brigade, I MEF, and other special operations forces secured the oil fields and then headed for Nasiriyah, leaving the British armored forces to isolate, secure, and clear southern Iraq's largest population center, Basrah, of Iraqi forces.¹⁵

CENTCOM and CFLCC had expected at least a portion of the British forces to continue with I MEF north toward Baghdad, but as the operation unfolded, the British troops remained in Basra, a change that Abizaid believed to be the result of a British national directive to British commanders. CFLCC adjusted and sent the Marines north without the British forces, while 3d Infantry Division, the V Corps main effort, advanced toward Tallil Airfield near Nasiriyah. At Tallil, where CFLCC intended to establish its main logistics and aviation hub for the march to Baghdad, the 3d Infantry Division easily defeated remnants of the Iraqi 11th Infantry Division and members of the Basrah-based Iraqi Quds forces and continued toward Nasiriyah.¹⁶

An Unexpected Enemy

In the days leading up to the invasion, the coalition's reconnaissance had focused on Iraqi defensive positions, signs that Saddam might flood the southern canals or destroy the oil infrastructure, the locations of surface-to-surface missiles, and the disposition of the Republican Guard divisions. CFLCC paid little attention to Iraq's irregular forces, and even less was known about what to expect from those forces other than that they were paramount to the defense of Baghdad and key regime locations. The other major movement that went largely undetected—due to the dearth of intelligence collection directed toward it—was the repositioning of the Fedayeen Saddam from Baghdad to Iraq's southern cities.

Special operations detachments in position in the Karbala Gap began to realize something was amiss on March 22 when they did not observe armored columns of the Medina Division they had expected to be there, but instead saw trucks filled with Fedayeen in black uniforms. When their reports were received by CFSOCC and CFLCC headquarters, they were met with incredulity.¹⁷ No one in the coalition command understood what the irregular Iraqi forces were doing there, let alone their composition and capability.

At Nasiriyah, Samawah, and Zubayr, CFLCC units first unexpectedly encountered tenacious resistance from the Fedayeen instead of the Iraqi Army units they had anticipated fighting. In accordance with the invasion plan, the 3d Infantry Division deliberately stayed outside of Nasiriyah, blocked the city, secured the crossing site on Highway 1 over the Euphrates River, and prepared to pass the 2d Marine Expeditionary Brigade (Task Force Tarawa), through its lines to occupy Nasiriyah and the secured bridge. The 3d Infantry Division could continue north to Samawah.¹⁸ Task Force Tarawa, commanded by Brigadier General Richard F. Natonski, arrived at Nasiriyah on March 22, and took control of the Highway 1 Bridge from the 3d Infantry Division, which continued west. In addition to assuming responsibility for that bridge, the task force was directed to secure two bridges in the eastern part of the city that would facilitate the continued rapid movement of I MEF north to Kut along Highway 7. Natonski's goal was to have both locations secure by 10 a.m. on March 23 and to avoid getting bogged down in urban combat. As his forces moved into the city, they took a barrage of artillery as well as small-arms fire from irregular forces moving around in trucks mounted with machine guns. The assaults became more frequent and powerful, and Nasiriyah transformed from a mission to secure bridges into what McKiernan described as "a damned tough urban fight."¹⁹

The Marines and CFLCC soon determined that the enemy they faced must be the Fedayeen. The Fedayeen "death squads," as reporters began to call them, did not appear to conduct large-scale coordinated operations. Instead, they attacked haphazardly in small groups, using well-rehearsed guerrilla tactics. They operated out of Ba'ath Party headquarters and military facilities, but they also used hospitals, schools, and mosques as bases and did not hesitate to use civilians as human shields. Some wore black uniforms, but many wore plain clothes and drove civilian vehicles so they could blend into the population ahead of the coalition advance. Their lack of uniforms often led to nighttime battles in extremely close quarters, with Fedayeen fighters crawling up beside coalition tanks and armored vehicles, requiring crewmembers to fight them off with pistols and captured Iraqi AK-47s.²⁰ The ferocity of the Fedayeen attacks also surprised the

coalition—Fedayeen attacked coalition vehicle and troop formations “in waves in an almost suicidal manner.”²¹

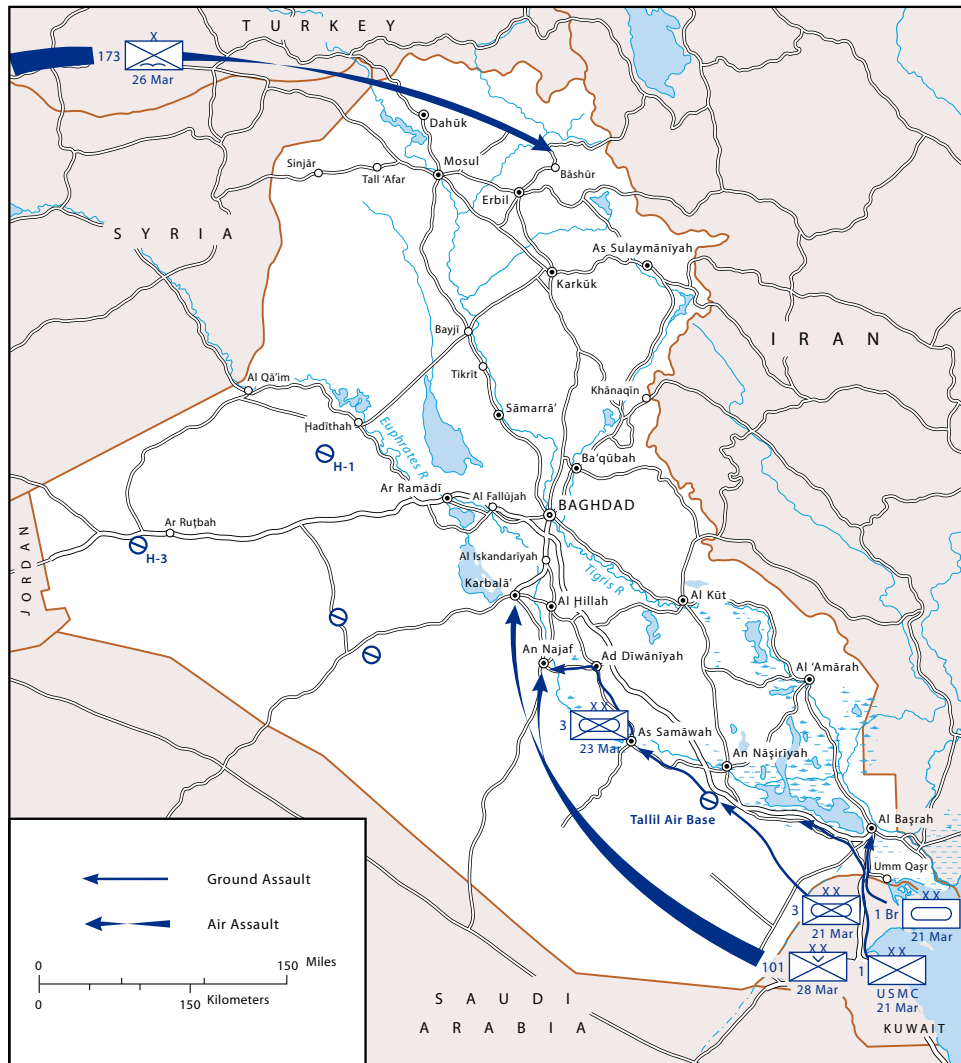
V Corps’ first encounter with the Fedayeen occurred as the 3d Squadron, 7th Cavalry, 3d Infantry Division, screened for the division en route to Samawah. Although special forces units reported that the Fedayeen were setting up ambush teams and checkpoints around Samawah, that information had not filtered down to V Corps’ tactical units. As the troops prepared to seize the bridges southwest of Samawah, they waved to some Iraqis, anticipating that the Iraqis would welcome them. Instead, they received small arms, rocket-propelled grenade (RPG), and mortar fire from Fedayeen in pickup trucks. The cavalry squadron remained under fire until they were relieved by 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division on the afternoon of March 23. In conjunction with CFACC close air support and special operations units in the area, the 3d Infantry Division systematically began destroying irregular forces in and around Samawah. Intelligence on the location of the Fedayeen units did not come from the Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS), UAVs, and other similar systems that the division had rehearsed using in exercises prior the invasion. Instead, 3d Infantry Division leaders found themselves using the division cavalry squadron and special operations units to locate enemy forces. This more traditional tactical reconnaissance capability became the 3d Infantry Division’s eyes and ears on the battlefield.²²

In Zubayr, a Sunni-majority suburb west of Basrah, the British 1st Armoured Division also came under heavy fire from irregular forces. After probing the enemy it faced, the division placed checkpoints around the town. During the day, local Iraqis approached the British checkpoints, surrendered, and then identified the location of Republican Guard, Fedayeen, and Ba’ath Party headquarters and strongpoints inside Zubayr. The division then conducted nighttime raids into the town to destroy the Iraqi forces and weapons in those facilities and add to their emerging intelligence picture.²³

The Iraqis, meanwhile, were astonished that the coalition appeared to be bypassing the southern cities entirely and leaving their supply lines along the Euphrates open to attack. They had assumed coalition units would at least partially secure each city along their intended avenues of approach, and early reports of heavy fighting near the outskirts of Zubayr, Nasiriyah, and Samawah had reinforced this Iraqi assumption. Once it became clear that the coalition units operating near these cities had no intention of remaining for any length of time, the high command in Baghdad ordered reinforcements against the Marines in Nasiriyah.²⁴

By March 23, a little over 2 days into the ground fight, nearly all tactical reporting on enemy activity shifted from conventional troop formations and movements to reports of irregular forces, especially the Fedayeen.²⁵ The intelligence analysts at CFLCC and V Corps assessed that the bulk of the regular Iraqi Army units in southern Iraq had either surrendered or deserted, but that Fedayeen and other “loyal security forces . . . seem to be offering the most resistance encountered thus far,” manning abandoned Iraqi Army weapon systems, establishing ambush points, and returning small-arms fire. The drastic change in the enemy situation confounded the coalition’s operational-level analysis and collection systems, which struggled to fit the incoming information into preexisting templates of a conventional enemy and tried vainly to maintain the sophisticated digital battle maps with company-sized and larger enemy formations.²⁶ This pattern of bottom-driven

reporting from tactical units and an inaccurate and outdated enemy picture at the operational headquarters persisted for the remainder of the invasion (see Map 9).



Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 9. Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, March 20-28, 2003.

Special Operations Forces Move Inward

With major combat operations underway in the south, special operations units expanded their operations in western and northern Iraq. On the evening of March 22, elements of 5th Special Forces Group linked up at the improved airfield at Wadi al Khirr and met with their established Iraqi contacts in the vicinity of Nasiriyah, Samawah, Hillah, Karbala, and Najaf to obtain a better picture of enemy and friendly activity within those cities. This mission was imperiled when two of these Iraqi contacts were captured by Iraqi troops, who broadcast the capture on television. Special operations units subsequently

decided to forgo using resistance organizations in those cities and instead spent the next several days gathering as much information as possible about the location of the Ba'ath and Fedayeen headquarters, artillery positions, and military compounds in preparation for 3d Infantry Division's arrival in the area. Other Operational Detachment Alphas (ODAs) pushed forward to obtain information about the activity of enemy forces in the Karbala Gap, the Republican Guard Medina Division in particular.²⁷

In the west, CJSOTF-W and other coalition troops searched for Scud missiles and suspected weapons of mass destruction (WMD) sites. At the same time as the invasion began in southern Iraq, special operations detachments moving along Highway 1 toward Rutbah encountered a line of traffic in which Iraqi military forces were dispersed among the civilian vehicles. The detachment called in close air support and was able to defeat the military forces, but had effectively announced their presence in the west. A similar announcement came when British special operations forces under the command of Major General Graeme Lamb in CJSOTF-W inadvertently clashed with Iraqi special mission units on their way to link up with Iraqi tribes in western Iraq. Traveling in lightly armored tactical vehicles, Lamb's special operators were forced to withdraw, and some of his troops inadvertently ended up across the Syrian border.²⁸

Meanwhile, in the north, CJSOTF-N moved into Iraq in a hastily prepared, high-risk air insertion operation the special operations troops nicknamed "Ugly Baby" because, they joked, "only a mother could love it." After Turkey refused to allow U.S. forces to cross into Iraq from its country, Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC) and CFACC developed aggressive flight paths along the western spine of Iraq's border with Jordan and Syria. As the aircraft flew over Sinjar Mountain, some were struck by Iraqi air defenses, but the need to get on the ground and show the Kurdish peshmerga the extent of U.S. resolve was great enough that the insertion mission pushed forward. By the first week in April, more than 50 special operations detachments were inserted into northern Iraq and made contact with forces from the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).²⁹ In addition to notifying Kurdish leaders that the Americans were coming, CJSOTF-N units were tasked to reinforce the 65,000-strong peshmerga against the Iraqi Army and Republican Guard corps positioned along the Green Line and to destroy the Ansar al-Islam enclaves in Sulaymaniyah Province. Their third and more subtle task was to ensure that the Kurds did not take the opportunity to annex Kirkuk, which the United States intended to remain under coalition and, eventually, Iraqi Government control. The U.S. special operations leaders on the ground with the Kurds convinced reluctant Turkish officials to reopen Turkish airspace for use in the invasion, after which CJSOTF-N coordinated with CFACC to destroy established Iraqi Army and Republican Guard defenses. After falling back from their prepared positions due to an untenable amount of coalition firepower, the Iraqi Army corps and Republican Guard units retreated. CJSOTF-N then used Kurdish reporting and other sources to locate and destroy additional Iraqi military equipment and formations while they prepared to continue south.³⁰

SETBACKS AND A CHANGE IN PLANS FOR CFLCC

Despite crumbling Iraqi divisions and the rapid advance of the coalition divisions in the south, not all went well in the first days of CFLCC's invasion. The A-10 aircraft called in to attack moving enemy targets north of Nasiriyah on March 23 mistakenly attacked a company of Marines instead, killing as many as 10 Marines and wounding several others. Combined with those killed or wounded by enemy fire that day, Marine losses in the city totaled 18 killed and at least 19 wounded, the highest losses of any single engagement during the invasion.³¹

Fratricide was not the only bad news from Nasiriyah. The first strong signal that CFLCC lines of communications were threatened occurred just outside the city when Marines from Task Force Tarawa encountered a U.S. Army convoy driving south toward them on Highway 7 on March 23. This was a surprise meeting, given that there were no plans or rehearsals suggesting that any Army units were ahead of the Marines along the eastern approach. An Army captain then informed the Marines that there were wounded American Soldiers in Nasiriyah. This was the ill-fated 507th Maintenance Company, a unit that had accidentally driven into Nasiriyah instead of around it. Ambushed by the Fedayeen in the city, the 507th lost 11 killed and 9 wounded, with 7 of the 9 captured by Iraqi forces, including Private First Class Jessica Lynch.³²

As the Marines fought in Nasiriyah, V Corps prepared for one of the most significant planned operations of the invasion: a deep aviation attack against the Republican Guard's Medina Division, the main conventional force defending Baghdad. On March 22, the 101st Airborne Division moved along the 3d Infantry Division's western flank to establish refueling points for itself and the 11th Attack Helicopter Regiment in preparation for two deep strikes through the Karbala Gap. There was an urgency to the operation: CFLCC expected a major sandstorm to arrive sometime on March 24, which would either delay or cancel the planned deep attacks altogether if they were not executed beforehand. In order to use the western avenue of approach and avoid urban areas, the 11th Attack Helicopter Regiment would require a flight path that crossed the boundary between the 3d Infantry Division and the 101st Airborne Division, a request the 101st denied. The final chosen flight path moved instead from southwest of Nasiriyah west toward Samawah and then turned north, risking taking the helicopters past urban areas.³³

The attack went awry from the outset. The preparatory suppression of enemy air defense fires took place on time, but the 11th Attack Helicopter Regiment's departure was delayed 2 hours as its aircraft refueled, desynchronizing the attack from its preparatory fires. While the suppressive fires were able to destroy some enemy air defense systems, they also unintentionally provided early warning of the helicopter attack. Iraqi spotters, who were now primed to look for approaching aircraft, notified awaiting forces via cell phone of the impending attack, exactly as General Lewis Wallace had once predicted during his 1990s experiences at the National Training Center. Intercepted signals of Iraqi early warning, although received by higher coalition headquarters, did not reach the regiment before their departure. Finally, the bright moonlight that evening perfectly silhouetted the aircraft against the clouds and made them prime targets for the Iraqis. As the regiment's aircraft approached the built-up areas along their flight path, lights in the cities of Haswah and Iskandariyah were switched off, signaling to Iraqi forces on

rooftops to launch barrages of anti-aircraft and small arms fire that inflicted significant damage on the American helicopters. The 11th Attack Helicopter Regiment was forced to abort the mission long before reaching the Medina Division, and the damaged aircraft returned to their staging point. Of the 30 AH-64 Apaches that had left that evening, one was shot down, and all 29 that returned were damaged by enemy fire.³⁴

The capture of the 507th Maintenance Company personnel and the fierce fighting in Zubayr, Nasiriyah, and Samawah convinced McKiernan and Wallace that CFLCC and V Corps could no longer bypass urban areas en route to Baghdad. In order to protect the force's vulnerable lines of communications, CFLCC would have to allocate forces to clear the towns and villages along and near Highways 1 and 8. In addition, I MEF determined that parts of Task Force Tarawa would need to remain in Nasiriyah and continue clearing operations until all of the bridges crossing the Euphrates and the Saddam Canal were secure. The failed helicopter attack against the Medina Division also illustrated the peril of not clearing urban areas along the lines of communications and discouraged the further use of attack aviation in that manner. "From that point on, I was not at all confident we could execute a successful deep operation [with helicopters], and we didn't need to," Wallace later recalled. "Over-the-shoulder direct ground fires was the best tactic given the uncertainty of the enemy situation, and General McKiernan agreed."³⁵

THE SANDSTORM AND OPERATIONAL PAUSE

As the expected sandstorm blew in on March 24, bringing with it violent rain and limited visibility that halted coalition units' advance, McKiernan and Wallace made significant adjustments to how they planned to use their forces before maneuvering through the Karbala Gap. The two commanders welcomed the operational pause as an opportunity to posture their forces properly before the final attacks on Baghdad.³⁶ Contrary to media reports, a temporary cessation of maneuver operations was already planned in Cobra II to allow sufficient time and space for logistics units to arrive, to refuel, and to refit the maneuver units for operations to first isolate Baghdad and then conduct armored raids into the city. The pause was also necessary for forces to prepare properly for Saddam's expected chemical weapons attack once coalition forces neared Baghdad. Neither McKiernan nor Wallace was willing to cross the Iraqi regime's supposed trigger line for chemical weapons attacks without the logistics and the security along the lines of communications necessary to complete operations to Baghdad.³⁷

Franks did not share McKiernan and Wallace's view that a pause was necessary and urged the two commanders to keep going. At CENTCOM's level, the sophisticated battle tracking technology that showed the locations of friendly and enemy units seemed to show no real resistance that merited slowing the V Corps advance. In Franks's mind, the Fedayeen and other irregulars were merely a harassing force that should not distract from the main effort to destroy the Republican Guard. Nevertheless, McKiernan persuaded Franks that adjustments were in order as he remained fixed on clearing the cities that threatened CFLCC's lines of communications.³⁸ If the Fedayeen could cause that much damage to one transportation convoy, they could wreak similar havoc on other logistics and support convoys moving north to assist the other CFLCC maneuver forces. In addition, even though the V Corps forces had halted temporarily on the west

side of the Euphrates to refit and refuel, other CENTCOM units continued to pressure the enemy. At CENTCOM, Franks and Central Air Force (CENTAF, now AFCENT or Air Force Central) Commander Lieutenant General Ted Michael Moseley used the cover provided by the storm to fly additional sorties to destroy enemy military positions and regime strongholds, including the Nida, Baghdad, and Hammurabi Republican Guard divisions around Baghdad.³⁹

Wallace used the temporary halt in major operations to evaluate how he would secure his lines of communications. Looking at a map of friendly forces, he observed that V Corps was operating west of the Euphrates, and I MEF was largely operating to the east of the Euphrates toward the Tigris River, leaving a huge salient between the Euphrates and Highways 1 and 8 running from Samawah north to Najaf and Karbala. In addition to the threat posed by Iraq's paramilitary forces operating in the urban areas, Wallace was also concerned that if the Iraqis chose to put artillery into that salient they could fire laterally into the V Corps and I MEF formations. Wallace, therefore, tasked the 101st Airborne Division and the remaining elements of the 11th Attack Helicopter Regiment to isolate and clear Najaf and Karbala, and he requested that the 82d Airborne Division be allocated to him to secure Samawah.⁴⁰

The sandstorm also provided McKiernan the opportunity to make his final decision about which units he would use to seize Saddam International Airport (SIAP) and which he would allocate to secure CFLCC's lines of communications. In January 2003, CFLCC and V Corps discussed a branch plan tasking special operations forces or a brigade from the 82d Airborne Division to seize the airport in the event of early regime collapse, but that scenario had not occurred. Both the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions also had been ordered to be prepared to seize SIAP, but the failed deep attacks and intelligence about the substantial Iraqi air defense preparations on the airfield gave McKiernan pause about air insertions. Because the 3d Infantry Division had advanced far more quickly to Baghdad than the plan envisioned, its units were best positioned to reach the airport, where a brigade-sized unit of the Special Republican Guard was preparing to defend the airfield. Accordingly, on March 26, McKiernan decided to use a brigade of the 3d Infantry Division to seize the airfield and the brigade of the 82d Airborne Division in Kuwait—CFLCC's operational reserve—along with a portion of the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment to clear the urban areas along CFLCC's lines of communication in the south. CFLCC would not reconstitute an operational reserve until the 4th Infantry Division arrived in theater in April.⁴¹

Franks had reservations about McKiernan's changes. Franks preferred that the 101st Airborne Division take SIAP, a dramatic move that would immediately put forces in Baghdad. Based on his experiences in Afghanistan, where special operations forces and air power had defeated the irregular Taliban forces, he believed the operators and other units with A-10 close air support could dispose of the Iraqi paramilitary forces in the southern cities. What Franks failed to account for, McKiernan pointed out, was that the special operations forces in Afghanistan had worked with organized resistance groups who were familiar with the terrain and could provide pinpoint targets and assessments, but there were no such linkages between coalition special operations and Iraqi resistance groups. McKiernan's argument carried the debate.⁴²

Meanwhile, the Iraqi military was temporarily emboldened by its early, perceived successes against U.S. and British forces near Samawah, Nasiriyah, and Umm Qasr, particularly after news reports spread about the American prisoners of war from the 507th Maintenance Company. These supposed successes led Iraqi military leaders to believe that the coalition forces would enter Iraqi cities – including Baghdad – only reluctantly, and reaffirmed their misplaced faith in the abilities of the Iraqi military. However, this Iraqi optimism was short-lived. Although the Fedayeen were fierce fighters, their recent arrival into the southern cities meant that they were unfamiliar with the terrain, and they also were at a distinct disadvantage in terms of firepower and skill.⁴³ As a result, their casualties tended to be severe.

As the “mother of all sandstorms,” as media reports dubbed it, descended on Iraq, Saddam, his son Qusay, and other senior military leaders were in the process of guessing wrong about the coalition’s advance, having convinced themselves they were being attacked from three directions. The presence of coalition special operations forces in Anbar led the Iraqi leadership to conclude that a conventional military force was moving on Baghdad from Jordan, while the Marine operations near Kut encouraged the belief that the coalition’s main effort was maneuvering east of the Euphrates River. While it was clear coalition units were also moving north along the west bank of the Euphrates, the Iraqi senior defense leadership considered that approach only a tertiary effort, and, consequently, Qusay denied Republican Guard requests to destroy a main Euphrates bridge leading into the Karbala Gap, a move that might have slowed the advance on Baghdad considerably.⁴⁴

While V Corps moved toward the Karbala Gap, the Republican Guard divisions prepared to defend as far forward of Baghdad as possible. The Medina Division remained in place near Karbala and Suwayrah and became the primary conventional force defending the east side of the Karbala Gap. The Baghdad Division of the Republican Guard was near Numaniyah and Kut, guarding the Tigris approach to Baghdad, while the Nebuchadnezzar Division near Hillah covered the central approach to Baghdad. One regiment of Iraqi special operations forces remained in Baghdad, while another moved south to patrol the area around Diwaniya, and the Iraqi 26th Division prepared to raid the coalition troops securing lines of communications between Najaf and Hillah.⁴⁵

Securing the Lines of Communications

As the sandstorm subsided on March 27, Task Force Tarawa was reinforced by two Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs) and began to clear and secure Nasiriyah, destroying Iraqi military and paramilitary bases in the city. By April 2, the Marines and special operations forces had rescued the surviving 507th Maintenance Company Soldiers captured on March 23, and Natonski declared the city secure. I MEF then split, with a small element moving toward Amarah and the main body continuing northwest toward Baghdad. The 101st Airborne Division, meanwhile, conducted deep aviation attacks against the Republican Guard Medina Division in an operation incorporating lessons learned from the 11th Attack Helicopter Regiment’s failure. The 3d Infantry Division continued north toward Najaf and prepared to isolate that shrine city before seizing the bridge over the Euphrates at the town of Kifl between Najaf and Hillah.⁴⁶

On March 28, V Corps was ready to launch a five-pronged attack to clear the way for the eventual entry into Baghdad. The 1st and 2d Brigades of the 101st Airborne Division went to Najaf to secure the highways leading north from the city, and then began clearing the city itself along with the 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, and special operations teams in the area, while one brigade of the 101st conducted a feint toward Hillah. The brigade of the 82d Airborne Division moved into Samawah with the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, relieving the 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, and then began clearing the city as McKiernan had directed. Between March 28 and 30, the 3d Infantry Division handed over the fights in Najaf and Samawah to the 101st and 82d, respectively, and then moved north to prepare for operations to isolate Baghdad. On March 31 and April 1, the 3d Infantry Division seized the bridge between Hillah and Karbala with the 3d Squadron, 7th Cavalry, while 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division cleared the all-important Karbala Gap.⁴⁷

Two incidents of note occurred as the 3d Infantry Division moved through the Karbala Gap. As the division's troops neared Karbala, they captured Iraqi soldiers claiming to be from the Republican Guard Nebuchadnezzar Division, which CFLCC had not detected as it moved south and still believed to be fighting in northern Iraq. Although these soldiers initially were thought to be deserters, interrogations revealed they had been ordered south to defend the capital; but, instead of moving with their tanks and mechanized vehicles, they had donned civilian clothes and moved in trucks and technical vehicles. As a result, V Corps deduced that the Republican Guard presence around Baghdad might be more robust than the coalition anticipated. Another incident was still more disturbing. On March 29, when 3d Infantry Division Soldiers stopped a taxi for inspection at a checkpoint the vehicle exploded—the coalition's first encounter with a suicide car bomb. Though it was the only incident of its type at the time, it had a jarring psychological impact on U.S. units and proved to be the first of many such encounters in the months and years to come.⁴⁸

The Battle for Hadithah Dam

The sandstorm did not halt the special operations activities in Anbar Province. During March 26–27, elements of the 75th Ranger Regiment seized the Qadisiyah Research Center, an airfield near Nukhayb in southwest Iraq, and the H-1 airfield. Having secured these essential points of entry, the Rangers' focus shifted to critical western infrastructure targets, which included the main bridge over the Euphrates at Ramadi and the Hadithah Dam. Although in poor condition, the dam provided one-third of Iraq's electrical power and regulated the flow of the Euphrates.⁴⁹ If it was destroyed by Saddam's forces, subsequent flooding could devastate the lower Euphrates River Valley, potentially hampering V Corps' movement through the Karbala Gap.

On April 1, a company of the 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, conducted a pre-dawn raid to seize the dam, meeting stiff resistance from local Iraqi guards. Soon after seizing the dam, the Rangers realized a much larger Iraqi force was stationed in the area. Over the following week, Iraqi troops mounted counterattacks against the small Ranger force, which beat back the attackers with the help of close air support. The Rangers also faced an unexpected emerging threat: in an incident on April 4, three Rangers were killed

by a suicide car bomb driven by female attackers who had made videotapes prior to the suicide mission and aired them on the Al Jazeera television network, with the message that they intended to wage jihad to expel the Americans from Iraq.⁵⁰

As they turned back successive Iraqi attacks, the Rangers actually found themselves engaged in another battle to prevent the dam from collapsing. Poor maintenance had caused its turbines and overflow machinery to deteriorate to such a degree that the dam was close to catastrophic failure at the time the Rangers seized it, even as many of the dam workers fled to avoid the fighting. Recognizing the danger, the Rangers and civil affairs personnel persuaded the captured dam superintendent that the U.S. troops did not intend to destroy the dam and convinced him and many of the remaining dam workers to return to work.⁵¹ By the time Baghdad fell on April 9, Hadithah Dam was secure, albeit still in need of repair.

Kirkuk and Operation VIKING HAMMER

While the Rangers seized the Hadithah Dam, Cleveland's CJSOTF-N was linking up with the Kurds and receiving Mayville's 173d Airborne Brigade under its tactical control. Executing a combat jump into a secured airfield in northern Iraq on March 26, the 173d provided Cleveland with additional combat power that could take and hold ground as special operations and peshmerga forces advanced on Kirkuk.⁵²

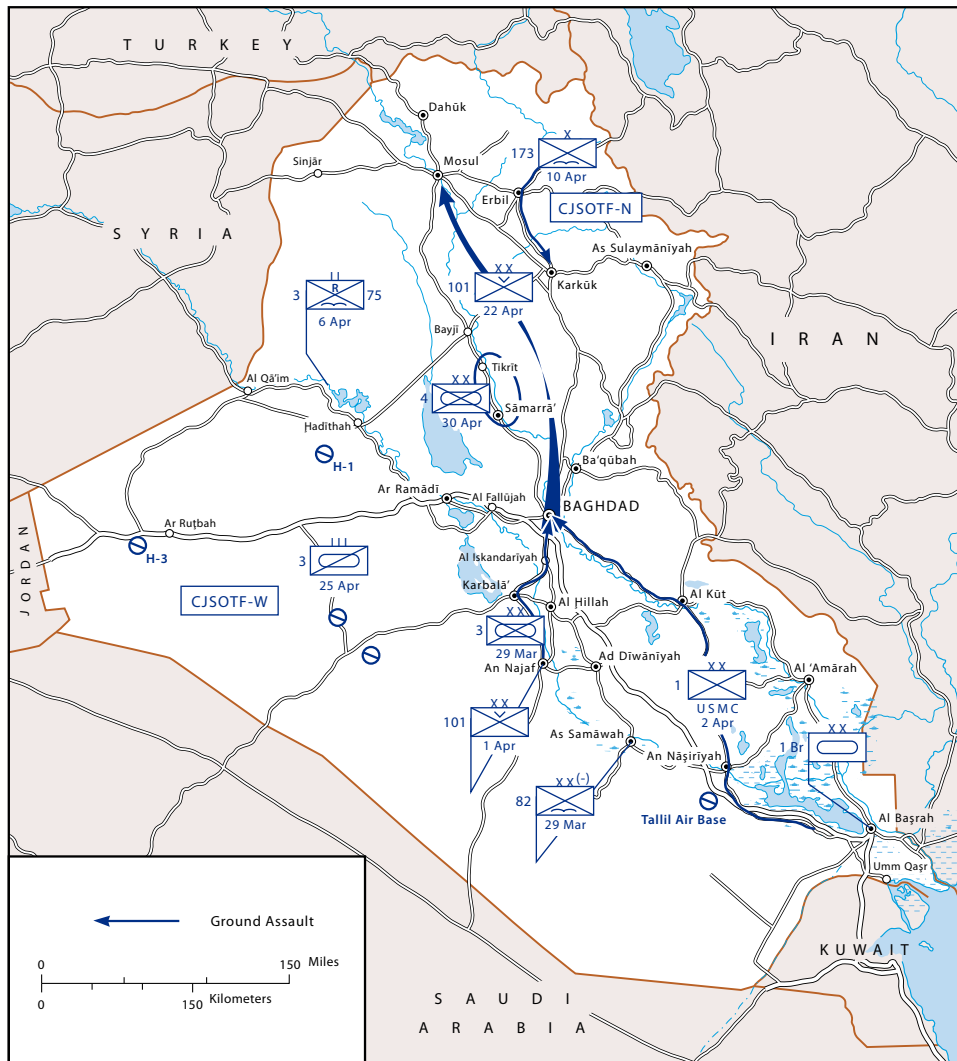
Elsewhere, to the northeast, the 3d Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, began Operation VIKING HAMMER to remove Ansar al-Islam from its base in Iraqi Kurdistan. With PUK peshmerga helping the 3d Battalion move to its targets, the special operators estimated the Ansar al-Islam sites at Halabjah and Sharqat contained approximately 700 fighters and a suspected biological warfare development site. Special operations forces and PUK peshmerga commenced the main attack on March 28, a week after 64 tomahawk missiles had first hit the Ansar al-Islam building and facilities. The fighting continued until March 30, by which time all the Ansar al-Islam fighters had either been killed or fled across the border to Iran. It would be far from the last time the coalition would hear from this terrorist group.⁵³

THE REGIME FALLS

Securing Baghdad and Basrah

While the 101st and 82d Airborne Divisions cleared the V Corps lines of communications, I MEF finished clearing Nasiriyah and moved along the east side of the CFLCC area of operations toward Diwaniya. A growing problem was that Highway 8, which ran through Diwaniya, was in the V Corps area of operations and not occupied by any Army units, thereby creating an area 80 kilometers wide that was a virtual Fedayeen sanctuary. Alerted to Fedayeen who were massing in Diwaniya, V Corps called in an air strike that destroyed a stadium in the city where the Fedayeen were gathering, after which CFLCC ordered Marine units to secure and clear the city. On March 31, CFLCC ordered I MEF to attack east along Highway 6 toward Amarah to provide a second clear line into Kut. From April 2 to 3, the 1st Marine Division crossed the Tigris River at Numaniyah,

destroyed what remained of the Baghdad Republican Guard Division, and moved north to destroy the Nida Division (see Map 10).⁵⁴



Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 10. Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, March 29-May 1, 2003.

Back on the Euphrates, V Corps used the 3d Squadron, 7th Cavalry and the 101st Airborne Division to reconnoiter enemy forces along the corps' western flank and the southwest side of Karbala Lake. From April 1 to 2, units of the 3d Infantry Division crossed through the Karbala Gap, the last checkpoint at which they were vulnerable before approaching Baghdad. The 3d Infantry Division then began destroying the remnants of the Medina Division and seized the al Qa'id Bridge. With assistance from special operations teams, the 101st Airborne Division moved into Hillah and began to clear and secure that city.⁵⁵

Iraqi commanders discerned the coalition's main effort too late. On April 1, as V Corps forces were moving on Karbala, Hamdani recognized that he had little with which to stop the V Corps' push through the Karbala Gap and the Marine advance at Kut. As the Marines successfully moved through Kut, the Iraqi Army IV Corps collapsed, and the central-Euphrates-based units were in a similar state of disarray. In an emergency meeting of the senior Iraqi military leaders on April 2, Hamdani asked for permission to move the Republican Guard Nida and Medina Divisions to defend avenues of approach to Baghdad along the east and west banks of the Euphrates. Qusay and defense minister General Sultan Hashem, however, conveyed Saddam's continued belief in the need to defend against the supposed American main effort from Jordan and, based on information he received from Russian sources, the Iraqi dictator did not believe the Americans would attack Baghdad until the arrival of the 4th Infantry Division. Therefore, Qusay instead ordered the Nida Division to reinforce the Republican Guard I Corps' defenses against an American attack from Jordan that would not be coming.⁵⁶

By April 3, CFLCC was ready to begin the attack on Baghdad. The 3d Infantry Division had safely pushed through the Karbala Gap and was prepared to advance toward the Baghdad airport, while I MEF had crossed the Saddam Canal and was prepared to advance toward Baghdad from the southeast. Using remnants of the Medina Division, Hamdani attempted a counterattack on the morning of April 3 to destroy the al Qa'id Bridge, but coalition air power quickly decimated the attacking Iraqi units. With no forces left at his disposal, Hamdani gave up, quitting his post and returning to a relative's house in Baghdad to await the inevitable.⁵⁷

Seizing Saddam International Airport

On the western outskirts of Baghdad, Saddam had designated a brigade of the Special Republican Guard and a contingent of special operations forces to defend the airport. The Special Republican Guard was the final vanguard defending Baghdad. It was also Saddam's most substantial armored force, armed with the country's most powerful (and best maintained) T-72 tanks and artillery systems. As coalition forces advanced toward the airport, Saddam ordered some of the paramilitary fighters assigned to the defense of Baghdad to reinforce the units at SIAP, but most of these forces were destroyed by coalition aircraft before they reached the gate leading to the airfield.⁵⁸

The 3d Infantry Division began its attack on SIAP with preparatory artillery fires late on the evening of April 3. By 11 p.m., 3d Infantry Division units had breached the airport wall, and in the early hours of April 4, the division's 1st Brigade began securing the airport itself, taking considerable time to clear the obstacles the Iraqis had emplaced on the airfield to make it unusable for coalition aircraft. In conjunction with members of a special operations task force, the division began clearing the remaining Special Republican Guard and paramilitary forces on the airfield, a process that required 2 days because of the complex tunnel and bunker systems the defenders had prepared. The securing of the airport involved some intense fighting. In one instance, troops from Company B, 11th Engineer Battalion had come under attack by a force of up to 100 enemy soldiers as they constructed a holding area for Iraqi prisoners. Under intense fire, Sergeant First Class Paul R. Smith, an engineer platoon sergeant, organized a hasty defense. When an

armored personnel carrier was hit, Smith evacuated three wounded Soldiers while under intense fire. He then returned to use the vehicle's 50-caliber machine gun and killed up to 50 of the attackers before being mortally wounded. For his actions, Smith was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously, becoming the first recipient of that award since 1993.⁵⁹ With SIAP under the 3d Infantry Division's control, the 2d Brigade moved toward Baghdad from the west and southwest, and, by April 5, was in a position from which its commander, Colonel David G. Perkins, intended to conduct armored raids into the city.⁶⁰



Source: U.S. Army photo by Specialist Daniel T. Dark (Released).

Colonel David Perkins, Commander, 2d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division.⁶¹

Basrah

While the 3d Infantry Division and I MEF prepared to attack into Baghdad, the British 1st Armoured Division completed its efforts to secure Basrah far to the south. The British commanders approached the operations to secure Basrah much as they had secured Zubayr. As with Zubayr, they were reluctant to enter Basrah until conditions were right to capture the city. Using a combination of information acquired from tribal and municipal leaders from the city and targeting information provided by special operations forces, the British forces prepared to enter the city using a combination of lethal and nonlethal means. On April 4, they conducted an air strike on the suspected location of Ali Hassan al-Majid's (dubbed "Chemical Ali" for his use of chemical weapons in attacks against the Kurds) headquarters, which, while unsuccessful, had a dramatic effect on the population of Basrah. Believing Chemical Ali to be dead, the population appeared to become more willing to cooperate. By the time the British 1st Armoured Division began conducting reconnaissance missions into the city on the morning of April 6, British units

had encountered no resistance. The division commander, Major General Robin Brims, decided to go into the city in force and attacked into Basrah from three directions as coalition aircraft carried out precision air strikes on the remaining Ba'ath command targets. By the morning of April 7, Basrah was under British control.⁶²



SECDEF Rumsfeld (left). Source: DoD photo by Helene C. Stikkel (Released).

**SECDEF Rumsfeld With British Major General Robin Brims,
General Officer Commanding, 1st Armoured Division (United Kingdom).⁶³**

The “Thunder Runs”

Wallace’s intent for Baghdad was to “avoid owning the city but yet still [be] able to control it from the outside.” He intended to establish bases outside the city and conduct armored raids against enemy targets inside Baghdad for approximately 30 days, after which he expected the remaining Iraqi leadership would capitulate.⁶⁴ The V Corps planners believed they could target Baghdad’s key nodes in a manner that would limit collateral damage but expeditiously facilitate the final collapse of the regime. Their targets included Ba’ath Party headquarters, symbolic regime structures, and Saddam’s numerous palaces and offices, all sites that CFACC repeatedly had bombarded for 2 weeks.

Wallace originally wanted the 3d Infantry Division to probe into the city with brigade strength to evaluate the Iraqi response and prepare for follow-on operations. Thus, he expected that, when the division’s 2d Brigade received the order to prepare for the first

of these armored raids into Baghdad on April 5, they would return rather than remain somewhere in the city by themselves. Major General Buford C. “Buff” Blount, the division commander, had a somewhat different view. Having encountered little coherent Iraqi defense on the approach to Baghdad, Blount preferred to keep his brigades moving and attack through Baghdad rather than merely probe it. Blount and Perkins thus set out to conduct what amounted to a movement to contact into the city, an attack the unit dubbed a “Thunder Run.” For his part, Perkins defined his task as “to enter Baghdad for the purpose of displaying combat power, to destroy enemy forces . . . and to simply show them that we can.”⁶⁵ As had been the case with other Iraqi cities, the attacking coalition units had no detailed breakdown of the enemy forces they could expect to face in Baghdad. Prewar intelligence estimates anticipated the city was defended by company-sized units of Special Republican Guard as well as paramilitary forces. These forces, the coalition believed, would anchor their defense at Saddam’s palace complex in central Baghdad, which was surrounded by outer sectors of defense reminiscent of the first Battle of Grozny.⁶⁶

What the 2d Brigade encountered instead as it moved into the city on April 5 was a hodgepodge of uncoordinated attacks by different groups of Iraqi defenders, some in uniform, some in civilian clothes, and some in jihadi-type “black pajamas,” as coalition troops dubbed them. The 3d Infantry Division suspected the Fedayeen were running the fight along with other miscellaneous paramilitary forces and uniformed Special Republican Guard soldiers. On the morning of April 5, from its position at the intersection of Highway 1 and Highway 8 just north of Mahmudiyah, the 2d Brigade moved north on Highway 8 through the southwest Baghdad district of Rashid, encountering heavy fire from the uncoordinated regime paramilitaries as it went. Repelling one lightly armed group of attackers after another, Perkins’s men penetrated into west Baghdad and turned west on the airport road later known to the coalition as Route Irish. Moving through a series of ambushes, the brigade arrived at the airport and linked up with the other 3d Infantry Division units there.⁶⁸



SECDEF Rumsfeld (left), Lieutenant General Wallace (center) Lieutenant General McKiernan(right). Source: DoD photo by Staff Sergeant Cherie A. Thurlby (Released).

SECDEF Rumsfeld With Lieutenant General Wallace, CG, V Corps, and Lieutenant General McKiernan, CG, 3d Army/CFLCC.⁶⁷

The regime's response to the 2d Brigade's attack was to claim that it had not happened. Despite the fact that media outlets had reported video of the Thunder Run, Baghdad's information minister, Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf, derisively called "Baghdad Bob" by the coalition, insisted on television that there were no U.S. forces in Baghdad, and claimed that the 3d Infantry Division attack on the airport had been repelled. Wallace and



Source: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Master Sergeant Buzz Farrell (Released).

**Major General James N. Mattis, CG,
1st Marine Division.⁷¹**

as Fedayeen forces, Allyn had taken the bridges and sealed off Baghdad by the evening of April 6. Iraqi forces, desperate to break through, attacked 3d Brigade for the next 60 hours straight, sending tanks, Russian infantry fighting vehicles (BMPs), infantry, bridging vehicles, and even a crane in massed wave assaults. The attacks resulted in some of the most intense fighting of the invasion, with nearly overrun units calling in their final protective fires and artillery units firing in direct fire mode – actions that had not occurred since the Vietnam war. Despite the onslaught, Allyn's brigade held, buying time for the remainder of the division to continue its assault into Baghdad.⁷²

With 3d Brigade blocking Iraqi reinforcements from the north and preventing units trapped in Baghdad from escaping, Perkins and Blount made plans for another Thunder Run to occupy the regime's central node in downtown Baghdad and stay there overnight. Wallace was concerned about the plan to remain in the city, as he did not believe the division or his corps was ready for the move into Baghdad, but he authorized Blount to send forces on the same route through Baghdad and occupy ground for several hours before withdrawing. However, Perkins never received these instructions, so when his brigade attacked into the city again on April 7 they advanced back into the central Baghdad

McKiernan were concerned that this disinformation campaign would only harden the forces that were defending in Baghdad and could potentially cause V Corps and I MEF to lose the initiative in the city.⁶⁹

Linking up with other 3d Infantry Division units at SIAP, Perkins reported that in his judgment the remaining enemy forces in the city would fight hard, but could "no longer mount effective resistance," a conclusion that validated Blount's instincts to press the attack. Elsewhere, Mattis, whose Marines were closing in on Baghdad from the east, also believed that pulling back from the city would constitute a "forfeiture of the initiative to the Iraqis" and would allow Saddam to "thicken" the defense of Baghdad.⁷⁰

In order to fully isolate Baghdad and protect 2d Brigade's forays, Blount ordered his 3d Brigade, commanded by Colonel Daniel B. Allyn, to attack across the western flank of the city and seize key bridges to its north. After fighting through elements of the Hammurabi Republican Guard Division, as well

government center (later, the Green Zone), including Saddam's iconic "crossed swords" military parade ground, and stayed there. Wallace was surprised when Blount confirmed reports that 2d Brigade alone had occupied the center of Baghdad, but decided not to pull Perkins and his troops out. Though the brigade ran low on fuel and its brigade command post was hit by a surface-to-surface missile causing heavy casualties, Perkins was adamant about remaining in position. The 1st Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, meanwhile, sustained heavy fire from what it believed were foreign fighters as it attacked to secure overpasses south of the city and support the 2d Brigade. The supporting attack along with continued coalition air strikes enabled Perkins and his troops to remain on the ground they had seized at the very heart of the regime's territory.⁷³

The Fall of the Regime

As the 3d Infantry Division brigades penetrated through west Baghdad, Mattis and his 1st Marine Division crossed the Tigris River on April 6-7, and attacked into the east side of the city, encountering intense fighting but linking up with 3d Infantry Division units on April 8. The little Iraqi resistance that continued was disorganized and sporadic. On April 10, Allyn's 3d Brigade launched an attack south into Baghdad, linking up with Perkins's 2d Brigade. As those two brigades joined forces with Mattis's Marines, virtually all resistance in Baghdad collapsed, and the Ba'athist regime lost control of its capital. Iraqis began celebrating in the streets, and, in one memorable celebration, encouraged U.S. forces to topple an iconic statue of Saddam in Firdos Square on the east side of the city. Amid the chaotic situation and with two American divisions in Baghdad, Saddam made one final public appearance in the Sunni neighborhood of Adhamiya on April 9, walking through a crowd of supporters in front of Arabic television cameras. As U.S. Marines and tanks approached the neighborhood, Saddam quit the capital, becoming a fugitive whom U.S. forces did not see again until December 13, 2003.⁷⁴

In retrospect, Hamdani judged that, had it not been for what he termed the "extreme caution" of the American forces as they approached Baghdad from Abu Ghraib, Baghdad might have fallen as early as April 5. By the time U.S. units reached Baghdad, most of the Republican Guard units responsible for the outer defenses of the city had collapsed, and all of the corps and division headquarters were destroyed. Many of the remaining paramilitary forces tasked to defend the city, including the Fedayeen and some "special security and protection forces," were sent to their deaths at the battle for SIAP instead. Thus, little organized military resistance remained in the city apart from Saddam's personal guard. Even he knew the end was near; from an obscure residence in Mansour he ordered his remaining militia and irregular forces to make a last-ditch attempt to stall the coalition, which they did by attacking the 3d Infantry Division's armored raids on April 7 and 8. Chemical Ali, meanwhile, made a failed attempt to organize officers to carry out suicide bombings against the American mechanized vehicles. As the statue of Saddam fell, the remaining Iraqi security forces donned civilian clothes and faded into anonymity.⁷⁵

The near-simultaneous collapse of Basrah and Baghdad—two of Iraq's three largest cities—along with Saddam's abrupt departure was greeted at CENTCOM and CFLCC as the effective destruction of the regime. However, these events in Baghdad and the

south eclipsed the fact that Mosul and the upper Tigris Valley remained under enemy control. Several days elapsed before a small contingent of special operations forces from CJSOTF-N and peshmerga arrived in Mosul to announce the fall of the regime. For the moment at least, the future hub of the Sunni insurgency was, in the coalition's thinking, an afterthought.

A VALIDATION OF THE RMA?

Despite facing unexpectedly tenacious irregular Iraqi defense in southern Iraq, U.S. and coalition forces succeeded in forcing regime change in just under 3 weeks, far ahead of the 70–120 days the invasion plan envisioned. Forced to adapt quickly to several unexpected factors, coalition units had used rapid maneuver and overwhelming firepower to destroy the sizable Iraqi security and intelligence forces in less than a month. The invasion showcased some successful innovations in joint and combined arms operations but also highlighted flaws in intelligence, aviation deep attacks, and the risks associated with unsecured urban centers along maneuver lines of communications.

The invasion also marked one of the largest—if not the largest—special forces operations in history, involving almost all of Air Force Special Operations Command, two Special Forces Groups and part of a third group, a Naval Special Warfare Group, and international special operations elements from the United Kingdom and Poland. For the bulk of the invasion, combat operations remained largely compartmentalized between special operations and conventional forces, with each having mostly separate missions, terrain, and key tasks.⁷⁶

On the surface, the special operations forces component of the invasion appeared to validate preexisting expectations of those forces' capabilities. With a comparatively small number of troops, special operations forces completed all of their tasks—except locating the nonexistent Scud launch points—in western and northern Iraq and supported conventional force efforts to identify and destroy Iraqi irregular forces. However, special operations forces faced significant challenges in Hadithah and Kirkuk in seizing and holding terrain by themselves. Eventually, those cities would have to be occupied by larger conventional military units.

Assuming risk in the urban areas was a problem that neither exercises nor simulations identified ahead of time. CFLCC, V Corps, and I MEF, however, were able to rapidly reallocate their forces, adjust their plans, and employ the reserve force to manage that difficulty during the operational pause provided by the “mother of all sandstorms.” At the same time, the deep attack that had served as a standard prewar winning move in simulations against peer military forces simply did not work in Iraq. The dismal failure of the first scheduled deep aviation attack against the Medina Division of the Republican Guard made the CFLCC and V Corps commanders reluctant to use attack aviation in future shaping operations. When aviation assets were used to support light or mechanized infantry in combined arms operations to secure the lines of communications and key objectives for the remainder of the invasion, those operations were very successful.⁷⁷

In the aftermath of the invasion, advocates of the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) pronounced the rapid coalition attack to Baghdad validated the RMA's contentions that speed and technological superiority would supplant mass and firepower in contemporary military operations and render large ground forces less relevant. Among the RMA advocates, Rumsfeld himself hailed the invasion plan as "an unprecedented combination of speed, precision, surprise, and flexibility."⁷⁸ Speaking before the Senate Armed Services Committee 3 months after the fall of the Iraqi regime, Rumsfeld told the senators that the principal military lessons of the invasion included "the importance of speed, and the ability to get inside the enemy's decision cycle and strike before he is able to mount a coherent defense," as well as the importance of jointness, intelligence, and precision, with the latter defined as "the ability to deliver devastating damage to enemy positions, while sparing civilian lives and the civilian infrastructure."⁷⁹ He also posited that the invasion had shown that:

In the 21st century 'overmatching power' is more important than 'overwhelming force.' In the past, under the doctrine of overwhelming force, force tended to be measured in terms of mass—the number of troops that were committed to a particular conflict. In the 21st century, mass may no longer be the best measure of power in a conflict. After all, when Baghdad fell, there were just over 100,000 American forces on the ground. General Franks overwhelmed the enemy not with the typical three to one advantage in mass, but by overmatching the enemy with advanced capabilities, and using those capabilities in innovative and unexpected ways.⁸⁰

It was certainly true that the invading coalition forces had displayed an impressive flexibility in their operations, as Rumsfeld and other RMA advocates noted. But more importantly, the invasion highlighted some of the shortcomings of U.S. military intelligence and the associated precision of coalition operations. The prewar intelligence estimates failed to anticipate the role of Saddam's irregular forces sufficiently, and the coalition intelligence apparatus had difficulty absorbing the enormous volume of information at its disposal and analyzing new information outside their premade templates of Iraqi regime forces. In reality, the enemy did not behave much like the coalition planners, psychological operations specialists, and intelligence analysts expected. Although air strikes and the rapid coalition advance demoralized segments of the Iraqi military, widespread capitulations did not occur; nor did coalition forces see the "massed tank battles" they expected from the Republican Guard. Saddam did not use chemical weapons as coalition forces advanced on Baghdad, and the bulk of the resistance in southern Iraq came from Iraq's irregular forces—the Fedayeen in particular—rather than the Iraqi Army and Republican Guard. From the first engagement with the Fedayeen, Ba'ath Party militias, and other paramilitary forces, intelligence personnel across CFLCC had difficulty comprehending the true enemy picture. This placed the responsibility for understanding and targeting the enemy almost entirely on the shoulders of the maneuver units and special operations forces in contact.⁸¹

Assets that were supposed to provide real-time tactical targeting information—for example, Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS), UAVs, and national-level platforms—were often focused on large Iraqi mechanized formations, forcing the coalition divisions to rely on the more traditional cavalry squadrons, long-range surveillance units, and special operations forces for reconnaissance and surveillance against

paramilitary forces. In short, it was an exact reversal of the late 1990s trend, which Rumsfeld and RMA advocates had encouraged, toward technological platforms and away from combined arms reconnaissance units that could fight for information. When put to the test, the technological platforms were found wanting.

The lessons Rumsfeld and RMA advocates took from the invasion also tended to ignore the simple fact that the Iraqi regime was a weak enemy whose leaders struggled to mount a coherent defense, and that this factor might have played a larger role in the apparent ease of the coalition invasion than the coalition's own advanced technological capabilities. For example, a lengthy 2007 report by Stephen Biddle of the U.S. Army War College found that the Iraqi military had performed exceptionally poorly in March–April 2003 and that the coalition advance was not so speedy that the Iraqis could not have taken advantage of some significant opportunities had they been a fully competent force. The Iraqis had, among other things, failed to flood the Karbala Gap or destroy bridges to slow down the coalition, use the Republican Guard in an urban warfare environment to inflict coalition casualties, conduct a scorched-earth campaign, or even competently perform simple gunnery and hit close coalition targets. If the coalition's easy victory rested on Iraqi military incompetence, Biddle concluded, then the supposed lessons of the new importance of speed and precision might not apply to a future conflict against a more competent enemy as Rumsfeld had implied.⁸²

Within the Iraqi regime and military, years of preparing to wage war against Iran or an internal insurgency left Iraqi forces ill-prepared for a coalition onslaught. Saddam's overconfidence in the abilities of his forces, fed by years of demanding only positive information about them, caused him and his inner circle to make military decisions far removed from what their operational commanders observed or requested. Although some Iraqi conventional and unconventional forces mounted energetic defenses of Iraq's southern cities and key terrain, they never gained the initiative. Select Iraqi units were able to mount some tactical counterattacks near Nasiriyah, Samawah, Kut, Najaf, Hillah, and the Karbala Gap, but at no point did the Iraqi forces have sufficient command and control or combat power to conduct an operational-level counterattack. In reality, the Iraqi regime and its military never stood a chance.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 4

1. Hans Blix, Briefing of the Security Council, February 14, 2003, available from <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB80/>, accessed June 10, 2014. All unpublished documents in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, are in the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) Study Group archives at the Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle, PA.

2. Interviews, Major Jeanne Godfroy, CSA OIF Study Group, with Major General Patrick Higgins, April 29, 2014, Reston, VA, and with Colonel (Ret.) Thomas Miller, July 3, 2014, Arlington, VA; Charles H. Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad: Army Special Operations Forces in Iraq*, Fort Bragg, NC: U.S. Special Operations Command History Office, 2007, pp. 112, 124–125, 128–130, 137–140, 145–148.

3. Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, p. 116; Interviews, Godfroy with Major Charles R. Miller, July 3, 2014; Colonel Frank Sobchak, CSA OIF Study Group, with Lieutenant General Charles Cleveland, June 4, 2014, Fort Bragg, NC.

4. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) translated doc, Correspondence on a telephone call warning against the use of weapons of mass destruction [sic], ISGQ-2003-00046817, dated March 5, 2003, online Harmony collection. An Iraqi military commander reported a phone call “made by an unknown person who did not speak with an Iraqi accent” to the General Military Intelligence Directorate and the Military Office of the Ba’ath Party, saying “We are warning you not to use the weapons of mass destruction against our sectors, and if you do so, you will be prosecuted as war criminals.”

5. Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, pp. 106–108; Interviews, Colonel Frank Sobchak with Lieutenant General Kenneth Tovo, June 25, 2014, Fort Bragg, NC; Godfroy and Major Wilson Blythe with Colonel Louis B. Rago II, June 12, 2014, Arlington, VA; Godfroy with Higgins, April 29, 2014; with Miller, July 3, 2014; with Colonel (Ret.) John Agoglia, November 7, 2013, National Defense University (NDU).

6. Stephen Biddle, “Speed Kills? Reassessing the Role of Speed, Precision, and Situation Awareness in the Fall of Saddam,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 30, February 2007, pp. 20–22.

7. Interview, Godfroy and Blythe with General (Ret.) William S. Wallace, June 17, 2014, NDU; Kevin M. Woods, Michael E. Pease, Mark E. Stout, Williamson Murray, and James G. Lacey, *The Iraqi Perspectives Project: A View of Operation Iraqi Freedom from Saddam’s Senior Leadership*, Norfolk, VA: Joint Center for Operational Analysis and Lessons Learned, n.d., pp. 125–128.

8. Interviews, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014; Godfroy with Agoglia, March 14, 2014. Notably, one Republican Guard Division—the Nebuchadnezzar—was ordered south shortly before the invasion. Its vehicles and revetments remained in place, however, leading the coalition to believe it still remained in northern Iraq.

9. Biography Draft, Iraqi Lieutenant General (Ret.) Ra’ad Hamdani, Kevin M. Woods, trans., Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, December 2013, pp. 218–223; DIA translated doc, Captured document held by General Military Intelligence Directorate, ISGP-2003-00033128, dated September 23, 2002, online Harmony collection.

10. Hamdani biography, pp. 218–223; DIA translated doc, Record of a military conference discussing the defense in the southern zone [sic], ISGP-2003-00023745, c. December 27, 2002, online Harmony collection.

11. Woods et al., *Iraqi Perspectives Project*, p. 126; Hamdani biography, p. 225; Colonel Gregory Fontenot, Lieutenant Colonel Edmund J. Degen, and Lieutenant Colonel David Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004, pp. 90, 97–98.

12. Interviews, CSA OIF Study Group with General (Ret.) John P. Abizaid, September 19, 2014, NDU, and with former President George W. Bush, April 27, 2015, Dallas, TX.

13. Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, pp. 90, 93; John Keegan, *The Iraq War*, New York: Random House, 2004, pp. 147–149.

14. Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, pp. 86–87, 93–94; Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, pp. 112, 114; Interview, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014; Keegan, *The Iraq War*, pp. 147–148.

15. Conference Call Interview, Godfroy with Lieutenant General (Ret.) Robin Brims, March 3, 2014; Royal Navy, *Operation Telic: 3 Commando Brigade’s Desert War*, Portsmouth, UK: RN Graphics Centre, n.d., pp. 14–16; Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, p. 113.

16. Quote from Interview, CSA OIF Study Group with Abizaid, September 19, 2014; Hamdani biography, p. 227; Interview, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014; Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, p. 88.

17. Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, pp. 207–210.

18. Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, p. 88; Interview, Lieutenant Colonel Steven C. Holcomb with Major General James D. Thurman, May 27, 2003, Camp Doha, Kuwait.

19. Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, pp. 267–295. Trucks mounted with machine guns are also known as technical vehicles. Interview, Holcomb with Thurman, May 27, 2003. Quote from *U.S. Marines in Battle: An-Nasiriyah*, March 23–April 2, 2003, Quantico, VA: History Division, U.S. Marine Corps, 2009, pp. 9–10.

20. Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, p. 170.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 129–131.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 126–128, 132–133; Commander's Assessment Report, V Corps, March 23, 2003; Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, p. 115; Robert S. Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight? Organizational and Doctrinal Trends in Mounted Maneuver Reconnaissance from the Interwar Years to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM*, Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combined Arms Center, Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010, pp. 455–456, available from usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/carl/download/csipubs/cameron_fight.pdf, accessed October 17, 2014. In the years that followed, cavalry squadrons like these were replaced by reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition (RSTA) squadrons as part of Army transformation. The RSTA squadrons exchanged people and weapons systems for more technically advanced recon naissance and surveillance platforms, reducing the capability of tactical formations to conduct armored reconnaissance against enemy formations.

23. Conference Call Interview, Godfroy with Brims, March 3, 2014.

24. Woods et al., *Iraqi Perspectives Project*, p. 130; Keegan, *The Iraq War*, p. 155.

25. For the most part, this was true although V Corps reports started gravitating toward conventional military tracking in the early days of April 2003. See Commander's Assessment Reports, V Corps, April 1–7, 2003, for more details.

26. Quote from Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, p. 209. Interviews, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014; Major William S. Story with Major General James Marks, February 3, 2004, Washington, DC: Center for Military History (CMH); Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, p. 210.

27. Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, pp. 145–148; Conference Call Interview, Colonel Frank Sobchak with Colonel Chris Connor, May 6, 2014.

28. Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, pp. 127–128, 130–132; Interview, Godfroy with Higgins, April 29, 2014.

29. Quote from Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, p. 117, see also pp. 116, 118–120. Interview, Godfroy with Miller, July 3, 2014.

30. Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, p. 193; Interviews, Sobchak with Cleveland, June 4, 2014; Godfroy with Miller, July 3, 2014, and with Higgins, April 29, 2014.

31. *U.S. Marines in Battle: An-Nasiriyah*, pp. 16–19.

32. Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, pp. 273–274; Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, p. 89; *U.S. Marines in Battle: An-Nasiriyah*, p. 11.

33. Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, pp. 112–113, 180–188; Interview, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014. General Wallace also believed the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 11th Aviation Group (commonly known as the 11th Attack Helicopter Regiment), aviators were eager to showcase their deep attack capability. He termed the enthusiasm to get into the fight as the “testosterone factor.”

34. Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, pp. 180–188.

35. Interview, Holcomb with Thurman, May 27, 2003; *U.S. Marines in Battle: An-Nasiriyah*, pp. 11–12. Quotes from Interview, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014.

36. Notes and Summary, Charles E. Kirkpatrick, *16 Days to Baghdad: V Corps in the Combat Phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom*, V Corps, n.d.

37. Interviews, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014; with Colonel Edmund J. Degen, May 22, 2014, Arlington, VA; with Colonel Louis B. Rago II, June 12, 2014, Arlington, VA; Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, pp. 346–347; CFLCC OPLAN, *Cobra II Base Plan*, January 13, 2003.

38. Interviews, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014; Holcomb with Thurman, May 27, 2003; Story with Marks, February 3, 2004; Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, pp. 346–348.

39. Interview, Story with Marks, February 3, 2004; Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, p. 188; Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, p. 347.

40. Interview, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014.

41. *Ibid.*; Interview, Godfroy and Blythe with Rago, June 12, 2014; Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, p. 210; Interviews, Holcomb with Thurman, May 27, 2003; Story with Lieutenant General David McKiernan, June 20, 2003, Camp Doha, Kuwait.

42. Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, pp. 350–351.

43. Hamdani biography, p. 227; Woods et al., *Iraqi Perspectives Project*, pp. 138–140; Keegan, *The Iraq War*, p. 150.

44. Woods et al., *Iraqi Perspectives Project*, pp. 141–145.

45. Hamdani biography, pp. 230–240.

46. *U.S. Marines in Battle: An-Nasiriyah*, pp. 36–40; Keegan, *The Iraq War*, p. 156; Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, pp. 188–189; Interview, Holcomb with Thurman, May 27, 2003.

47. Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, pp. 147–148, 190, 240–241; Notes and Summary, Kirkpatrick, *16 Days to Baghdad*.

48. Interview, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2003; Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, pp. 391, 397–398; Conference Call Interview, Godfroy with Rick Atkinson, October 24, 2014. Atkinson was a journalist embedded with the 101st Airborne Division during the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

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52. Interview, Sobchak with Cleveland, June 4, 2014; Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, p. 191.

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55. Commander's Assessment Reports, V Corps, April 1 and March 23, 2003; Notes and Summary, Kirkpatrick, *16 Days to Baghdad*; Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, pp. 282–286; Interview, Sobchak with Connor, May 6, 2014; Hamdani biography, p. 228.

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57. Woods et al., *Iraq Perspectives Report*, pp. 136–137; Hamdani biography, pp. 242–257.

58. Hamdani biography, p. 258.

59. Medal of Honor Citation, Sergeant First Class Paul R. Smith, April 5, 2005, available from www.army.mil/medalofhonor/smith/citation/index.html, accessed November 2, 2015.

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63. DoD photo by Helene C. Stikkel, "The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld, U.S. Secretary of Defense (left), is greeted by British Army MAJ. GEN. Robin V. Brims, Commander, British 1ST Armored Division as he arrives at Basra Airport, Iraq, on April 30, 2003," April 30, 2003, National Archives Identifier 6681167, Released to Public, Unrestricted, modified (cropped).

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66. Fontenot, Degen, and Tohn, *On Point*, p. 336; Interview, Godfroy and Blythe with Rago, June 12, 2014.

67. DoD photo by Staff Sergeant Cherie A. Thurlby, "The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld, left, U.S. Secretary of Defense, is escorted by U.S. Army LT. GEN. William Wallace, center, V Corps Commander and U.S. Army MAJ. GEN. Buford Blount, right, 3rd Infantry Division Commander, as he arrives at Baghdad International Airport to tour the city and speak with the troops on April 30, 2003," National Archives Identifier 6684875, April 30, 2003, Released to Public, Unrestricted, modified (cropped).

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70. Ibid., pp. 336, 343-345; Interviews, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014; Godfroy and Blythe with Degen, May 22, 2014. Quotes from Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, p. 429.

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73. Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, pp. 448-459; Commander's Assessment Reports, V Corps, April 8-9, 2003.

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78. SECDEF Donald H. Rumsfeld, Testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, July 9, 2003.

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CHAPTER 5

“WE’RE HERE. NOW WHAT?”

As 3d Infantry Division troops seized downtown Baghdad on April 2, 2003, Lieutenant General William Wallace called Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) operations chief Major General James D. Thurman for instructions. “Okay, Bubba, we’re here,” Wallace said. “Now what?”¹

Wallace’s question foreshadowed what became the private views of many coalition commanders in the weeks following the toppling of Saddam Hussein. Like Wallace, many were unprepared for the new situation that emerged as the Iraqi state collapsed, which necessitated a combination of combat operations, intense policing operations, reconstruction, and the establishment of new local governments. As they had done in the exercises leading up to the invasion, U.S. ground forces expected to be able to seize their objectives, conduct after action reviews of the operation, and prepare for redeployment, leaving the post-conflict phase as some other agency’s responsibility.² These expectations were reinforced by overly optimistic strategic assessments that the Iraqi population would welcome the coalition and resume normal activities quickly. The Army and Marine forces that had spent their organizational energy focusing on their immediate objectives of destroying the Iraqi military and forcing regime change were not prepared for the complicated Phase IV they were about to face.

The speed with which coalition forces arrived in Baghdad also caught the few planners at CFLCC and the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) who were finalizing Phase IV plans by surprise, meaning that much of that planning was completed while the transition to Phase IV was already in progress. Consequently, CFLCC conducted a very rough “rolling transition” from major combat operations to stability operations, with some units beginning their humanitarian assistance missions while still engaged in combat operations. As CFLCC scrambled to reposition its limited forces across the contested territory, units also encountered new enemies that intelligence estimates mischaracterized and underestimated.

Phase IV operations were complicated by a number of other factors. Widespread public disorder and looting surprised coalition commanders, and the coalition’s efforts to restore order undermined the legitimacy of the entire coalition enterprise in Iraq. Neither CFLCC nor V Corps had accounted for looting during planning for the invasion, and neither they nor CENTCOM were prepared to declare martial law in Iraq in the interim.³ In addition, the collapse of the regime did not mark the end of major combat operations. Iraq’s borders with Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia were wide open, and Saddam, his sons, and most of the Ba’ath Party senior military and internal security leaders remained at large, as were suspected weapons of mass destruction (WMD) materials. CFLCC units continued to encounter pockets of resistance in Baghdad and Anbar, while Mosul, Kirkuk, and the upper Tigris River Valley remained unsecured by coalition forces although many government buildings and posts were seized by peshmerga and Badr Corps militias. As Lieutenant General David D. McKiernan later recalled:

We're in Baghdad . . . we know the Ba'ath party has ruptured, no one can find Saddam, but in a city of 6 million people, we don't know if we're in control yet. There is not a lot of combat going on, it is a fluid situation. We are still trying to exploit WMD [weapons of mass destruction] sites and there is fighting in other areas of Iraq, so it is a very complex, convoluted situation.⁴

IRAQI STATE COLLAPSE

The Dissolution of Public Order

Once it became clear that Saddam was no longer in power, Iraqi citizens began wild celebrations in the streets of Baghdad and other liberated areas. Coalition troops were unprepared for the utter dissolution of public order that followed. Within days of the regime collapse, Baghdad and other areas of Iraq descended into chaos. Looting and arson began in Baghdad almost immediately, and disorder spread throughout southern Iraq and in Kirkuk as well. Opportunists took advantage and ravaged Ba'ath Party and Iraqi Government facilities, critical infrastructure sites, public houses, and the homes of wealthy Ba'athists who had fled. Regime loyalists and security and intelligence personnel who remained destroyed a substantial amount of government security documents and ministry information, all of which was intricately maintained only in hard copy form. The Iraqi police structure was severely damaged, and many police stations were destroyed. Looting at hospitals resulted in the disappearance of much-needed pharmaceuticals. The National Museum of Baghdad was looted as well, and ancient Iraqi artifacts quickly began appearing in black markets outside of Iraq.⁵

By April 11, CFLCC recognized that the presence of coalition troops deterred looting, and McKiernan ordered units to increase patrols around important governance locations, hospitals, and other facilities. CFLCC tasked its civil affairs units with helping to recover local museum items and, with some outside assistance, made progress towards that goal by the end of April. The gradual reduction in looting and violence was at least partially due to coalition units' efforts to find local police willing to conduct joint patrols in various areas of Baghdad, and CFLCC began providing new uniforms to the Iraqi police to distinguish them from the old regime.⁶ By April 16, coalition and Iraqi police joint patrols were on the streets of Baghdad. CFLCC judged that the looting was dramatically reduced and that Iraqis, in Baghdad at least, were beginning to resume normal activities. Isolated pockets of looting in other cities and ammunition depots continued across Iraq through the end of April 2003.⁷

In some areas, the looting of April 2003 was accompanied by rioting that the small number of Iraqi police who remained at their posts were unable to quell. Demonstrations in Baghdad, Anbar, and some cities of southern Iraq increased steadily toward the end of April. During some of those demonstrations, CFLCC units determined that anti-coalition agitators in the crowds were attempting to provoke coalition troops into a violent response to pin blame for the instability on the coalition. Another hurdle to halting the demonstrations arose as Iraqis began competing with each other for political power and positions in hastily organized governance structures. Just 10 days after Baghdad's fall, CFLCC observed that Iraqi religious leaders from various sects were "establishing

themselves as local leaders or pushing support for their designated candidates in the cities," creating local rivalries. In response to rising civil unrest, many CFLCC units began implementing curfews, especially ahead of major events that included the Shi'a Arba'een holiday and Saddam's birthday.⁸

Changing Rules of Engagement

The coalition's difficulty in arresting the looters was symptomatic of a larger problem—unclear and varied application of the rules of engagement, the guidelines under which coalition troops were instructed to use force. The rules of engagement had already changed significantly from the beginning of the invasion through its completion. Both the 1003V and Cobra II war plans initially called for very restrictive rules of engagement against nonuniformed personnel, and those who were captured in uniform were expressly categorized as prisoners of war. "There was also a lingering concern if we should put U.S. soldiers in a position to stand between the Iraqi people and symbols of the regime from whom they had been liberated," recalled Wallace.⁹ Because the coalition did not want the Iraqis to perceive them as oppressors, coalition commanders directed their troops to apply the minimum amount of force needed for each situation. During the invasion, however, commanders at all levels had gradually eased restrictions on the use of force, as the number of paramilitary attacks by the Fedayeen Saddam and others increased.¹⁰

As looting and disorder spread throughout Iraq, commanders were unclear about how to apply the rules of engagement that had governed the invasion. Coalition units had shifted from taking prisoners of war to taking looters and criminals into their custody, designating them as "detainees" rather than prisoners of war. Commanders and civilian leaders differed on how to deal with looters and violent dissidents they could not capture. Some believed it was best to allow the Iraqis to blow off some steam after years of oppressive rule. On the opposite end of the spectrum, others proffered that shooting looters and instituting martial law might be suitable deterrents to disorder, albeit unpopular ones. After a discussion concerning a theoretical order to shoot looters in the act was leaked to the press, Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald H. Rumsfeld expressed his concern that the rules of engagement established by the headquarters in Baghdad "were being diluted as they were passed down the chain of command." Lieutenant General John P. Abizaid, empowered as the CENTCOM deputy to make decisions about Iraq, quickly agreed, and decided to "reenergize the chain of command to ensure [they had] robust rules of engagement in place and that every Soldier and Marine [understood] them."¹¹

In response to the emerging circumstances on the ground, CENTCOM made an addendum to the rules of engagement in OPORD 1003V on April 25. These additional rules of engagement contained provisions for commanders to implement curfews and the use of force during civil-military operations, which included authorization to use deadly force to prevent the theft or destruction of property belonging to U.S. troops or private Iraqi citizens. U.S. forces also were permitted to use deadly force to prevent the escape of detainees or enemy prisoners of war, to exercise law enforcement powers, and to guard WMD and other hazardous materials that were deemed "inherently dangerous to others." In addition, the addendum permitted commanders to authorize searches

and detention of civilians, vehicles, and property and to use nonlethal riot-control agents on unruly crowds and demonstrations. Brigade commanders had the authority to retain detainees in their custody for up to 10 days, after which they were required to present probable cause for holding them longer in a "hearing held by a competent authority."¹²

Despite Abizaid's efforts and those of his subordinate commanders, the rules of engagement and directives concerning coalition unit behavior in the summer of 2003 remained loosely understood and applied across the theater. For example, the order to conduct presence patrols to stop looting was not uniformly applied. The light infantry 101st Airborne Division conducted many foot patrols, while the mechanized 3d Infantry Division remained more tied to its mechanized platforms and tended not to engage in dismounted patrols.¹³ Moreover, there were often no specific instructions for how patrolling units should respond to looting. For the remainder of the conflict, some units maintained the more restrictive rules of engagement, believing that shooting or detaining large numbers of civilians undermined stability and security. Others adopted more permissive rules of engagement, asserting that harsher penalties for misbehavior and violence deterred further violent behavior and guerrilla-like attacks. Finally, the new rules of engagement really applied only to American units and personnel, not coalition partners, and some conflicts in the theater rules of engagement were not immediately resolved. Consistent understanding and application of the rules of engagement remained problematic for the rest of the war.

Combat Operations Continue

Although the Ba'ath Party was clearly no longer in charge of Iraq after April 9, combat operations to eliminate pockets of Iraqi military and paramilitary resistance continued, with Baghdad and some other population centers not yet fully under coalition control. "This fight is nowhere near over," McKiernan told his subordinate commanders on April 10, "but we have momentum and we've got initiative on our side. So everywhere we get in contact . . . with the remaining regime resistance, we're going to get a stranglehold on it."¹⁴ From April 9 to 11, V Corps and I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) completed the outer cordon of Baghdad and continued to quash enemy resistance in the city. They secured key lines of communications and highways leading into Baghdad, secured Saddam International Airport, and destroyed the remnants of the Iraqi Republican Guard units that remained around Iraq's central zone.¹⁵

CFLCC units also turned their attention toward seizing physical symbols of the regime, including Ba'ath Party headquarters, Fedayeen outposts, and Saddam's special security and intelligence headquarters. They also secured ministry buildings, major infrastructure, and other government facilities in Baghdad. The V Corps and I MEF continued to clear Baghdad through April 15. Apart from encountering "several disorganized counterattacks by irregular forces," the V Corps and I MEF units in Baghdad did not face significant enemy resistance; they easily destroyed the technical vehicles full of fighters and small outposts with close air support.¹⁶

South of Baghdad, CFLCC troops secured population centers along the main lines of communication. The 101st Airborne Division secured Karbala and Najaf and cleared Hillah. The 82d Airborne Division cleared Samawah, and Task Force Tarawa secured

Diwaniya, Numaniyah, and the highways leading into Kut before advancing east toward Maysan. En route to Amarah, the Marines destroyed abandoned equipment from the 10th and 14th Iraqi Army Divisions but encountered no resistance. In Basrah Province, the British 1st Armoured Division secured the remainder of the Rumaila oil fields and Qurnah and patrolled Basrah and Zubayr.¹⁷

While Task Force Tarawa isolated Kut, other I MEF units maneuvered north of Baghdad. The I MEF troops crossed the Diyala River northeast of Baghdad on April 9 and prepared to secure areas near Saddam’s home in Salahadin Province. Between April 13 and 15, I MEF attacked Baqubah and Tikrit and secured Bayji, Samarra, and the highways leading from those cities into Baghdad. They then prepared to secure the remainder of Salahadin Province ahead of the arrival of the 4th Infantry Division, which had made its way by sea to Kuwait after its northern invasion route was shut off by the Turkish Government.¹⁸

Elsewhere in northern Iraq, Colonel Charles Cleveland’s Combined Joint Operations Task Force-North (CJSOTF-N) fought remnants of the Iraqi Army and Republican Guard divisions. By April 13, the task force judged that the Iraqi I and II Corps were reduced to about 30 to 40 percent of their original strength, with the remainder of the forces having deserted. The fighters of Ansar al-Islam who survived the coalition air strikes had crossed over into Iran, and CJSOTF-N verified that the organization no longer had a presence on Iraqi soil. In Ninawa Province, CJSOTF-N and its peshmerga partners had put the Iraqi V Corps to flight and entered Mosul, northern Iraq’s largest population center and the location at which the Iraqi V Corps commander surrendered to the task force on April 11.¹⁹

Meanwhile, CJSOTF-West (CJSOTF-W) began establishing checkpoints on Iraq’s considerable borders with Jordan and Syria. Portions of a separate special operations task force, the Rangers, and the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, started to transition from operations against Iraqi military and paramilitary forces to hunting high-value regime targets.²⁰

A Country Full of Weapons

In the turbulent weeks after Baghdad’s fall, coalition units discovered an astonishing amount of munitions across the country. In the months prior to the invasion, Saddam’s forces placed large numbers of weapons and stockpiles of ammunition in dispersed caches to improve access for Iraqi forces that Saddam assumed would be immobilized by coalition air power. Many of those caches remained intact after the Iraqi regime was defeated, along with the vast stores the Iraqi military had dispersed during the 12 years of no-fly zones. In addition, many usable tanks, armored personnel carriers, and artillery pieces, abandoned during combat operations, remained vulnerable to looters and militia groups. CFLCC and Coalition Forces Special Operations Component Command (CFSOCC) leaders worried that munitions and equipment looted from these caches would find their way into the black market and either be used against coalition forces or be used by Iraq’s factions against one another if the caches were not secured.²¹

For coalition ground forces, the scale of that mission was overwhelming. Many of the caches were spread across large areas virtually impossible for units to physically secure, and the sheer volume of munitions was equally daunting. When 4th Infantry Division

troops arrived at Taji military depot on April 18, for example, they found that they had to secure and empty hundreds of bunkers. The weapons ammunition depot outside of Rutbah was larger in size and composition and required significant numbers of troops to secure it. Less than 3 weeks into Phase IV, CFLCC assessed that major problems remained with leftover Iraqi arms and munitions.²²

In northern Iraq, CJSOTF-N was concerned about the equipment the regime's troops had abandoned, some of which was left fully loaded with ammunition, and proposed establishing several locations to store the armored vehicles and artillery pieces scattered throughout the north. However, CFLCC had no troops to allocate to that mission, and the peshmerga seized the tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery pieces, small arms, and ammunition and moved them north of the Green Line into Kurdish-controlled territory.²³

From Humanitarian Assistance to Reconstruction and Governance

In his commander's intent for Cobra II, McKiernan envisioned a "blurred" or "rolling" transition between Phase III and Phase IV in which humanitarian assistance would begin in cleared areas even before the conclusion of major combat operations.²⁴ In fact, McKiernan and Wallace both expected their post-regime focus to be almost exclusively on humanitarian missions, much as it had been after the Gulf war. This assumption proved incorrect. By the end of April 2003, CFLCC's units had shifted from clearing and securing territory to restoring essential services, repairing infrastructure, and establishing meager local and national governance capabilities.²⁵

The British forces began their humanitarian aid distribution in Umm Qasr on March 31 and later spread to Basrah and Zubayr. CFLCC units in Nasiriyah, Najaf, Samawah, and Baghdad followed suit in mid-April, and the Marines established a civil-military operations center at the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad. Civil affairs units opened the port of Umm Qasr as a theater humanitarian distribution center and prepared to reinstate the Oil for Food redistribution program as planned. These humanitarian assistance operations were, however, much smaller than what most CENTCOM leaders envisaged for the post-hostilities period because the widespread humanitarian crises that CENTCOM and policymakers expected did not occur. Instead, CFLCC discovered that Iraqis' most pressing concerns were not food and water, but the restoration of basic services and functions of the state, meaning CFLCC units abruptly shifted from humanitarian assistance to finding Iraqi engineers, technocrats, and bureaucrats to help them maintain the electrical, water, sanitation, medical, and oil systems and infrastructure—another mission for which CFLCC was unprepared.²⁶ In addition to these new infrastructure operations, CFLCC began to assume some governance-related responsibilities for which they had not planned. These included recalling local police to duty, enforcing the rule of law, and assisting with the establishment of the new Iraqi provincial and national governments. On April 10, CENTCOM directed CFLCC to "provide all support necessary to establish a central coordination mechanism within each governate [province] of Iraq," likely in response to pressure from both U.S. policymakers and Iraqis to prepare the country for Iraqi rule.²⁷ CFLCC units operating in relatively stable areas like Hillah and Basrah began to establish interim city councils.²⁸

Meanwhile, the CFLCC planners who had continued during the invasion to develop Eclipse II – the Phase IV sequel to Cobra II – found themselves in the middle of planning operations that were already ongoing. CFLCC did not issue the commander’s intent for Phase IV until April 15, shortly after rushing through a more final version of Eclipse II that differed somewhat from the initial version prepared in early March. Far fewer forces were available to secure the country than CFLCC planners anticipated: the 4th Infantry Division had just arrived, the 1st Armored Division was preparing to enter the country, and, apart from scattered and disorganized Iraqi police, there were no recalled Iraqi security forces available to assist the coalition in maintaining law and order. The threat, too, was different: instead of anticipating that the greatest sources of instability would be reprisal attacks, the new Eclipse II judged the major threat would be “the Sunni minority, primarily represented by remnants of the regime-sponsored paramilitary forces” and ethno-religious flashpoints in Mosul, Kirkuk, Saddam City (later renamed Sadr City), Karbala, Najaf, and Basrah. Notably, Anbar Province’s cities were omitted from the CFLCC estimate. The new version of Eclipse II also identified the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), rather than the Coalition Joint Task Force–Iraq (CJTF-I), as the lead agency for civilian governance.²⁹

Unfortunately, the Eclipse II plan came too late to prevent significant disparities in each division’s interpretations of how to implement Phase IV directives in their areas of operations, areas that varied enormously in their characteristics. Moreover, V Corps and I MEF were unprepared to incorporate the lone agency assigned to run post-regime Iraq – ORHA – into their efforts to restore stability.

Just prior to the invasion, CFLCC first began incorporating ORHA into its Phase IV planning and operations in Kuwait. Like CFLCC, ORHA quickly acknowledged that reconstruction issues were far more pressing than humanitarian requirements. What CFLCC and ORHA discovered once inside Iraq was that Saddam had not invested in the physical infrastructure of the country for years, particularly in the Shi’a south and Sadr City. The water, sewage, electricity, transportation, and communications infrastructure in those areas was decades old and crumbling – in much more dire circumstances than anyone in CENTCOM or CFLCC had guessed. An early prospective hurdle emerged when large numbers of Iraqi utility workers failed to arrive to perform their jobs due to pay disputes in early April. Over the next 2 weeks, coalition units worked with ORHA to come up with expedient methods of payment, using Iraqi civil leaders as designated pay representatives.³⁰

Governance was a much more complicated mission for ORHA. Just days after the fall of the regime, retired Lieutenant General Jay Garner was surprised to receive instructions from Washington to have ORHA build governing capacity within the Iraqi Interim Authority in Baghdad. Like CENTCOM’s leaders, Garner had been planning to build governance structures starting at the municipal level, and then build toward national elections. The decision to run the process from the top down – originating from Under Secretary of Defense Douglas J. Feith’s office – meant that Garner needed to adjust how he developed relationships with the Iraqis.³¹ Throughout April, Garner strove to meet important Iraqi leaders, apprise them of the ORHA mission, and gain their support for an interim Iraqi Government. He met with Kurdish leaders in the third week of April and began liaising with national-level leaders shortly thereafter, subsequently establishing

offices in Mosul and Baghdad. CFLCC assisted ORHA with organizing the first meetings of the Iraqi Interim Authority in Baghdad on April 26 and 28, and a CFLCC-brokered security town hall meeting in Baghdad on April 29. On April 27, Garner conducted his first radio broadcast, in which he “urged the Iraqi people to return to normalcy and [assured] them that ORHA would assist in their recovery,” and pledged to “expedite the establishment of the new Iraqi Government.” ORHA personnel and resources continued to flow into the country for the remainder of April, and Garner planned to have his headquarters in Baghdad fully operational by May 3, 2003, not knowing that his organization would be gone in less than 30 days.³²

As the demand for reconstruction and local policing increased, mission requirements for engineers, civil affairs personnel, and military police expanded considerably. However, the comparatively small numbers of engineer, civil affairs, and military police battalions were task organized to support the divisions rather than the broader theater during the invasion, and there was no plan to reallocate those forces to support either ORHA or CFLCC in Phase IV. This lack of support left the theater command and the reconstruction authority with no assets with which to begin the reconstruction. By mid-April, McKiernan’s command began to consolidate and redistribute the support units for the reconstruction mission, though most of them ultimately remained in Baghdad.³³

New Actors on the Battlefield

The transition to Phase IV also introduced a host of new actors to CFLCC battle space. Coalition partners who had declined to participate in combat operations began sending military forces and humanitarian assistance units to support stability operations. Jordan established a field hospital west of Baghdad, and Italy agreed to set up its own field hospital in Baghdad proper. CFLCC met with a delegation from Japan to discuss using Japanese defense forces in northern Iraq. Albania and El Salvador sent forces to assist the 101st Airborne Division in Mosul, and CFLCC began assembling a multinational force to assume I MEF’s battle space as I MEF redeployed to the United States.³⁴

The number of private contractors also increased substantially once stability operations commenced. Most of CFLCC’s subordinates used systems that required contractor maintenance, most notably the 4th Infantry Division, whose deployment was briefly imperiled by the sheer number of private contractors who refused to support the unit in direct combat. The arrival of civilian-run agencies on the battlefield along with increased logistical requirements after the fall of the regime generated an increasing demand for contractor support. ORHA was particularly reliant on private companies for its reconstruction operations, including Raytheon and Kellogg, Brown & Root.³⁵ Other contractors provided a range of services, including personal and facilities security, training and advising capabilities, communications management, and life-support operations.

Problems in Northern Iraq

As the Iraqi Army in northern Iraq melted away after April 11, Cleveland and his special forces troops quickly found that they faced challenges far beyond the means of a CJSOTF to handle. The first challenge was averting another Kurdish civil war between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK),

while also preventing Kurdish reprisals against Arabs in Kirkuk and Mosul. CJSOTF-N attempted to work with Colonel William C. Mayville's 173d Airborne Brigade to develop an updated picture of the locations of peshmerga units so as to prevent Kurdish "land grabs" in the Mosul and Kirkuk areas that exacerbated the already tenuous security situation in those mixed-ethnicity cities. The situation in Kirkuk was the more pressing of the two. CSJOTF-N was concerned that the remaining Iraqi Army and Republican Guard units might move south of Kirkuk and back to Tikrit. In addition, the last of the Iraqi military resistance in the north had collapsed and there was nothing "holding the Kurds back" from taking the city. Both the KDP and PUK claimed Kirkuk and its oil fields, and shortly after the fall of Baghdad, the groups began accusing each other of rogue efforts to seize them. CJSOTF-N also observed a surprising number of internally displaced persons returning to Kirkuk, where coalition leaders were concerned they would target Arab civilians occupying formerly Kurdish homes. Many Kurds were indeed eager to exact reprisals in Kirkuk, from which tens of thousands of Kurds had been expelled by Saddam's regime after the 1991 rebellion.³⁶

Cleveland tasked Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth E. Tovo with trying to maintain security in Kirkuk, and Tovo, in turn, worked to restrain his peshmerga counterparts from going into Kirkuk ahead of the coalition troops, a job that proved futile. On April 10, before either Tovo's men or Mayville's 173d Airborne Brigade reached Kirkuk, the Iraqi Army abandoned the city and looting began. On the same day, peshmerga units arrived in Kirkuk and occupied the city in defiance of their prior agreement with U.S. forces. While select peshmerga units made a concerted effort to stop the looting, others actively participated in looting and began reprisals against the city's Sunni Arab and Turkoman population. Jalal Talabani, the PUK leader, declared an interim government in Kirkuk under PUK leadership, though because of the rapport the U.S. military and Kurds had built during Operation PROVIDE COMFORT in the 1990s, Kurdish leaders were somewhat receptive to entreaties to move the peshmerga out of the city.³⁷ Tovo's units were also able to reach Kirkuk in time to end some of the reprisals against Arabs. To reassure Kirkuk's civilian population that the city remained under coalition control, Tovo ordered his special operations troops to exchange their Kurdish garb and long hair for military uniforms and haircuts; these troops began handing out small American flags, claiming that they were from American paratroopers. These actions created the visual effect of thousands of American airborne troops in Kirkuk when, in fact, there was only Tovo's small special operations contingent. The ruse worked long enough to allow the larger 173d Airborne Brigade to move into Kirkuk and make the act a reality.³⁸

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Waltemeyer, another of Cleveland's subordinates, used similar methods to restrain the KDP peshmerga from seizing Mosul, even going so far as to put his vehicle – marked with a large American flag – at the head of the peshmerga convoys racing toward the city, thereby putting a nominal coalition face on operations there. He was joined by reinforcements from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) on April 14. In the interest of preventing ethnic conflict and maintaining order, CJSOTF-N worked with Kurdish leaders to withdraw the peshmerga from Mosul and Kirkuk, which was difficult considering that the peshmerga had assisted the coalition in clearing both cities in the first place.³⁹ The situation in Mosul did not stay calm for long. The 26th MEU unwittingly stirred up unrest by failing to stop a returning former Saddamist, Mishan

al-Jabouri, from declaring himself the mayor of Mosul. Jabouri's power grab angered local Moslawis, who responded with a large protest on April 20 in which they rioted, burned Jabouri's car, and threw stones at him. Things got out of hand when the 26th MEU intervened to break up the demonstration. Shots fired from the crowd appeared to be aimed at the Marines, who fired back and killed between 10 and 15 civilians in the process, causing the crowd to erupt even further. With the situation in Mosul slipping into chaos, CENTCOM ordered CFLCC to move troops north to control the city as soon as feasible.⁴⁰

Yet another northern problem came in the disposition of the Mujahedin e Khalq (MeK), an armed Iranian opposition group that had for 2 decades been sponsored by Saddam. With Saddam's support, the MeK's militia had frequently conducted cross-border operations into Iran from its base in Diyala and had helped the Ba'athist regime crush the 1991 Kurdish rebellion.⁴¹ The MeK had not resisted coalition forces during the invasion, but the group remained armed and was also on the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations. However, no policy was in place for how coalition forces should approach this organization if it did not fight, so the problem fell to CJSOTF-N to sort out by default. With plenty of other security challenges to deal with, Cleveland recommended that the coalition give the MeK amnesty in exchange for assisting in identifying Badr Corps infiltration points along the Iranian border, a recommendation a skeptical CENTCOM chose not to take. In the meantime, MeK leaders requested a formal cease-fire with the United States, which Cleveland signed in the absence of any other instructions. The Department of Defense (DoD) agreed afterward to treat the MeK as a recognized force and accept its armed capitulation until its final disposition could be decided.⁴²

The Iranian-backed militias like the Badr Corps infiltrating into northern Iraq were another problem. CJSOTF-N began tracking Badr Corps infiltration across the Iranian border in mid-April and became concerned that the Badr Corps intended to draw the MeK in Diyala into a fight, derailing the cease-fire negotiations. After CJSOTF-N confronted the Badr Corps and threatened to target them with lethal force if they did not leave the area within 24 hours, the group left the region around April 19.⁴³ Turkey and the ethnic Turkoman population added a final complication to the already difficult situation in northern Iraq. Coalition leaders were concerned about Turkey's reaction should the Kurds take steps to achieve their ambition of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq. Cleveland expected that Turkey might use the Kurdistan Workers Party's (PKK's) annual "spring offensive" and the instability in Iraq as an excuse to advance a larger Turkish military presence into northern Iraq. CJSOTF-N also judged that Turkey was using a Turkoman political party, the Iraqi Turkoman Front, to gain a foothold in Kirkuk and might use any ethnic incidents—however minor—involving the Turkomans as an excuse to infiltrate Turkish paramilitaries into the area. Turkey already used the Peace Monitoring Force, established by the United Nations (UN) at the conclusion of the Kurdish civil war in 1996, as a cover for Turkish special forces operations, and those, too, had the potential to expand to Kirkuk.⁴⁴

To prevent these various crises from becoming a general conflagration across the north, Cleveland had only three special forces battalions and the 173d Airborne Brigade at his disposal, plus the 26th MEU, the unit that had fired on the crowd in Mosul. The U.S. forces that had been bolstered by 60,000 peshmerga during the invasion now found

themselves responsible for preventing those same peshmerga allies from unsettling the complex ethno-religious issues that permeated the region, a task CJSOTF-N could not hope to accomplish with its limited means.

REPOSITIONING THE FORCE

With the transition to Phase IV underway, McKiernan, Wallace, and Lieutenant General James Conway met to discuss how best to position their forces to stabilize the country. McKiernan was faced with shortages in his task organization that he had not anticipated. Although his invasion force was sufficient for toppling the regime, he now had approximately 2 1/2 fewer divisions than he had expected to execute the Eclipse II plan. Because CFLCC had advanced on Baghdad so rapidly, the 4th Infantry Division, 1st Armored Division, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, 416th Engineer Brigade, and 352d Civil Affairs Command were still flowing into theater at the time the regime fell. More importantly, Rumsfeld had canceled the participation of the 1st Cavalry Division in the invasion in February 2003, but McKiernan had assumed that, along with the 1st Armored Division, the 1st Cavalry Division would be available for use with other follow-on forces in Phase IV.⁴⁵ He was therefore dumbfounded when Franks told him in the last days of April 2003 that the SECDEF had decided to off-ramp the 1st Cavalry Division. He would receive only the 1st Armored Division to augment his thinly spread units, especially considering that I MEF was already preparing to depart the theater and CFSOCC was likewise preparing to redeploy a significant portion of its forces. Franks had also given McKiernan explicit guidance on April 15 that "we're not staying and we're going to take as much risk leaving Iraq as we did attacking Iraq." With that bold statement in mind, and recognizing that with the impending departure of the Marines and special operations elements in CJSOTF-W, the thinly stretched remaining Army divisions would be responsible for securing most of the country, McKiernan and Wallace set about rearranging their units in accordance with the general plans they had discussed prior to the invasion.⁴⁶

As planned, they placed the boundary between V Corps and I MEF at Baghdad, with V Corps assuming responsibility for Baghdad itself as well as the provinces to the north and west of the city. I MEF was assigned all provinces south of Baghdad with the exception of Basrah, which remained under British control. The 3d Infantry Division, augmented by the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, remained in Baghdad before being relieved by the 1st Armored Division later in the summer and redeploying home. McKiernan and Wallace had intended to place the 101st Airborne Division in Baghdad as well, but with the growing crisis in the north, Wallace decided to dispatch the 101st—the only division whose air assets allowed for a rapid deployment—to confront the rising challenge in Mosul and Ninawa Province. Major General Raymond T. Odierno and the 4th Infantry Division relieved the Marines in Salahadin and Tamim (Kirkuk) Provinces, and the soon-to-arrive 3d ACR would move to Anbar to augment CJSOTF-W.⁴⁷ At CFLCC's direction, V Corps began building up Saddam International Airport (renamed Baghdad International Airport in mid-April) as the coalition's future headquarters for the theater.



Source: DoD photo by USAF Staff Sergeant Jeffrey A. Wolfe (Released).

**Major General Raymond T. Odierno, Commanding General,
4th Infantry Division (2001-2004).⁴⁸**

Two factors prevented the immediate reposturing of CFLCC's forces. The first was current unit positions. "The difficulty was that everyone was out of position to [move into their (planned) Phase IV areas] at the time the regime fell," recalled Wallace. The V Corps units could not move north until the Marines assumed responsibility for the southern zone, and the Marines could not move south until the 4th Infantry Division assumed control of Salahadin Province and the 3d Infantry Division took control of Baghdad in its entirety. In other words, the major units were about to conduct a "clockwise relief in place" so that the center could get set.⁴⁹ The other factor that prevented an immediate Phase IV reset was the need to provide security for the Shi'a holiday and its associated pilgrimage known as Arba'een, scheduled to occur between April 20 and 23. (This holiday commemorated the martyrdom of Imam Hussein in 680 AD, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. It involved a pilgrimage to the shrine city of Karbala, where Imam Hussein was killed by the army of Caliph Yazid.) Saddam had banned the pilgrimage for the previous 25 years, however, the coalition intended to facilitate Shi'a participation in the pilgrimage for the first time in the newly liberated Iraq. Wallace directed the 2d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, in Samawah with some augmentation from the 101st Airborne Division to provide security for the more than one million pilgrims who participated in this event.⁵⁰

With Arba'een complete, V Corps set about relieving I MEF of its responsibilities in Baghdad and northern Iraq. Between April 15 and 24, the 4th Infantry Division and the 3d ACR off-loaded the remainder of their equipment and personnel in Kuwait, and the 2d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, assumed control of Najaf, Karbala, and Hillah. The 4th Infantry Division moved north toward Baghdad, conducted a passage of lines through the 3d Infantry Division's battle space, and then relieved I MEF units in Samarra

and Tikrit, establishing full control of their new area of operations by April 20. The 4th Infantry Division assumed operational control of the 173d Airborne Brigade in Kirkuk and tactical control of CJSOTF-N by the end of April, after which CJSOTF-N handed the Kirkuk security mission to the 173d and then transferred the MeK camp in Diyala to the 4th Infantry Division's control.

As the 4th Infantry Division moved into the upper Tigris River Valley, two brigades of the 101st Airborne Division conducted one of the largest and longest air assaults in U.S. military history, moving almost 500 kilometers by helicopter from the Karbala region to Mosul to begin operations to calm the northern city. Elsewhere, V Corps completed its relief in place of the I MEF and CJSOTF-W units in Baghdad, freeing I MEF to move south and assume responsibility for Samawah, Diwaniya, Karbala, Najaf, and Hillah by April 23, and allowing the brigade of the 82d Airborne Division to move to Anbar Province in response to the deteriorating security situation there. British forces relieved I MEF in Maysan, and I MEF began to prepare the provinces under its control for the transition to a multinational headquarters so that it could redeploy to the United States.⁵¹

As this vast reset began, CFLCC became increasingly concerned about the transit of foreign fighters, former regime leaders and assets, and museum artifacts across Iraq's borders with Syria and Jordan. On April 10, CENTCOM had ordered CFSOCC to take control of Anbar's border crossings, where it was to prevent Iraqi regime leaders from escaping across the border while apprehending any foreign fighters trying to cross in either direction and preventing loot and cash from transiting out of the country. CJSOTF-N, recognizing that some of the top regime high-value targets (HVTs) were using Highway 1 out of Mosul to flee into Syria, moved to secure the highway to cut off that escape route.⁵² CJSOTF-W requested that it be relieved of the Hadithah Dam so it could begin securing border crossings in the area and hunt the HVTs on CENTCOM's "deck of cards."⁵³ Accordingly, a battalion of the 101st Airborne Division arrived at Hadithah Dam and relieved the CJSOTF-W forces there by April 20.

Securing border posts was not the only difficulty in Anbar. McKiernan had originally intended to put the 1st Cavalry Division in the province at the conclusion of major combat operations, but with that division no longer at his disposal, McKiernan and Wallace decided that Anbar would have to be an economy of force mission. As early as April 13, however, McKiernan's command had received reports that the Dulaim and Albu Risha tribes had taken control of military equipment formerly belonging to the Iraqi 12th Armored Division near Ramadi, and that they had also been somewhat successful in forcing foreign fighters out of the province. Because of these early reports, CFLCC had expected the situation in Anbar to be favorable to the coalition presence, but as the reset began, it became apparent that an armored cavalry regiment alone was insufficient to quell the deteriorating situation there.⁵⁴ Demonstrations in Fallujah and Anbar's provincial capital of Ramadi grew increasingly violent, with the local police either unwilling or unable to restrain the crowds or stop the looting. CFLCC assessed that former regime loyalists or paramilitaries remained in the area, which had not been cleared during the invasion, and were inciting violence. Coalition analysts also suspected tribal factions were playing a role in the problem, but had little awareness of the root causes of local tensions in these areas. General Wallace temporarily sent the 3d Squadron, 7th Cavalry, to Ramadi on April 14 to better appraise the situation, but by the third week of April, Fallujah and

Ramadi were spiraling out of control, and the Ramadi police chief begged the coalition for reinforcements. Concluding that the situation in Anbar could not wait for the 3d ACR to arrive from Kuwait, Wallace decided to send the 2d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division in southern Iraq to Ramadi ahead of the 3d ACR's arrival in order to "thicken" the thin coalition presence there. Unfortunately, Anbaris became even further incensed when Soldiers of the 82d Airborne Division returned fire coming from a crowd of angry Fallujah citizens, killing 17 locals. The 3d ACR then took over the province from the 82d Airborne Division on April 28 after relieving the battalion of the 101st Airborne Division at Hadithah Dam.⁵⁵

Although the coalition's corps and division boundaries fell along Iraq's provincial borders and were based on what CFLCC and its subordinate units had judged to be operationally appropriate, they were incongruous in many places with Iraq's physical and human terrain and were not coordinated with ORHA's northern, central, and southern zones of influence.⁵⁶ The division and corps boundaries also did not account for the areas most likely to be difficult to control, nor did they align with the zones of operation Saddam had used to control the country. As a result, the new coalition operational boundaries created opportunities for hostile forces to exploit. The 4th Infantry Division's area of operations included Salahadin and Diyala Provinces, split by the Hamrin mountain range and the Diyala River, while the boundary between the 101st and the 4th Infantry Division arbitrarily bisected the upper Tigris River Valley. This arrangement meant that the division controlling Tikrit also controlled the Diyala Valley, even though Diyala was customarily linked to Baghdad, while the traditional link between Mosul and Tikrit was broken. The boundary between the 101st and the Anbar-based 3d ACR, meanwhile, bisected the Jazeera, the large desert in northwestern Iraq that stretched into Syria, placing the traditional smuggling routes between Iraq and Syria on a seam between units. Although a boundary between the Baghdad-based 3d Infantry Division and the 3d ACR was established, the allocation of forces created a large gap in the physical presence of coalition forces between western Baghdad and Fallujah, leaving uncovered the "western belts" area that later became al-Qaeda in Iraq's biggest staging base against Baghdad. Finally, Anbar Province itself, later the heartland of Sunni resistance groups, was an enormous area that bordered Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, far too large for a brigade-sized element to control.

By the end of April, CFLCC units were in their new, unanticipated Phase IV areas, adjusting to new surroundings with little background data or guidance on how to proceed. Few, if any, CFLCC units had had time to mature security operations completely in their initial positions before the entire coalition spent 3 weeks conducting reliefs in place, just as Iraq's urban areas most urgently needed security. Additionally, CFLCC was so busy repositioning units that it had little time to provide an overarching strategic direction to its subordinate units. As a result, divisions in each region developed their own mechanisms for addressing their unique circumstances. The 101st Airborne Division established a civil-military operations center in Mosul and prepared to host municipal elections. The 4th Infantry Division in the Tikrit area focused on presence patrols and security operations in its contentious areas which had been the most fervent Saddamist strongholds and had never been cleared during the invasion phase. The 82d Airborne Division transitioned from conducting pilgrimage security to intensive patrolling and

security operations in the increasingly restive Anbar Province. The U.S. Marines and British forces in southern Iraq focused on stability operations but implemented force protection standards in accordance with local commanders' guidance rather than CFLCC's direction.⁵⁷ It was becoming clear that CFLCC's troop numbers had been sufficient to topple the regime, but, as General Eric Shinseki had predicted, were inadequate for securing the country, especially without the expected assistance of the Iraqi Army.

MILITANTS AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Foreign Fighters, Fedayeen, and IEDs

On April 15, CFLCC made the determination that all Iraqi conventional and Republican Guard forces had abandoned their positions and were combat ineffective. Various CFLCC and CFSOCC units accepted the sporadic surrenders of senior military officials and commanders at the corps level and below, while a special operations task force began searching for fugitive members of the senior military leadership. Most of the Ba'ath Party militias and Fedayeen were believed to have either fled or gone underground in Iraq's major cities as well. Initially, CFLCC believed that residual attacks against coalition troops were the work of foreign fighters, not Iraqis. In mid-April, CFLCC analysts judged that foreign fighters were the most significant enemy threat in Baghdad and believed them to be responsible for the sporadic ambushes and sniper fire directed against coalition troops. By late April, however, CFLCC shifted from targeting foreign fighters to destroying hostile former regime elements and death squads that coalition analysts now believed to be behind ambushes, sniper fire, and grenade attacks. Concerns about this activity increased as Saddam's April 28 birthday approached, and CFLCC units prepared for widespread attacks and demonstrations spurred by the former regime elements. The nuclei of these activities were Tikrit, where the 4th Infantry Division encountered large pockets of resistance from Taji to Bayji; and Anbar, where the 82d Airborne Division and the 3d ACR had difficulty addressing the former regime threat within the almost daily protests in Ramadi and Fallujah.⁵⁸

Coalition ground forces also encountered a type of attack they had not really seen during the invasion—remote-detonated and suicide improvised explosive devices (IED) and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED). The number of suicide bombings and remote-detonated IEDs steadily increased throughout April. On April 14, Marines on patrol in Baghdad were seriously wounded when attacked by a suicide bomber wearing an explosive vest, a practice that became gruesomely common in the months and years to come.⁵⁹

Shi'a Reprisals and Hints of Iranian Influence

Unknown to the coalition at first, Iraqi society had only just begun to respond to the absence of a repressive and sectarian rule. Reprisal attacks against the former regime began almost immediately. The Badr Corps militia led by Hadi al-Amiri had spent months preparing lists of regime loyalists it intended to target once Saddam was no longer in power. According to Iraqi politician Ali Allawi, shortly after major combat operations

ceased, approximately 10,000 Badr Corps personnel organized into death squads began hunting and executing senior Sunni regime loyalists, as well as Shi'a citizens who had collaborated with the regime. Badr acquired weapons by looting Ba'ath Party militia and Iraqi Army depots, rapidly established footholds in Basrah, Amarah, and Baghdad, and set its sights on Diyala as well. In response to the Badr reprisals, some other militias and tribes began to form protection forces in Baghdad and across southern Iraq. CFLCC, meanwhile, began to monitor Badr Corps activities and infiltrations through Maysan Province more closely as reports surfaced that the group was acquiring weapons from supporters inside Iraq.⁶⁰

In the southern provinces, I MEF and the British 1st Armoured Division also saw signs that groups linked to Iran were having a disruptive effect in their areas of responsibility. Iranian-linked Shi'a clerics used anti-coalition messages in their Friday religious sermons in April, something Sunni imams were doing elsewhere as well. Coalition units also suspected Iranian agents of inciting public disturbances and undermining the coalition's ability to establish new local governments, leading CFLCC to caution its units that Iran might try to develop "shadow governments" in southern Iraqi towns. These concerns were amplified when, on April 25, citizens of Kut removed a new city council member they suspected of being an Iranian puppet. I MEF and British troops later apprehended some Iranian citizens in Iraq and reported that Iran might be sending agents to infiltrate the Arba'een pilgrimage and disrupt coalition stability operations more broadly.⁶¹

The Khoei Murder

In April 2003, coalition troops inadvertently stumbled into the longstanding intra-Shi'a battle among rival religious families in Najaf. On April 5, Ayatollah Abdul Majid al-Khoei, son of the former Grand Marja' and a leader of the 1991 uprising, returned to Najaf from his 12-year exile in London. Upon arriving in the holy city, Khoei moved to the Imam Ali shrine. News of his return quickly spread to supporters of Moqtada Sadr, son of the murdered Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr. At the time, Moqtada Sadr was largely unknown to the coalition other than as the son of the venerated Shi'a cleric assassinated by Saddam's regime in 1999. Sadr and his followers, however, had a popular following in Najaf and viewed Khoei as a Western-backed interloper, much as they viewed the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq and the Badr Corps as Iranian-backed interlopers. On April 10, personnel from the 5th Special Forces Group in Najaf introduced the 101st Airborne Division leadership to Khoei, whose presence in the city seemed to offer a local partnership for the stability operations and reconstruction to come. However, Khoei was dead before the day was out. Within hours of his arrival, a mob of Sadr's supporters made their way to the Imam Ali shrine, where Khoei was meeting with Haider Kelidar, the shrine's regime-appointed caretaker. Attacking Khoei and his small entourage, the Sadrist mob, reportedly led by future Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous) leader Qais al-Khazali and Moqtada Sadr's brother-in-law, Riyadh al-Nuri, killed Kelidar and dragged the gunshot-wounded Khoei down the street to Sadr's door, where Sadr allegedly denied Khoei sanctuary. The Sadrist mob then killed Khoei in a nearby shop.⁶² This shocking murder, of which the coalition was only dimly aware when it happened, had profound political consequences for Iraq and the coalition.

Two notable events occurred on May 1, 2003. At the strategic level, then-President George W. Bush announced that U.S. forces had achieved victory and declared an end to major combat operations in Iraq. The pronouncement took place aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* in front of a banner emblazoned with the words, "Mission Accomplished."⁶³ That optimistic declaration belied the semi-controlled chaos on the ground. The other event was less publicized, but was important for the ground forces: on May 1, CENTCOM formally announced a full transition to Phase IV stability operations, and CFLCC, instead of transitioning its operations to a follow-on command or agency, became dual-hatted as the Combined Joint Task Force for Iraq, numbered CJTF-7.

It was already apparent to the ground force commanders that the mission was far from accomplished. When Saddam fled the capital, the physical presence of the Iraqi state had disappeared, and no entity or organization, including the coalition, was postured to take its place. Though most of the looting and rioting had died down by the end of April, governance, utilities, and threats to stability varied hugely from region to region. With little planning or direction, CFLCC's units took on missions to defeat the remaining enemy forces, stop looting, contain demonstrations and reprisals, distribute humanitarian assistance, engage in widespread reconstruction, and build Iraqi governance capacity; but they did so by using unit boundaries that were misguided for Iraq's geography and human terrain.

CFLCC also struggled to allocate its comparatively small number of forces properly for the growing operational requirements at hand, while incorporating a host of new coalition partners, humanitarian aid organizations, and contractors into its battle space. Enemy activity increased in April, and enemy tactics, techniques, and procedures, as well as its lack of identifiable organizations, confounded the coalition. These mounting challenges were oddly juxtaposed with I MEF's and the 3d Infantry Division's preparations to leave Iraq. The coalition military's inability to meet Iraqi expectations and secure the country in the wake of a collapsed state also initiated a divide between the coalition and Iraqi society that only grew wider as coalition leaders set about implementing deeply misguided policies in the summer of 2003.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 5

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2. Interviews, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014; Godfroy with General (Ret.) David McKiernan, November 24, 2014, Boston, MA.

3. E-mail, Wallace to Godfroy, October 28, 2014.

4. Interview, Godfroy with McKiernan, November 24, 2014. McKiernan discussed the situation, referencing a slide his C-2, Major General James "Spider" Marks, had prepared in April 2003. McKiernan used the slide as the basis for giving his subordinate commanders operational context.
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14. Quotes from Transcript, CFLCC BUA Notes, April 10, 2003.
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33. Rudd, *Reconstructing Iraq*, pp. 165, 172–176, 181, conclusion; Cdr Sitreps and OPSUMs, CFLCC, April 28–May 1, 2003.
34. Cdr Sitreps and OPSUMs, CFLCC, April 21–28, 2003.
35. Rudd, *Reconstructing Iraq*, pp. 153–154.
36. Interview, Sobchak with Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Mark Grdovich, September 19, 2014, Fort Bragg, NC.
37. Ibid.; Human Rights Watch Report, Reversing the Arabization of Kirkuk, available from www.hrw.org/reports/2004/iraq0804/7.htm.
38. Interviews, Sobchak with Tovo, June 25, 2014; with Lieutenant General Charles Cleveland, June 4, 2014, Fort Bragg, NC; with Grdovich, September 19, 2014.
39. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM History Brief, May 14, 2003; Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, pp. 373–375; Intel Sums, CJSOTF-N, April 9–30, 2003; Interviews, Sobchak with Tovo, June 25, 2014, with Cleveland, June 4, 2014.
40. Combined Forces Command (CFC) FRAGO 09–0115, referenced in Cdr Sitrep, CFLCC, April 14, 2003; Cdr Sitreps and OPSUMs, CFLCC, April 14–19, 2003; Intel Sum, CJSOTF-N, April 20, 2003; Interview, Rudd with Colonel Joseph Anderson, July 29, 2003, Mosul, Iraq.
41. Federation of American Scientists (FAS) Intelligence Research Program, Mujahedeen e-Khalq (MeK), July 13, 2004, available from fas.org/irp/world/para/mek.htm.
42. Intel Sums, CJSOTF-N, 9–13, April 24–26, 2003; Interview, Sobchak with Cleveland, June 4, 2014; Briscoe et al., *All Roads Lead to Baghdad*, p. 365.
43. Intel Sums, CJSOTF-N, April 17–19, 2003; Interview, Sobchak with Cleveland, June 4, 2014.

44. Cdr Sitreps and OPSUMs, CFLCC, April 28-May 1, 2003; Intel Sums, CJSOTF-N, April 15-30, 2003.
45. OPLAN Eclipse II Draft, March 2003; Interviews, Story with McKiernan, June 20, 2003; Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014.
46. Interviews, Story with McKiernan, June 20, 2003; Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014. Quote from Interview, Godfroy with McKiernan, November 24, 2014. During this last interview, McKiernan provided the authors with a slide from the fall of 2003 differentiating between units that were combat ready on G-day, units that were anticipated to participate in the entire operation from Phase I to Phase IV and redeployment, and units that actually came into the theater.
47. Interview, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014.
48. DoD photo by USAF Staff Sergeant Jeffrey A. Wolfe, "Major General Ray Odierno, Commander of the 4th Infantry Division, arrives at Forward Operating Base Bernstein, in the area around Tuz, Iraq, just prior to the beginning of the FOB's dedication ceremony," DIMOC Identifier 040123-F-BA503-005, October 29, 2003, Released to Public.
49. Interview, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014.
50. Cdr Sitreps and OPSUMs, CFLCC, April 20-27, 2003.
51. *Ibid.*, April 16-May 1, 2003; Interview, Sobchak with Cleveland, June 4, 2014.
52. CENTCOM FRAGO 09-091, "Control of the Iraqi Border Crossing Areas," April 10, 2003; Intel Sums, CJSOTF-N, April 10-14, 2003.
53. The "deck of cards" was literally a deck of 52 playing cards created by CENTCOM with pictures of the Ba'athist regime's most-wanted figures on the reverse of each card. The cards were distributed to units so they would recognize the high-value targets if they came across them. CFC FRAGO 09-098, referenced in Cdr Sitrep, CFLCC, April 12, 2003; Cdr Sitrep CFLCC, April 17, 2003. The dam referenced in this situation report is the Kadasea Dam, which is likely the Hadithah Dam, which sits over the Qadisiyah Lake. Cdr Sitrep, CFLCC, April 20, 2003.
54. Interview, Godfroy with McKiernan, November 24, 2014; Transcript, CFLCC Cdr BUA Notes, April 13, 2003.
55. Transcript, CFLCC Cdr BUA Notes, April 13, 2003; Cdr Sitreps and OPSUMs, CFLCC, April 21-May 1, 2003; Interview, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014; Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, p. 527. Rudd, *Reconstructing Iraq*, pp. 160-161, 171-172, 192; CFLCC FRAGO 254 to Operation Order (OPORD) 03-032. While in Kuwait, ORHA divided Iraq into three zones: a northern region consisting of Mosul, Kirkuk, and all of the Kurdish-controlled provinces; a central region focused on Baghdad that incorporated Diyala, Anbar, and Salahadin; and a southern region containing all of the provinces south of Baghdad.
56. Rudd, *Reconstructing Iraq*, pp. 160-161, 171-172, 192; CFLCC FRAGO 254 to Operation ORDER (OPORD) 03-032. While in Kuwait, ORHA divided Iraq into three zones: a northern region consisting of Mosul, Kirkuk, and all of the Kurdish-controlled provinces; a central region focused on Baghdad that incorporated Diyala, Anbar, and Salahadin; and a southern region containing all of the provinces south of Baghdad.
57. Cdr Sitreps and OPSUMs, CFLCC, April 21-30, 2003.
58. *Ibid.*, April 11-19, 2003; Intel Sums, CJSOTF-N, April 10-15, 2003.
59. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM History Brief, May 14, 2003.

60. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*, p. 139; Conference Call Interview, CSA OIF Study Group with Colonel (Ret.) Derek J. Harvey, January 8, 2014; Intel Sums, CJSOTF-N, April 15–25, 2003; Cdr Sitreps and OPSUMs, CFLCC, April 21–28, 2003.

61. Cdr Sitreps and OPSUMs, CFLCC, April 21–28, 2003.

62. Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada al-Sadr, The Shi'a Revival, and the Struggle for Iraq*, New York: Scribner, 2008, pp. 124–125.

63. Jarrett Murphy, "Text of Bush Speech," *Associated Press*, May 1, 2003, available from www.cbsnews.com/news/text-of-bush-speech-01-05-2003.

CHAPTER 6

LOST IN TRANSITION, MAY-JULY 2003

Throughout the month of April, Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) units had struggled to address the gamut of operational and strategic challenges of a postwar Iraq. The declared transition from major combat operations to stability operations on May 1 foreshadowed several other transitions that ultimately proved disruptive to the coalition's post-combat efforts. Over the course of the next 45 days, many key leaders and organizations central to the invasion left the country, as did a large number of troops. The remaining theater command was a sparsely staffed, under-resourced corps headquarters commanded by a general officer who had arrived in Iraq weeks before as a division commander. The senior diplomat who arrived to partner with him had extensive antiterrorism and reconstruction experience, but none that was on the scale of Iraq's requirements.

Additionally, the overarching assumption governing Phase IV planning—that the military would be responsible for fighting the war and then quickly turn operations over to civilian control—evaporated as the civilian body formed for the job, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), arrived in the country with far too little capacity to relieve the military of its stabilization tasks. Transitions in the upper echelons of the theater created a vacuum at the operational level of war that the U.S. Army, Marine, and British forces on the ground filled by adapting to the new requirements of their diverse and wide-ranging areas of operations. However, the coalition divisions and brigades soon found themselves dealing with disparate regions of a country whose society was imploding—a process made far worse by disastrous coalition policies that collapsed the Iraqi state in May-June 2003, creating a dangerous power vacuum at all levels.

TRANSITIONS AT ALL LEVELS

Civilian Oversight: From Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance to Coalition Provisional Authority

In the days following Saddam Hussein's fall, CFLCC, as the nominal Combined Joint Task Force-Iraq (CJTF-I) headquarters, made a concerted effort to consolidate reconstruction and governance activities to bolster the capability of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) and accelerate the transition of Iraq from military to civilian control. ORHA's primary focus was securing the Iraqi ministries, defining security requirements, making emergency payments to the Iraqi military and civil servants, and developing the Iraqi police.¹ CJTF-I intended to continue building up ORHA's capability in accordance with its Eclipse II lines of operation.²

Viewed from Washington, however, ORHA appeared to be overwhelmed, lacking even basic communications and logistical infrastructure, which precluded even its movement into Iraq without assistance. Furthermore, ORHA was too small to foster Iraqi governance capacity at the ministerial level, having been developed on the assumption that

Iraqi ministries would continue to function after a short hiatus. ORHA's mandate, too, was more as an emergency relief force than an organization tailored for long-term reconstruction and capacity building. Recognizing that U.S. leaders had probably underestimated the requirements of managing a postwar Iraq, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice asked Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld whether he thought that the ORHA mission was failing. Rumsfeld agreed and informed Rice that he was working on some new ideas for the President.³

From the beginning of the Iraq campaign, then-President George W. Bush made it clear that he wanted the Department of Defense (DoD) to lead the reconstruction effort until it transitioned back to Iraqi control.⁴ His intent was to maintain a single chain of command for postwar operations and keep the responsibility for interim Iraqi governance squarely on the shoulders of DoD rather than the State Department. These principles led to the creation of the Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority—a more robust organization than ORHA—empowered to bypass the interagency processes and bureaucracy in Washington in order to make important policy decisions in the face of a dynamic situation. CPA would replace ORHA as the ground-level agency responsible for Iraq's reconstruction and for establishing a new Iraqi Government to which the coalition could transfer control.⁵

The President and SECDEF selected Ambassador L. Paul Bremer to lead this new organization. Bremer had no Iraq or Middle East experience, but had plenty of interagency experience and had served in Afghanistan and East Africa. He had also served as the Chairman of the National Commission on Terrorism in 1999 and on the National Academy of Sciences' Committee on Science and Technology for Countering Terrorism in 2002. After the President and SECDEF confirmed that he would indeed lead CPA in April 2003, Bremer spent 2 weeks assembling his team and attending briefings to prepare for the task ahead of him. The result of these hasty efforts, however, was a CPA that was anemically manned by civilians with little experience working with the military and ill-prepared for the challenges that lay ahead.⁶

Back in Baghdad, Lieutenant General (Ret.) Jay M. Garner was unaware of the effort in Washington to bolster the CPA and was surprised when Rumsfeld notified him on April 24 that Bush planned to appoint a new presidential envoy to run the Iraq reconstruction effort just a week after Garner had arrived in Baghdad. Garner was not the only one surprised by Bremer's appointment. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad had also been working as a special envoy and ambassador-at-large to the Iraqi opposition since 2002, and in April 2003, he was in Iraq working to link the Iraqi expatriate leaders with indigenous Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish leaders to form a new Iraqi Government. When Garner informed Khalilzad that Bremer was assuming responsibility for governance in Iraq, Khalilzad expressed shock that he was being replaced and that no one in the administration had notified him. After threatening to resign, he was only convinced to remain in Baghdad temporarily at Garner's entreaty.⁷

On June 15, ORHA was formally redesignated as CPA, and Bremer spread the remaining ORHA personnel across seven major directorates: oil, civil affairs, economics, aid, operations, security affairs, and press and public affairs. His new organization was thinly manned by a conglomerate of civilians and military personnel who had volunteered for Iraq from Washington or had worked in ORHA. Although Bremer complained that many

of the CPA personnel who volunteered lacked the requisite experience for the tasks they were assigned, few additional personnel were forthcoming from outside Iraq.⁸ It would be the military headquarters in Baghdad that would fully staff the CPA.

Theater Command: From CFLCC to V Corps

On May 1, 2003, CFLCC formally became dual-hatted as Combined Joint Task Force-Iraq (CJTF-I), which was numbered soon after as CJTF-7. The rebranding of CFLCC was another sign that, as far as most U.S. policymakers and military leaders outside Iraq were concerned, major combat operations were over.⁹ Generals David McKiernan and William Wallace, however, were still grappling with balancing the complexities of Iraq's security and reconstruction requirements with the number of forces they had been assigned. They were thus both surprised when the SECDEF abruptly decided to send McKiernan's CFLCC and Wallace home and make the V Corps the new CJTF-7 headquarters under the command of newly minted three-star general Ricardo Sanchez. Rumsfeld made this decision in early May and originally instructed that Wallace should leave the country immediately, but given the uncertainty of the situation, McKiernan persuaded Rumsfeld to delay the change of command until June 15, 2003.¹⁰



Adnan Pachachi (left) Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez (center).
Source: DoD photo by Staff Sergeant Reynaldo Ramon, USAF (Released).

Iraqi Governing Council Leader Adnan Pachachi and Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, Commanding General, V Corps/CJTF-7, Speak to the Media During a Press Conference in Iraq.¹¹

From the time they were notified about the changing of the guard for CJTF-7, Wallace and McKiernan prepared to move their headquarters and transition responsibility for the mission. Wallace had already made plans to split the V Corps into a main and supporting headquarters but had intended to put his main headquarters at Balad, 64 kilometers north of Baghdad, from which he believed he could exercise better control over the V Corps subordinate commands. That effort came to an abrupt halt with the impending plans for ORHA to leave Iraq, and Wallace decided instead to make Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) the operational headquarters for V Corps as it became CJTF-7, assuming that the new civilian authority in CPA would make its headquarters in central Baghdad.¹²

Once on the ground, Bremer was quick to establish his authority and harness the military presence under his leadership. Upon his arrival in Iraq, he informed Wallace and then Sanchez that they worked for him and that he wanted them by his side in the CPA headquarters in central Baghdad for the reconstruction effort.¹³ It was then clear that V Corps needed to split its headquarters to co-locate with CPA and simultaneously manage its operational and theater requirements. Sanchez left CJTF-7 operational headquarters at BIAP with V Corps deputy commander, Major General Walter Wojdakowski, in charge, while Sanchez himself and some key staff members moved to Baghdad's Green Zone with the CPA. From that point forward, the CJTF-7 commander's responsibilities became oriented on theater strategy and policy, while the remainder of the V Corps headquarters at BIAP ran combat operations, published orders, and built infrastructure.¹⁴

The May 18 CFLCC order setting out these command and control changes also established the mission and timelines for the transfer of responsibility for Iraq operations to V Corps, which became dual-hatted as CJTF-7 on June 15, 2003. The order further stated that I MEF was under the tactical control of CJTF-7, while CJTF-7 itself was under the operational control of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). CFLCC would revert to its pre-conflict designation as the Third U.S. Army, and its Iraq-related responsibilities would change to reconstituting forces, force sustainment, and redeployment operations from bases in Kuwait and Qatar.¹⁵

The change from CFLCC to CJTF-7 left the Iraq theater in the hands of a much smaller and less capable headquarters than the one that had led the invasion. The headquarters that had run the ground war and conducted the most in-depth planning and preparation for Phase IV of any military or civilian agency suddenly found itself in Kuwait, while the new, smaller, and less experienced CJTF-7 found itself managing a two-corps-sized force with few of the resources needed to prosecute stability operations at the strategic and operational level. Unlike CFLCC headquarters – which was at more than 100 percent strength with approximately 1,200 personnel and contained general officers in all its key staff positions – the V Corps headquarters was far smaller, with fewer than 300 personnel.

The V Corps would also do all of this with a new commander. While General Tommy Franks had long planned to retire from CENTCOM in the summer of 2003, Wallace believed he would remain in command of V Corps until at least fall 2003, when his scheduled 2 years as a corps commander were complete. However, Wallace's widely reported comments about the Fedayeen as an unplanned-for enemy during the invasion had irritated Rumsfeld, who had come to believe Wallace had displayed a lack of aggressiveness during and after the invasion. Although McKiernan had been able to dissuade Rumsfeld

from relieving Wallace in the middle of the invasion, he was unable to convince the SECDEF to maintain Wallace as the V Corps commander for Phase IV.¹⁶

Sanchez, Wallace's replacement, was identified as the next V Corps commander in April 2003, but he, too, had not expected the change of command to take place before the fall. He had arrived in Iraq shortly after the invasion in command of the 1st Armored Division, which was replacing the exhausted 3d Infantry Division in Baghdad, and Sanchez had expected to remain in that more limited capacity for several months as a two-star general. Now, just days later, he learned he would be in command of the entire theater within a month. Still, Sanchez had participated in the planning for Iraq and his division, in particular, was well-briefed on operations in Baghdad. He was also optimistic that his joint and interagency experience from the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) and, more recently, his experience leading a multinational force in Kosovo had prepared him to manage another joint, interagency, and multinational organization in Iraq. His experience working in a joint environment placed him high in Rumsfeld's favor, suggesting that he possessed enough credibility with the SECDEF to ensure he received the support he needed. Therefore, Sanchez took command of CJTF-7 on June 15, expecting a challenging but not impossible mission.¹⁷

Important Individual Transitions

In addition to the major organizational transitions that took place in Iraq in the summer of 2003, many of the key personnel and much of the military's resident Iraq expertise moved out of the theater. At the end of April 2003, Franks informed Rumsfeld of his intent to retire that summer. Feeling that his mission was complete now that the Iraqi regime had been toppled, Franks had no desire to follow through with what he anticipated would be a messy and lengthy postwar period, and the CENTCOM commander had even begun plans to take leave in the Caribbean in May before Rumsfeld intervened to deny the leave request. Franks proposed that his deputy, Lieutenant General John Abizaid, replace him as the CENTCOM commander, and Rumsfeld agreed. From that point onward, Franks largely disengaged from leading efforts in Iraq, leaving Abizaid with the difficult task of running CENTCOM without actually being its commander. The Pentagon announced at the end of May that Abizaid would be promoted to four-star general and succeed Franks on July 7, 2003.¹⁸

Abizaid's selection as CENTCOM commander aligned well with his professional and personal background. An Olmsted Scholar and Arabist of Lebanese descent, Abizaid had considerable experience with the Middle East and Arab culture. His efforts to focus CENTCOM and the Joint Staff on Phase IV operations in the fall and winter of 2002, combined with the engagements he conducted with Iraq's neighbors before the invasion, gave him ample relevant regional experience. In fact, the original plan for the post-invasion command in Iraq had Abizaid commanding a CENTCOM forward command post in Baghdad, and he later was slated as the commander for the projected Combined Joint Task Force-Iraq.¹⁹ As the CENTCOM commander, however, Abizaid needed to consider many other countries in addition to Iraq and the Middle East, as well as the broader Global War on Terrorism.



John P. Abizaid (front center). Source: DoD photo by John Valceanu (Released).

General John P. Abizaid, Commanding General, CENTCOM, With Members of Multi-National Division–Central South.²⁰

Across Iraq, routine Army institutional transitions were also taking place. Sanchez's replacement at the 1st Armored Division, Brigadier General Martin E. Dempsey, did not arrive to take over command of the division until September, so Brigadier General Fred "Doug" Robinson, Sanchez's deputy, assumed command in the interim. Just as Robinson took command, all of the division's brigade commanders who had recently embarked on Phase IV operations in Baghdad were replaced as well, leaving few leaders with Iraq experience in charge and putting many new personalities together within that division alone. Elsewhere, several other brigade and battalion commanders changed command as part of the Army's standard 2-year command cycle. Substantial numbers of Army field grade officers and senior noncommissioned officers who had participated in the Iraq planning and combat operations also left for new assignments or the next level of professional military education.²¹

The final transition that indirectly affected Iraq was General Eric Shinseki's retirement in the midsummer. On June 11, 2003, Shinseki sent Rumsfeld a lengthy "End of Tour Memorandum" articulating how he believed that many of his intentions and actions as

the Chief of Staff of the Army had been misconstrued by the Office of the SECDEF. The memorandum also reinforced the emphasis on Army transformation and asked the secretary to maintain momentum in that direction.²² After Shinseki retired on July 31, his Vice Chief, General John M. “Jack” Keane, became the acting Chief of Staff of the Army, charged with both leading Army transformation and supporting two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

WMD Mission: From 75th Exploitation Task Force to Iraq Survey Group

In addition to securing conventional weapons caches, one of CFLCC’s key tasks was to secure, investigate, and exploit weapons of mass destruction (WMD) sites, a mission assigned to the 75th Field Artillery Brigade. It quickly emerged that the scale of the problem was more than the 75th Field Artillery Brigade could handle. The sensitive site exploitation mission had been secondary to the invasion itself during CENTCOM’s planning, and assigning the 75th Field Artillery Brigade had almost been an afterthought.²⁴ The 75th Field Artillery Brigade’s leadership recognized early on that they were not adequately equipped or operationally embedded in the plan. The security vacuum after the invasion hampered the unit in deploying its teams and accessing the suspected sites without security support. It also had no access to Iraqi Government documents about the WMD program. Nor did the 75th Field Artillery Brigade follow the prioritized list of suspected WMD sites it had received. Instead, the 75th Field Artillery Brigade’s inspection teams tended to move quickly around the country responding to any and all reports of sites that might be associated with WMD.²⁵

The 75th Field Artillery Brigade’s failure to uncover large WMD stockpiles in its first month in Iraq was a serious matter for policymakers in Washington. At the recommendation of Under SECDEF for Intelligence Stephen A. Cambone and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) Director Vice Admiral Lowell E. Jacoby, Rumsfeld moved to supplant the 75th Field Artillery Brigade with a much larger Iraq Survey Group (ISG). The ISG mission was threefold: to locate U.S. Navy pilot Captain Michael “Scott” Speicher shot down over Iraq in 1991; to gather evidence of the regime’s ties to terrorism and war crimes; and, most importantly, to locate Saddam’s WMDs and the associated programs that supposedly produced them.²⁶

With several hundred people drawn from across the intelligence community, the ISG was led by Major General Keith W. Dayton, DIA’s Director of Operations, with David A. Kay serving as chief scientist. Although the shorthanded 75th Exploitation Task Force expected to be integrated into the ISG, that never happened. On June 22, the ISG formally took charge of the WMD mission, and the 75th Field Artillery Brigade redeployed in frustration, bringing an unceremonious end to the unit’s abortive mission to verify the *casus belli* of the Iraq invasion.²⁷



Source: U.S. Army photo by Mr. Scott Davis (Released).

**General John M. “Jack” Keane,
Vice Chief of Staff of the
Army (1999-2003).²³**

THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE IRAQI STATE AND SOCIETY

The coalition military had invaded Iraq with the intent of toppling the Iraq regime but had assumed that, beyond the regime, the state administrative apparatus would remain largely intact. The invading U.S. forces had also expected to have assistance from the Iraqi military to maintain a secure environment and enable a peaceful handover to a transitional Iraqi Government. Once on the ground, however, U.S. officials made a series of decisions that dramatically expanded the invasion's impact on the Iraqi state and society, precipitating a governance vacuum at all levels in Iraq.

The Disbanding of the Army and Outlawing of the Ba'ath Party

The unexpected pairing of the CJTF-7 headquarters and the new CPA in May 2003 was rocked by immediate and sharp differences of opinion about the nature of their relationship. Although Bremer ostensibly worked for the SECDEF, his approach in practice resembled that of a presidential envoy consulting directly with the White House rather than with DoD or the rest of the interagency. The CPA and Bremer were under the impression that they would command the military forces by issuing military orders designed to fulfill CPA's objectives. Meanwhile, CJTF-7, under Sanchez, believed that the relationship was one in which military leaders would set their own priorities and direct their own operations to support CPA's objectives.²⁸ For his part, Abizaid later noted that the formal relationship between CENTCOM and CPA was never made clear to him.²⁹ The most difficult policies that CJTF-7 had to operationalize in the first months of CPA's tenure were those dealing with de-Ba'athification, the dissolution of the Iraqi Army, and the control of weapons. The National Security Council (NSC) had been working on a de-Ba'athification plan for Iraq within the U.S. interagency for months, and CENTCOM and CFLCC both had plans to recall Iraqi civil servants and select members of the military to run the government and secure the country. Both the NSC and CENTCOM agreed that the Ba'ath Party itself should be outlawed, but, as Rice put it, "the question was to what degree were you going to allow government employees and military people to retain their positions."³⁰

The general thought among senior U.S. officials was that members of the top two levels of the Ba'ath Party – that constituted only a small fraction of the Iraqi population – should be prohibited from holding office with some exceptions, but that all other Ba'ath Party members could denounce the party and remain in position through a separate process. CENTCOM, for its part, planned to disband select segments of the Iraqi military that were loyal to Saddam, but intended to retain at least the regular army to assist with reconstruction. The NSC and ORHA plan for the Iraqi military called for the retention of about five divisions of the Iraqi Regular Army, with a select portion of field grade officers removed by a relatively forgiving de-Ba'athification policy. Like CENTCOM's plans, the interagency proposal was to use the retrained Iraqi military for reconstruction and stabilization tasks, keeping Iraqis who were used to wielding weapons gainfully employed.³¹

Bremer, however, arrived in Baghdad with very different guidance and intentions on de-Ba'athification. On May 9 – his last day spent at the Pentagon before going to Baghdad – Bremer received his orders in a memorandum from Rumsfeld, which included

instructions to “actively oppose” the legacy organizations loyal to Saddam, including the Ba’ath Party and regime security organizations. That afternoon, Bremer also paid a visit to Under SECDEF Douglas Feith, who showed him a draft order for the de-Ba’athification of Iraqi society that would marginalize the top four levels of the Ba’ath Party, thereby expanding the prohibition to tens of thousands of additional Ba’athists. According to Bremer, he understood that the order as written had been reviewed and approved by the White House, DoD, and Department of State. Although Feith planned to have Garner issue the order immediately, Bremer argued that the order was so important that it should wait until he arrived in Baghdad to issue it himself, a move that Bremer believed would establish his authority as he took up his duties in Iraq.³²

Bremer’s thoughts on how to manage the former regime security institutions were shaped by conversations that his senior adviser for defense and security affairs, Walter B. Slocombe, had held in May with Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld, who judged that most Iraqis feared the return of Saddam Hussein’s repressive security institutions and that the Iraqi Army had melted away of its own accord after the regime collapsed. Additionally, all of these institutions were predominantly Sunni and not representative of the Iraqi population, or so the DoD leaders believed. On May 19, Bremer sent a memorandum to Rumsfeld recommending that all of these institutions – including the Iraqi Army – be formally dissolved, to which the secretary agreed.³³

Once in Baghdad, Bremer discussed de-Ba’athification and the status of the Iraqi military with Abizaid, indicating to the presumptive CENTCOM commander that de-Ba’athification efforts focusing on only the top two levels of the Ba’ath Party were not stringent enough and that he intended to disband the Iraqi Army formally.³⁴ Abizaid thought Bremer’s plans extreme, “I think the model that was being used in Washington was the WWII model of de-Nazification,” Abizaid recalled later, “Saddam [was] Hitler, the Republican Guards the SS, and the Ba’ath Party the Nazi Party. This notion of this great crusade against evil had no bearing in reality to what was on the ground and the historical context of Middle Eastern politics and Iraq politics in particular.” Abizaid protested to Franks that Bremer’s proposals went far too deep into Iraqi society and were bound to cause problems, but his protests had no effect on the policy.³⁵

In retrospect, it appears the more moderate de-Ba’athification proposals previously approved by the President and the Executive Steering Group in Washington before the invasion either were not transmitted to Bremer or were overridden by those he received via the Office of the SECDEF as he moved forward with the de-Ba’athification order he had first viewed with Feith and Rumsfeld.³⁶ On May 16, 2003, Bremer issued CPA Order 1, De-Ba’athification of Iraqi Society, which banned Iraqis who had been in the upper four levels of the Ba’ath Party – rather than just the top two levels – from holding government office, effectively putting between 30,000 and 50,000 Iraqis out of work, including senior civil servants, military leaders, and university professors.³⁷

While Iraqis and the coalition military were still processing the implications of the de-Ba’athification order, Bremer issued CPA Order 2, The Dissolution of Entities, 1 week later on May 23, 2003, and just 4 days after his memo to Rumsfeld declaring his intention to take this step. CPA Order 2 dissolved most of Iraq’s security and intelligence apparatus, including the Ministry of Defense, Iraqi Intelligence Service, Special Security Organizations, and paramilitary forces. It also disbanded all branches of the Iraqi military in

their entirety, negating in a stroke the NSC plan for the new Iraqi Army and CENTCOM and CFLCC plans to recall it. CPA Order 2 also suspended pay for members of those entities and, because many security officials were also in the top four levels of the Ba'ath Party, it essentially prohibited them from public employment in the new Iraq.³⁸

The extensive de-Ba'athification policy had both immediate and far-reaching consequences. Because most senior civil servants and university professors across Iraq had been required to be level four or higher in the Ba'ath Party, many key players in the Iraqi ministries and education systems were either forced from their positions or opted to leave them in the absence of other instructions. This severely disrupted the reconstruction plans ORHA and CJTF-7 had been making. In the coalition, units discovered they now had to screen their scarce interpreters for Ba'ath Party membership and potentially arrest or dismiss them. The feedback that CPA and the coalition received about the policy ranged from "relief that [they] were purging Ba'ath Party members to outrage [they] were going overboard in [their] pursuit of former Ba'ath Party members."³⁹

The order to dissolve the Iraqi military generated a more inflammatory response. Although the Republican Guard was loyal to Saddam, the Iraqi Regular Army had been more distant from the regime and contained members from all of Iraq's ethno-religious communities. Its dissolution created a large population of seasoned military men who suddenly had no livelihood. The order to dissolve the Iraqi military resulted in increased demonstrations and demands for jobs, pay, and the immediate reconstitution of the Army. Some of these protests disintegrated into violent confrontations with the coalition, resulting on occasion in the deaths of coalition troops.⁴⁰

These two CPA policies in rapid succession sent shockwaves throughout the country. Concerned about the backlash to his de-Ba'athification memo, Bremer added an addendum to CPA Order 1 on June 3. Instead of dismissing all senior Ba'ath Party members outright, the addendum set up an investigatory process and an Iraqi-led de-Ba'athification council that would gradually assume full control of the process. Based on interviews, public records, and testimony, this committee would determine the nature of citizens' Ba'ath Party membership, assist with appeals, and either grant or deny requests for exceptions to the CPA policy. Exceptions included provisions for those "judged to be indispensable to achieving important coalition interests."⁴¹ For many senior U.S. military leaders, the disbanding of the Iraqi Army was an unwelcome step taken without their input. Abizaid later recalled being pulled from a planning meeting in Baghdad to be told that Bremer had issued the order without consulting him, even though Abizaid and other U.S. commanders had already formulated plans that counted on the use of the Iraqi Army as auxiliary manpower.⁴² In an even more jarring moment, on the day CPA Order 2 was announced, Brigadier General Mark P. Hertling, assistant commander of the 1st Armored Division, was in the middle of addressing a gathering of 600 senior Iraqi officers in Baghdad to solicit their participation in the reconstitution of the Iraqi Army when, as he recalled it, "my aide came in to tell me that CPA had just made the announcement [disbanding the army] . . . The Iraqi generals got the word, too, a few minutes later through their channels."⁴³

The Debate over Disbanding the Iraqi Army

To a large extent, the military men in Baghdad were seeing the result of conflicting policy positions in Washington. Senior U.S. policymakers had differed in their views on how deeply the Iraqi Ba'athist state should be dismantled. On the one hand were senior officials who believed much of the Iraqi state and security structure would need to be retained in order for the coalition to manage the post-regime-change turbulence successfully. On the other hand, as Abizaid observed, were senior officials who feared that keeping the Ba'athist structure in place would mean Iraq would not transition to democracy but would revert to "Saddamism without Saddam."⁴⁴ They also feared that the Kurdish and Shi'a opposition parties, such as Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the Badr Corps, might become hostile to the coalition occupation if the Ba'ath and the Iraqi security apparatus were not fully disempowered.⁴⁵ Speaking to journalists in 2005, Bremer postulated that the disbanding of the Iraqi Army had been "probably the most important decision I made, and it had the effect of avoiding a civil war in Iraq" by reassuring the Kurds in particular that the United States was intent on making serious changes in Iraq.⁴⁶

In later years, Bremer and Walter Slocombe held fast to the explanation that CPA Order 2 had merely codified the reality that the Iraqi Army had disbanded itself by dissolving during the course of the invasion. By April 15, "there simply was no organized unit" in the Iraqi Army, Slocombe told reporters in Baghdad in 2003.⁴⁷ However, this was an explanation with which Garner and others did not agree. On April 15, the date he said the Iraqi Army had dissolved itself, Slocombe was still in Washington and did not arrive in Iraq until weeks later. On the ground in Baghdad in April, Garner and Colonel Paul Hughes, an Army officer who worked for Slocombe, were receiving dozens of contacts with groups of Iraqi officers (such as those Hertling was meeting). These officers wished to arrange for the recall of tens of thousands of their soldiers to duty or to reorganize the Iraqi forces with the coalition's assistance. Hughes had even formulated a plan to give Iraqi officers an emergency payment of \$20 each to buy essentials for their families. Other officers had drawn up plans to use Iraqi troops to guard the Iranian border.⁴⁸ Slocombe and Bremer's promulgation of CPA Order 2 caught Garner, Hughes, and other military leaders by surprise and cut short their negotiations with the Iraqi military.

Bremer's sweeping actions in Baghdad also appeared to catch the President and his advisers by surprise. Speaking to Army historians in 2015, Bush recalled that Bremer had "informed" him of the decision to disband the Iraqi Army rather than seeking guidance or saying, "Mr. President, here are your choices." The decision had effectively countermanded Bush's pre-invasion decision to retain and use the Iraqi Army. Echoing Bremer and Slocombe's rationale, however, Bush recalled:

I always felt that to the extent we could use the Iraqi Army as a stabilizing force [it] would be a plus . . . but the problem is that, when we got there, there was no Iraqi Army left . . . they just evaporated, there was no structure. . . . I remember Bremer telling me that we disbanded the army but there was no army to begin with.⁴⁹

Bremer's choices conflicted with the President's original guidance, Bush told Army historians, but, as commander in chief, he believed it important to trust the judgment of

the U.S. officials on the ground as they were closer to the dynamic situation and whom Bush wished to empower rather than micromanage from Washington.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Rice concluded later that Bremer had not perceived the “fine line between empowerment to act in a kind of tactical sense and knowing when an issue is really a strategic issue” requiring input from the President, SECDEF, and national security advisor. Bremer would spend months attempting to walk this fine line, but the President subsequently reined in some of Bremer’s authority: he and Rice would have direct contact with Bremer at least every few days and require him to consult more closely on strategic policy issues.⁵¹

Reconstructing an Iraqi Army and Disarming an Armed Society

The fallout from disbanding the Iraqi military, along with the clear necessity to secure Iraq, lent more urgency to the project to build a new Iraqi security force. Hoping to stymie the civil unrest generated by CPA Order 2, Bremer announced that an organization was already established to build the new Iraqi Army. This effort, led by Slocombe, actually began before the CPA order was issued. On May 9, Major General Paul D. Eaton, then commander of the U.S. Army infantry school at Fort Benning, GA, was notified by U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) that he had been chosen to lead the new Coalition Military Assistance Training Team (CMATT). CMATT was comprised of a skeleton staff of military personnel and contracted military and police trainers who were expected to configure 27 Iraqi motorized infantry battalions over 2 years – an army that would be too small to wage wars of aggression and, interestingly, incapable of defending the country from outside invasion. Arriving in Iraq on June 13, Eaton found his efforts to create a new Iraqi Army immediately hindered by two factors. Although Wallace and Sanchez agreed that constructing a new Iraqi Army should be a military operation, Bremer did not. Based on Bremer’s guidance, CMATT would work directly for the CPA, outside of the CJTF-7 chain of command and operations. Second, CMATT itself was an economy of force mission. Its trainers were drawn from the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, other individual augmentees from the U.S. Army, and contractors, with the latter initially making up most of CMATT’s personnel.⁵²

With no concrete relationship with the main force on the ground and with few resources of its own, Eaton’s CMATT was unlikely to resolve the immediate security problems generated by the dissolution of the Iraqi military. Thus, clarification of the de-Ba’athification policy and Eaton’s new mission could do little to improve matters for coalition ground forces in the short term. CJTF-7 leaders now had a delicate situation on their hands: they could not flagrantly ignore Bremer’s orders, but implementing them would further disrupt a precarious security situation. CJTF-7 and its divisions needed to balance their operational requirements subtly against CPA policy directives, but on a quiet, ad-hoc basis.



Paul Bremer (seated, left) and Major General Paul Eaton (far left).
Source: DoD photo by Staff Sergeant Quinton Russ, USAF (Released).

Ambassador Paul Bremer Signs an Order for the CPA, While Major General Paul Eaton, Commander, CMATT (2003-2004), Stands in the Background.⁵³

Some units began to hold meetings with local leaders and tribal sheikhs to find ways to reinstate professors or gainfully employ Ba'athist civil servants and former military members. Other units began locally hiring former Iraqi soldiers to protect government facilities and key infrastructure sites. The 101st Airborne Division in Mosul found a legal loophole that allowed it to bring some university faculty and other teachers back into their respective schools. Still, other units tacitly allowed key players and interpreters to continue working while seeking similar mechanisms to restore or replace their jobs.⁵⁴

The unrest spawned by CPA Orders 1 and 2 was exacerbated by yet another far-reaching directive: CPA Order 3, Weapons Control, which forbade Iraqis who were not police from possessing or carrying firearms, grenades, rocket-propelled grenades, and other munitions.⁵⁵ Implementing this order was fraught with difficulty. Most Iraqis had weapons in their homes, and in rural areas, weapons were both part of the culture and essential to the Iraqi lifestyle. Many Iraqis viewed personal weapons as necessary for their protection in the security vacuum following the invasion, and most of the Kurdish and Shi'a political militias carried weapons as a matter of course. The sheer volume of weapons and munitions available in the open and in unsecured military facilities rendered enforcing the order impossible.

Once again, CJTF-7 and its subordinate units had to develop mechanisms to cope with an order they could not fully enforce. CJTF-7 first established a weapons amnesty program in June, which allowed Iraqis to turn in weapons and other munitions without

penalty. When the weapons amnesty program expired on June 14, measures to enforce the policy had still not been published, and much confusion about the requirements remained. CJTF-7 units then began buyback programs in which Iraqis who turned in weapons received cash payments for those weapons, but compliance with the weapons policy was not widespread, signifying an unwillingness of the Iraqi populace to trust the coalition to provide basic security. The Marines also conducted their own weapons collection program but had little to show for the significant effort it required.⁵⁶

Marginalization of Iraq's Tribes

The fourth CPA pronouncement that had the potential to deepen Iraq's instability concerned the country's tribes, toward whom CPA's attitude tended to be dismissive. Believing they were shaping a new, modern Iraq, Bremer and many of the CPA officials who accompanied him initially saw little place for "backward" tribal culture, a perspective Bremer would later change.⁵⁷ By mid-May, the experiences of CJTF-7's divisions confirmed that Iraq's tribal infrastructure was intertwined closely with the country's politics and governance, and that engagement with tribal sheikhs was crucial to identifying and resolving issues for Iraqis in both rural and urban areas. Consequently, many units decided tacitly to overlook CPA's official stance toward Iraq's tribes for the time being. Military units at all levels began a concerted effort to reach out to the tribal sheikhs to identify reconstruction requirements and set up interim governance structures.⁵⁸ However, because of their lack of knowledge about Iraq's tribal rivalries, coalition forces found themselves immersed in, and often manipulated by, long-standing tribal disputes over resources and power.

CJTF-7'S TRIAL BY FIRE

The Drawdown of the Invasion Force

After June 15, the new CJTF-7 faced numerous challenges that consumed nearly all of its organizational energy and made it difficult to manage security, reconstruction, and governance operations. Franks's instructions were to remove the invasion force, particularly the 3d Infantry Division and I MEF, from Iraq as quickly as possible. The 4th Infantry Division, the 1st Armored Division, and later, the 101st Airborne Division would remain an additional 120 days to complete the planned transition to civilian control, a timeline that CENTCOM would later extend to 6 months and beyond as it became apparent that the redeployment needed to be more gradual. Franks also expected ORHA or another civilian agency to establish a functioning Iraqi transitional government in the same time period. The resulting drawdown was to reduce the number of troops committed to Kuwait and Iraq from just more than 300,000 to approximately 113,000 between May and September 2003. CJTF-7's task was to facilitate the reduced U.S. footprint in Iraq while completing the Phase IV tasks outlined by CENTCOM and Eclipse II. As the looting and demonstrations died down, Franks decided to accept the risks involved with moving forces out of the country while the situation on the ground was still developing. His thought – and that of the Army and Joint Staff – was to reconstitute the force for other

operations and reinforce the strategic message that the United States was liberating Iraq, not occupying it.⁵⁹

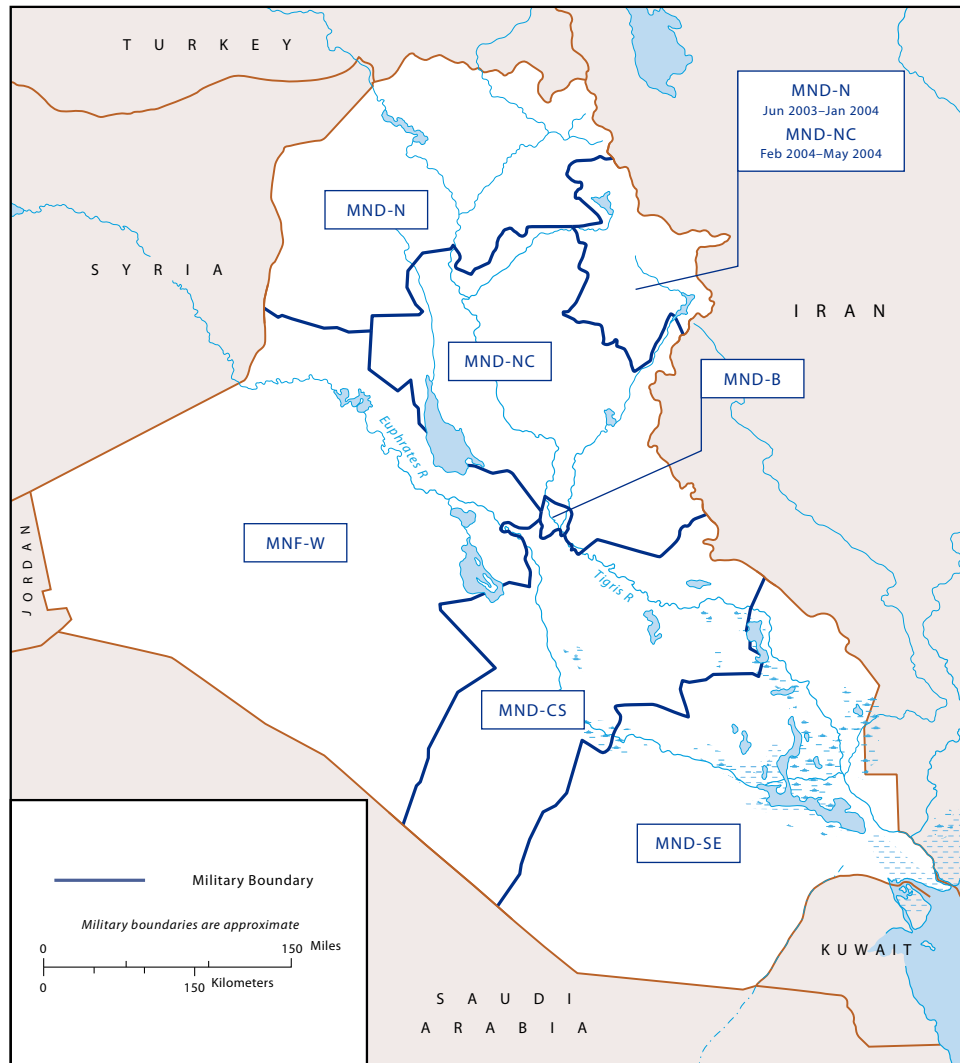
It quickly became clear that the sum total of these decisions was to leave a stateless theater of war with a civilian authority and a military command that were each woefully incapable of doing what was necessary to control the situation. The combined effects of the transition from a theater to a corps headquarters and institutional movements of individuals in Iraq reduced theater headquarters staffing to around half of what was required for manning and intelligence architecture in the summer of 2003. The corps staff and the normal corps intelligence cell and assets, already woefully inadequate for an area the size and scope of Iraq, were split between the two headquarters. Furthermore, the corps had a small logistics footprint and almost no organic civil affairs or strategic communications capability. CPA's staffing, too, remained filled at approximately 65 percent strength in Baghdad, even when augmented by the military. Without military personnel loaned by CJTF-7, its strength would have dropped to nearly 40 percent. At the height of the invasion, CFLCC staff had numbered more than 1,200 people, including an intelligence directorate of almost 400.⁶⁰ With the change to V Corps as CJTF-7, the CFLCC was handing control of the theater of operations to a headquarters less than one-quarter of CFLCC's peak size. Sanchez estimated that he required between 600 and 700 personnel to manage all of his missions appropriately, more than twice the May 2003 strength of the V Corps staff, which stood at 280 at the time.⁶¹

In the DoD manning plan for Sanchez's CJTF-7 headquarters, 344 positions were to be filled by the U.S. Army, 210 by coalition partners (including 40 from the United Kingdom), and 195 slots by other branches of the U.S. military. The deputy commander of CJTF-7 was a British officer; however, manning the command proved to be more challenging than designing it. With an end to major combat operations having been declared, the force-provider organizations turned their attention to reconstituting the forces used in the Iraq invasion so they could be available for other contingencies. Staffers in the Pentagon were understandably lethargic in finding personnel for a CJTF-7 headquarters whose mission was understood to be a short-lived one. As Sanchez watched CFLCC return to Kuwait, he asked the departing command to leave its field grade staff officers to fill out his headquarters. Since many of those personnel had nearly completed their 90-180-day temporary duty assignments, the numbers CFLCC was willing to leave with CJTF-7 were small.⁶² Few outside Iraq understood the urgency of the deteriorating situation there in May 2003, creating a disconnect between operational requirements and resourcing agencies that would persist until late 2003.

Six Areas of Operations

Managing Iraq's vast and complex terrain was a colossal task for any military, but particularly the overextended coalition units in summer 2003, most of whom found themselves in areas they had not expected to be and largely without any local knowledge. The country that coalition units occupied was extraordinarily diverse in geography and demographics. When V Corps became CJTF-7 on June 15, its area of operations extended to all but the Kurdish provinces of Dahuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah, though these, too,

fell under its purview. The remaining 15 provinces constituted 6 subordinate areas of operations (see Map 11).



Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 11. Operation IRAQI FREEDOM: Combined Joint Task Force-7, June 2003-May 2004.

In Northern Iraq, the 101st Airborne Division's area of operations was a region with porous borders that various tribes and groups had used for smuggling routes for decades. In Ninawa Province, bordering Turkey and Syria, the 101st Airborne Division made its headquarters in the city of Mosul, whose approximately 2 million inhabitants made it one of the three most populous cities in Iraq. Ninawa's population is predominantly a mix of Sunni Arabs and Kurds, with significant minorities of ethnic Turkomans, Shi'a Arabs, Christians, and Yazidis spread across the province's plains and the area of the Sinjar mountain range extending west into Syria. In the eastern portion of the division's area

of operations, the remaining three of Iraq's northernmost provinces – Dahuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah – comprised a semiautonomous region operated by the joint PUK-KDP Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) separated from Iran and Turkey by the Qandil Mountains and the larger Zagros mountain range. The high peaks and steep terrain of these mountains provided a haven for smugglers, terrorists, and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which had fought an insurgency against the Turkish Government for a quarter century.

To the south of the 101st Airborne Division, the 4th Infantry Division occupied Salahadin, Tamim, and Diyala Provinces. Kirkuk, the capital of Tamim Province, was the focal point of conflict between Arabs and Kurds and, by default, between the Kurdish autonomous region and Iraq. The nearby Kirkuk oil fields were critical to Iraq's oil production, a source of contention between the KRG and the Iraqi Government. West of Kirkuk, Salahadin Province contained Saddam's home area of Tikrit and had been the center of political power in Iraq for 35 years. Separated from Kurdistan by the Hamrin mountains, Salahadin contained Tigris River towns and the "Zaab Triangle" long used as a transit area for smugglers, with the points of the triangle at Sharqat, Hawijah, and the oil-refinery town of Bayji. On the other side of the Jabal Hamrin range from Salahadin, Diyala Province sat at a strategic crossroads: the province's physical terrain offered easy access to Baghdad and the south as well as routes into Iran. Diyala's isolated hamlets, thick palm groves, and fragrant citrus orchards provided plentiful hiding places that allowed smugglers and resistance groups to thrive. Baqubah, Diyala's largest city and capital, was also on a fault line between Iraq's religious sects: Sunnis controlled the area west of the city near the Tigris River, and Shi'a controlled most of the city east of the Diyala River. Farther up the Diyala Valley, the towns of Jalawla and Khanaqin sat on similar fault lines between Arabs and Kurds. Diyala's fertile land, canals, and tributaries had long made it Iraq's breadbasket, with valuable farms and irrigation systems over which locals were willing to fight.

In the center of the country, the 1st Armored Division occupied Baghdad and its six outlying districts: Abu Ghraib, Istiqlal, Mada'in, Mahmudiyah, Taji, and Tarmiyah. The city of Baghdad contained more than 7 million inhabitants, a quarter of the country's population, with a mixture of religions, sects, and cultures spread across a geographic area the size of Los Angeles, CA. One of the city's subdistricts, Sadr City, was the poorest and most densely populated area in the country with more than 2 million Shi'a Arabs living in eight square miles of squalor. Under Saddam Hussein, the Republican Guard had used a system of "belts" to defend and control the key territory leading into Baghdad. The northern portion of the belts systems included Taji and Tarmiyah, while the western belt ran from Karma south to Abu Ghraib. To the south of Baghdad, the belts included the important towns of Yusufiyah, Mahmudiyah, and Jurf al-Sakhr west of the Tigris. East of the river, the belt ran from Salman Pak to the town of Nahrwan in Diyala. All of these areas lay within 48 kilometers of Baghdad and connected the capital to the rest of Iraq.⁶³

West of Baghdad, the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment occupied Anbar Province, an area the size of Arkansas sharing extensive borders with Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Although virtually all of the province's population lived in the towns along the lush Euphrates River Valley, much of Anbar was covered by the Jazeera Desert that extended south from the Anatolia Mountains of Turkey. Anbar's other desert – the Hajarah – had a

complex topography of rocky desert, deep wadis, ridges, and depressions, many of them ideal smuggling routes. Anbar's harsh, arid terrain was home to some of the toughest of Iraq's Sunni tribes, many of whose historical lands extended across Anbar's borders into Ninawa, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. Anbar's capital, Ramadi, was the largest city in the province, but the nearby city of Fallujah presented the most difficult urban area. Located on the banks of the Euphrates River, Fallujah, known as the "city of mosques" with over 200 in the city, had been a hotbed for conservative Sunni Islam and criminal activity under the Ba'athist regime. The largest lake in Iraq, Lake Tharthar, was located in Anbar between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, while the Hadithah Dam on the Euphrates was the country's most important source of irrigation and hydroelectric power production. Between Ramadi and Fallujah lay Lake Habbaniyah, where a series of fishing villages were used as bypass routes for smugglers looking to avoid Highway 10 when shuttling arms, goods, and cash.⁶⁴ Highway 1 was Anbar's other main thoroughfare, running west from Fallujah to Rutbah near the Jordanian border.

South of Baghdad, I MEF occupied the provinces of Najaf, Karbala, Babil, and Wasit – an area almost as large as West Virginia. Najaf and Karbala Provinces contained the holiest shrines in the Shi'a Islamic world, and Najaf historically had been the main religious and intellectual center for all of Shi'a Islam. Saddam had been careful to avoid major confrontations in Najaf for fear of igniting a sectarian civil war. Karbala's historical significance extended back to the 680 AD battle in which the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein Ibn Ali, had been martyred at the hands of an army sent from Syria. Faithful Shi'a constantly guarded the Imam Hussein shrine there, and large crowds of Iraqi and Iranian Shi'a pilgrims traveled to both shrines during annual holidays. Situated between Karbala and Najaf, Babil Province, with its capital at Hillah, was the site of the ancient city of Babylon, surrounded by lush farmland and date palm groves crisscrossed by irrigation canals.

South of I MEF, the British 1st Armoured Division occupied Basrah, Maysan, Dhi Qar, and Qadisiyah Provinces, an area almost half the size of England. Basrah, the region's most populous city, contained 2 million people, most of them Shi'a Arabs. The surrounding province was home to the country's largest oil fields and reserves, the largest being the Rumaila field located approximately 32 kilometers north of the Kuwaiti border. Basrah Province and the Shatt al Arab waterway bordered Iran and had been heavily contested in the war between the two countries. The terrain northeast of Basrah into Maysan Province was filled by dense marshland that Saddam drained in the 1980s to prevent Iran from using the marshes to move troops and supplies into Iraq, and had further drained in the 1990s after many of the area's inhabitants – known as Marsh Arabs – had joined in the 1991 rebellion against his regime. In the mid-Euphrates region, Qadisiyah Province was sparsely populated, with most of its Shi'a-majority population in its capital, Diwaniya, but was of both geographic and historical significance. Located south of Baghdad and east of Najaf along Highway 1, Diwaniya was on the strategic outer perimeter of the defense of Baghdad. The city was also the site of an ancient battle in which early Muslim Arabs soundly defeated a Persian army, enabling the spread of Islam to Iraq and Iran. All four of these southern provinces had received little benefit from the south's oil riches under Saddam.

The transitions at the operational and strategic levels left most of the coalition's units without a campaign plan or overarching guidance that could link their six areas of operations together. In the absence of specific directions, CJTF-7 subordinate commands tended to operate in their areas as they saw fit, yielding wide variances in unit activities across the country. Unit reporting in the summer of 2003 was indicative of both the types of challenges each unit faced as well as where commanders placed their emphasis.

In Baghdad, coalition units tended to have strategic resources and civilian agencies and assistance missions at their disposal that were not available in the rest of the country. The 3d Infantry Division received assistance from ORHA to secure the Iraqi ministries and disseminate emergency payments to thousands of Iraqi civil servants. The division then began implementing neighborhood missions to clear and repair facilities and services in Baghdad, one neighborhood at a time. The 3d Infantry Division's handover of the Baghdad area of operations to the 1st Armored Division began in mid-May and was complete by May 29. Like the 3d Infantry Division, the 1st Armored Division focused on patrols, raids, and security of fixed sites, but also had unique missions such as preparing Baghdad's airport for commercial travel, as well as similar reconstruction projects. The division also found that increased patrolling at night reduced curfew violations and improved the security situation, and the unit continued the 3d Infantry Division's efforts to establish Neighborhood Advisory Councils in Baghdad's neighborhoods, or mahallas.⁶⁵

In Ninawa Province, the 101st Airborne Division worked with ORHA's northern office, local technocrats, neighborhood leaders known as mukhtars, and tribal sheikhs to organize municipal and provincial elections in Mosul. On May 5, 2003, the 101st Airborne Division installed a new city mayor and town council for Mosul and organized elections for a new provincial governor shortly thereafter. The division's focus next shifted toward standing up a multi-ethnic police force and facilitating the return of displaced Kurds and the relocation of Arab families occupying their property. For the rest of May, the 101st Airborne Division worked with tribal sheikhs to organize and distribute the products of the spring harvest delayed due to the invasion, distribute essential supplies, and secure border-crossing points between Iraq and Syria. By June 15, the 101st Airborne Division also graduated its first class from a new police academy in Mosul. In May and June, however, the 101st Airborne Division encountered pockets of resistance and began to increase the number of raids on suspected Ba'athists and Fedayeen.⁶⁶

The 4th Infantry Division's area of operations was far less permissive. As the division expanded into its assigned battle space, it encountered significant resistance from remnants of the regime's security apparatus and began to encounter Iranian-affiliated militias as well. The division conducted several raids against buildings of an organization "believed to be running a shadow government" in Baqubah, during which it seized dozens of personnel, weapons, and specialized communications equipment. On May 15, the division raided villages near Ad Dawr, Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri's home territory, detaining 250 Iraqis, including the 52 individuals on the CENTCOM "Deck of Cards" list, and a former Ba'ath Party branch command chairman. Tikrit and its surrounding areas remained problematic, and the 4th Infantry Division frequently conducted searches and raids throughout June. The Badr Corps also began to create problems in Baqubah, where 4th Infantry Division troops detained the traffic chief and police chief for suspected

involvement in Badr Corps militant activities. In late May and early June, the 4th Infantry Division began screening toward the Iranian border in Diyala and raiding Badr Corps and SCIRI headquarters, capturing some Iranian nationals suspected of militant activity. Many of the division's activities, however, were not combat operations. For example, the division assumed responsibility for accepting the capitulation of the MeK and proctoring its disarmament. Toward the end of May, the 4th Infantry Division reported more governance-related missions, including elections in Kirkuk and the payment of police officers and civil servants. The 173d Airborne Brigade's sector in Kirkuk remained tense, with scattered clashes between Kurds and Arabs in Kirkuk and Hawijah and attacks against the local oil infrastructure.⁶⁷

To the west, Anbar's major urban areas and borders were unsecure, and the activities of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR) reflected increasing incidents of violence and demonstrations in Fallujah and Ramadi. Although the regiment spent considerable effort improving the numbers and capabilities of the local police force to assist them in those cities, those efforts and the regiment's attempts to use joint "show of force" missions with the Anbar provincial police failed to deter violence. By the beginning of June, the 3d ACR was reporting near-daily enemy contacts and violent disruptions in Fallujah, Ramadi, and Habbaniyah. Meanwhile, concerns about Anbar's largely unsecured western border with Syria and Jordan led CJTF-7 to task the Marine Task Force Tripoli to conduct a reconnaissance in force along the border. After the 3d Infantry Division completed its relief in place of the 3d ACR in Fallujah and Ramadi on June 3, the cavalry unit moved to Rutbah to focus solely on the mission of patrolling the Syrian border.⁶⁸

In the south, most of I MEF's activities in May and June focused on battle handover to multinational replacements and preparations for redeployment. In the interim, Marines in Iraq's south-central provinces worked with the United Nations (UN) to establish a satellite UN office in Hillah, conducted police training, distributed fuel, and distributed emergency payments. Like the 101st Airborne Division in Ninawa, I MEF worked with municipal, religious, and tribal leaders to set up city and provincial councils. As it prepared to depart the theater, however, I MEF increased its patrols and security operations, including raids against suspected Ba'ath Party members and sympathizers. It also spent considerable effort conducting counter-ambush operations on Highways 1 and 8, which coalition troops had designated Main Supply Routes Tampa and Jackson, respectively.⁶⁹

In Iraq's southernmost provinces, British troops continued their efforts to secure key oil infrastructure and expand humanitarian operations in Maysan while trying to establish law and order in Basrah. They adjudicated emergency payments for invasion refugees who were returning to their homes and professions and proctored a vote of no confidence in the Umm Qasr town council in early May. By mid-May, they were working to restore essential services such as Basrah's deteriorating water and sewage systems. British units also found that local citizens were concerned about the date palm harvest for the fall, and requested assistance with crop sprays and distribution for that economically important crop, illustrating the wide variety of unexpected activities the Iraq invasion forces found themselves conducting after Saddam Hussein's fall.⁷⁰

CJTF-7 Attempts to Synchronize Operations

As the summer progressed, the undermanned CJTF-7 often found itself lagging behind these subordinate units' vast and varied initiatives, though it did attempt to implement some of the more useful operations countrywide. As a result, CJTF-7 struggled to bring order and focus back to the theater level. Apart from issuing orders that attempted to operationalize CPA policies, CJTF-7, in consultation with the divisions, began issuing orders and providing much-needed resources to all six areas of operations in an attempt to recentralize the coalition's operations. One example involved the development of local police capability. While the divisions had been working with and hiring new local police forces since April, CJTF-7 began to nationalize the process in May. In order to give commanders more capability to support local requirements immediately, CJTF-7 distributed commander's discretionary funds down to the brigade level beginning the 3rd week in May. On June 11, CPA released \$10,000 for each brigade commander to use as their operational requirements necessitated, a forerunner of the massive commander's emergency response program funds that would come later in the war.⁷¹

The road to synchronization of the far-flung coalition units was not an easy one. As the de facto operational commander, General Walter Wojdakowski was effectively trying to lead his peer division commanders without having been one himself, an unusual circumstance. Moreover, the uniqueness of each area's environmental dynamics rendered some of the CJTF-7 instructions inappropriate or irrelevant for some units.⁷² It was most often the case that CJTF-7 centralized operations for crisis management – as was the case with the CPA policies – rather than routinely.

CJTF-7 encountered difficulties in several areas that required synchronization. To forestall an impending food shortage, on May 8, CJTF-7 and ORHA reactivated Iraq's Oil for Food program distribution by coordinating with Turkey to authorize food convoy movements. A severe fuel shortage also required immediate central action. The Iraqis, accustomed to receiving subsidized fuel under the regime, quickly ran through most of the remaining fuel supplies in the country. Lines at government gas stations grew enormous, and tempers were short as temperatures rose, generating unruly crowds that sometimes became violent. With assistance from Iraq's Oil Ministry personnel, CJTF-7 worked with ORHA and the divisions to expedite the movement of benzene and diesel fuel into the country and gradually transition fuel distribution from government gas stations to privately owned stations.⁷³ CJTF-7 also recognized early in May that establishing Iraqi media networks would facilitate success in other key tasks, and subsequently provided some guidance for assisting and improving media outlets, as well as supporting pro-coalition newspapers and broadcasts, and disseminating its own newspapers and messages through national and local media.

Though coalition units in the summer of 2003 were repairing infrastructure, facilitating crop harvests, and delivering services, Iraqis were becoming impatient with the lack of services, jobs, and basic security, as well as the absence of clear decision-making on the disposition and allocation of crops and harvests. Some supportive imams attempted to "influence the climate in a positive way" in exchange for favors, but CJTF-7 failed to adequately promote its successes and the progress being made, a fact that was recognized and reported to CJTF-7 by sympathetic Iraqi journalists.⁷⁴ The focus of CJTF-7's efforts,

however, remained the city of Baghdad. While CJTF-7 did incorporate feedback from the outlying divisions into some of its operations, its formal guidance to its units beyond Baghdad in the early summer of 2003 was minimal, leaving them largely to their own devices.

THE SECURITY SITUATION DETERIORATES

In early May 2003, CFLCC prematurely assessed that the security situation was improving with calm settling on the country. Reports of looting had fallen significantly, as had random acts of violence and subversion. This relative calm gave way to attacks against coalition military targets that gradually grew in size and scope through May and June. Until early June, most coalition soldiers moved through the Iraqi cities in soft-skinned vehicles, often lightly armed with pistols and without helmets. According to Eaton, that posture changed abruptly when a U.S. Soldier in Baghdad was shot in the back of the head at point-blank range while shopping for CDs. "When that happened, there was an immediate ratcheting up of security measures to protect the force," recalled Eaton.⁷⁵ The new measures required all CJTF-7 personnel to drive in at least two-vehicle convoys and wear protective vests and helmets, items that were not available to all of the coalition personnel in Iraq. The rapid acceleration toward war and delayed deployment orders had left 40,000 of the 130,000 U.S. Soldiers in Iraq without the ceramic plates for their protective vests, and the light infantry and support units had few armored vehicles allocated to them.⁷⁶ The Baghdad shooting incident heralded more rocket-propelled grenade attacks, convoy ambushes, and drive-by shootings against coalition forces and joint patrols with Iraqi police as the summer wore on. After 8 coalition deaths from hostile fire in May, 24 coalition troops were killed in enemy attacks in June and 28 in July. CFLCC and CJTF-7 attributed most of these small-arms attacks to former regime death squads, Fedayeen, and paramilitaries thought to be reconstituting themselves in Ninawa, but carrying out attacks elsewhere in Iraq. The most contentious areas were the Baqubah to Tikrit corridor; the urban part of Anbar consisting of Fallujah, Habbaniyah, and Ramadi; and the corridor between Hadithah and Hit.⁷⁷ On June 8, the lethality and volume of attacks in these predominantly Sunni areas of Iraq led the newly formed Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Arabian Peninsula (CJSOTF-AP) to assess that the greatest long-term threat in Iraq would come from "a resurgent, amorphous Ba'ath Party orchestrating insurgent warfare." This is the first recorded use of the term "insurgent" to characterize enemy behavior and intentions.⁷⁸ Because attacks had increased most rapidly in Sunni regions, CJTF-7 judged that, although some of the resistance might have been planned before the war or was being executed by former regime leaders, coalition policies were also to blame. CPA Orders 1 and 2 led many Sunnis to believe they would have no employment or advancement opportunities when the new Iraqi Government assumed power. Members of the now-defunct Iraqi military were clearly capable of organizing armed resistance.⁷⁹

Other CJTF-7 reporting in May-June 2003 indicated additional subversive influences were disrupting the security situation, most of which were coming from Iran. The Badr Corps and SCIRI undercut coalition efforts to the point that CJTF-7 considered itself engaged in "an active IO war in Najaf" and believed over 4,000 Badr Corps personnel

were operating in Iraq.⁸⁰ In turn, unidentified militias attacked Badr Corps headquarters across Iraq as the summer approached, including a strike against one in Baqubah that included a female suicide bomber on May 25.⁸¹ CJTF-7 also determined that at least one major intra-Shi'a rivalry was already getting out of hand – that between Moqtada Sadr and his followers in Najaf and eastern Baghdad, and SCIRI's representatives in Karbala and parts of Najaf. The Iranian regime appeared to be supporting SCIRI at that time, but it was also encouraging the Sadrist's anti-coalition stance. These activities led at least the special operators of the CJSOTF to judge, in June 2003, that Iran was "executing a long-term campaign to further its national interest."⁸²

Throughout Iraq, the removal of the Ba'ath Party and Saddam from power opened the door for more open expression of religious freedom, although along with that freedom came a rise in religious extremism. Beginning in late May 2003, nongovernmental organizations in Iraq reported that female schoolchildren and teachers were receiving death threats from an organization calling itself "The Popular Committee for Punishment," as well as the Badr Corps, designed to deter their attendance. In many places, women began to fear kidnapping and rape and avoided going to work or school because of the risk. CJTF-7 later identified at least two Islamic fundamentalist groups trying to jumpstart political parties in order to seize power in areas of Iraq the coalition had not occupied, and Sunni Islamic fundamentalism, including Salafism, was thought by CJTF-7 to be the unifying factor among restive groups in Anbar. Many Iraqi Salafis were virulently anti-coalition, calling for and executing attacks against coalition forces. Signs emerged that Ansar al-Islam, having survived the coalition's attack on it in early April, was beginning to reestablish itself in northern Iraq with support from al-Qaeda.⁸³ Unlike CJTF-7, the armed groups and anti-coalition factions appeared to conduct effective information operations, emphasizing in their messaging the coalition's failure to restore security, services, and jobs or highlighting the damage the coalition's Western values would supposedly inflict on Iraqi society. By mid-June, coalition units were reporting that local radio stations had begun to broadcast anti-coalition propaganda, while imams continued to spread anti-coalition messages during their Friday sermons. In mid-May, CJTF-7 units observed graffiti suggesting that Baghdadis seemed to be losing confidence in the ability of U.S. forces to control the situation. When some Iraq-based and international media outlets began inciting elements of the Iraqi population to violence, CPA issued a proclamation criminalizing the practice on June 13, and CPA shut down an Iraqi paper called *Nation's Echo* in Najaf because it advocated violent resistance to the coalition.⁸⁴

Farther south, British expectations that their experience in Iraq would be similar to their peacekeeping efforts in Northern Ireland or the Balkans were upended on June 23, 2003, in a violent incident in the town of Majar al Kabir, 20 kilometers south of Amarah. When the British 1st Parachute Regiment began conducting searches for heavy weapons in the town, an angry mob of several thousand Iraqis closed in on the British troops. After an exchange of gunfire that left several Iraqis dead, the troops had to be extracted under fire, after which the mob surrounded a small patrol of six British military policemen who had taken refuge in a police station. With little ammunition and no means to contact other British forces, the British patrol was quickly overwhelmed and massacred.⁸⁵

It was the most costly engagement for the British military since the 1991 Persian Gulf war, and the deaths had significant military and political consequences.⁸⁶ Concluding the

incident had resulted from overly aggressive tactics and a loss of Iraqi popular support, cautious British military leaders would tend to limit future operations in order to avoid another such ambush and to maintain force protection. Meanwhile, the gruesome details of the incident undermined support for the war among the British public, which had expected the Iraq campaign to transition into a stabilization mission after the invasion. The Majar al Kabir killings became a political cause against the Tony Blair government, with the father of one of the slain military policemen later unsuccessfully challenging Blair for his parliamentary seat in the May 2005 British parliamentary election.⁸⁷

Targeting the Iraq Regime's Remnants and Saddam's Sons

Despite the growing number of attacks attributed to the Ba'ath Party, CJTF-7 remained focused in its early days on the activities of defeated or disintegrated conventional Iraqi Army forces that had fought during the invasion. The coalition's reporting did not shift to an emphasis on the Ba'athist insurgency and Iranian-associated subversion until June, by which time it was clear that the coalition was struggling to grasp the complexities of the post-Saddam environment.⁸⁸

The Sunni areas of Iraq were clearly problematic, and the porous western borders contributed to the influx of foreign fighters and assistance to indigenous Iraqi fighters. In May, CJTF-7 conducted a corps-level operation to target Ba'ath Party and Fedayeen resistance groups and camps in the Sunni Triangle between Tikrit, Balad, and Ramadi, and to create the conditions to secure Fallujah. The operation's intent was to find those responsible for organizing attacks on coalition forces and against Iraqis working with the coalition to establish a new government. The main effort of Operation DESERT SCORPION, as it was called, was the 3d Infantry Division, supported by the 101st Airborne Division, the 4th Infantry Division, and the CJSOTF.⁸⁹ In the lead-up to the main operation, the 4th Infantry Division conducted its own Operation PENINSULA STRIKE beginning on June 10 in order to set conditions for Operation DESERT SCORPION by defeating Ba'athist elements in the Tigris River Valley. The 4th Infantry Division troops raided arms markets and dealers, seized illicit munitions, and detained approximately 400 Iraqis. At the same time, coalition special operations and V Corps units destroyed a suspected Ansar al-Islam camp near Rawah, killing 61 fighters. In order to prevent the further resurgence of Ansar al-Islam, V Corps inserted its long-range surveillance company into Sulaymaniyah to reconnoiter old Ansar al-Islam camps and try to monitor the organization's activity, though these actions ultimately did not prevent the group's comeback.⁹⁰

Operation DESERT SCORPION commenced on June 15, 2003, the day that Sanchez took command of CJTF-7. CJTF-7 divisions conducted simultaneous attacks and raids in Fallujah, Habbaniyah, Ramadi, Hit, and Baqubah, and later continued those operations into Tikrit and Hadithah. Over the next 2 weeks, coalition troops destroyed at least 1 suspected militant training camp and captured or killed over 400 suspected Sunni resistance fighters and terrorists.

CJTF-7 and CJSOTF-AP believed Operation DESERT SCORPION had yielded a major victory against what coalition commanders viewed as an insurgency led by remnants of Saddam's regime. Coalition forces reinforced the operation with a series of attacks on Deck of Cards targets and other important Ba'athists well into July. These efforts

culminated in the 101st Airborne Division's raid that killed Uday and Qusay Hussein in Mosul on July 22. The brothers and Qusay's 14-year-old son, Mustafa, had returned to the northern city after having fled to Syria and, later, to Salahadin Province following the fall of the regime. On July 22, Saddam's sons were lodged with a former regime loyalist in Mosul. Their host, fearing for his life and interested in the reward money, approached members of the 101st Airborne Division and notified them about his "guests." The 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, commanded by Colonel Joseph Anderson, surrounded the house while special operations troops knocked on the door, were admitted by the owner, and entered the residence, only to be engaged immediately in a firefight with Saddam's sons.⁹¹ After four of the Soldiers were wounded, the special operators withdrew, and Anderson's troops launched anti-tank missiles and a wall of small-arms fire at the house, quelling Uday and Qusay's fire. The brigade found the bodies of Qusay, Uday, and Mustafa inside and confirmed their identities shortly thereafter.⁹²

The death of Saddam's sons appeared at first to deal a blow to the nascent insurgency. Reports suggested the two were leading a good portion of the former Ba'athists and disenfranchised Sunnis who remained viable after the conclusion of Operation DESERT SCORPION. Although both Saddam and his deputy, Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, remained at large, coalition leaders were confident they would soon be in U.S. custody. CJTF-7 decided to reinforce their interim success against Saddam's power base with Operation VICTORY BOUNTY at the end of July – a mop-up action intended to sweep up the remaining vestiges of Ba'ath Party militia and Fedayeen in the Sunni Triangle. This operation was the last corps-level search-and-attack mission managed by CJTF-7.⁹³ Nevertheless, the scale of both Operations PENINSULA STRIKE and DESERT SCORPION began to indicate that the gathering resistance to the coalition was larger than just Saddamist remnants and that the armed conflict in Iraq might, in fact, be far from over.

AMBASSADOR BREMER AND THE IRAQI INTERIM GOVERNMENT

As the CJTF-7 units continued their hunt for the remaining leaders of the former Iraqi Government, Bremer attempted to expand on the efforts of ORHA and Khalilzad to create a new government. Bremer hosted meetings with key Iraqi leaders to work toward establishing a national Iraqi Government comprised of expatriate leaders and appropriate local Iraqis. The pressure for a new government was intense. As early as mid-May, CJTF-7 reported that Iraqis at the municipal, provincial, and national levels continually "voiced concern with the pace of governmental reform and their desire to see Iraqis running Iraq as soon as possible."⁹⁴ In December 2002, U.S. policymakers met with Iraqi expatriate leaders at a conference in London, United Kingdom (UK). Bremer encountered the same group of expatriates soon after his arrival in Baghdad and was concerned that they were pushing the United States to establish an Iraqi Government run by exiles before local leaders could gain an advantage over them. On June 1, 2003, Bremer met with seven of these leading expatriate political figures (at the time known collectively as the G-7), including Ahmad Chalabi's representative for the Iraqi National Congress, Ayad Allawi of the Iraq National Accord, Jalal Talabani of the PUK, Massoud Barzani of the KDP, Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim and Abdul Aziz al-Hakim's Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, Ibrahim al-Ja'afari of the Da'wa Party, and Nasir

Chaderji of the predominantly Sunni Muslim National Democrats. At the meeting, Bremer informed the G-7 that an interim authority – as stipulated by UN Security Council Resolution 1483 – would be established within 6 weeks, consisting of a 25 to 30-person political council of nonexpatriate Iraqis appointed by Bremer and the G-7 leaders. The political council, intended to be representative of Iraq’s population but without quotas for factions, would appoint a chief adviser to each ministry, and take up practical work on long-term issues like educational reform, business development, de-Ba’athification, and electoral laws and procedures.⁹⁵

This plan created some significant difficulties for the CPA. First, because it was appointing the political council, it was easy for the Iraqis to hold the CPA – rather than the Iraqi leadership – accountable for errors in the selection and activities of the interim authority. Because the CPA was generally unaware of who the influential local Iraqis were, including tribal leaders, it ran the risk of appointing a group of people that, as one internal coalition memo put it, “looked like Chalabi and Friends,” an outcome that would likely be unacceptable to the Iraqi people. The CPA intended to mitigate that outcome by traveling to the various regions of Iraq and, with the assistance of CJTF-7, interviewing prospective nominees and other capable Iraqi leaders.⁹⁶ Although CJTF-7 and its divisions did indeed have better visibility on who were the more capable Iraqi leaders, it, too, lacked a common understanding of the Iraqi socio-political landscape and was vulnerable to being manipulated by various factions competing with each other for power and territory.

The Raid on the Turkish Special Forces

The fact that some Iraqi groups could manipulate the coalition’s activities accounted for what became a serious international incident in July 2003. Although the 101st Airborne Division, 4th Infantry Division, and 173d Airborne Brigade were all aware that Turkish officials were working with the Iraqi Turkoman Front (ITF) in northern Iraq, they were unaware of the type and quantity of Turkish military units operating inside Iraq. CJSOTF-N and European Command (EUCOM) had both been tracking the presence of Turkish special operations forces in the region, but that information was not provided to other coalition units in the area. When Kurdish Assayaish intelligence officials in northern Iraq claimed to the 173d Airborne Brigade that Turkish special operations forces were using the ITF office in Sulaymaniyah as a cover for a plot to assassinate Kirkuk’s mayor, Colonel William Mayville and the 173d Airborne Brigade received permission to raid the ITF’s Sulaymaniyah office on July 4. Once there, Mayville’s troops detained a number of armed men and discovered a large quantity of weapons at the scene without a clear purpose for their intended use.⁹⁷ Handcuffed and hooded, the detainees were sent to Baghdad, where their captors quickly determined that they, in fact, were Turkish special operations troops. U.S. forces removed their restraints, provided them with food and water, and eventually released them to Turkish custody.⁹⁸

The Turkish Government and public, however, did not respond well to the operation. Inflammatory stories emerged from the Turkish media that the detainees were shackled, beaten, and robbed. Turkish generals characterized the incident as the “worst crisis of confidence in the two countries’ more than 50-year NATO alliance,” and the

Erdogan government demanded an apology for the incident.⁹⁹ Further disputes emerged over the equipment and weapons the 173d Airborne Brigade had seized. The debacle was eventually resolved by a joint Turkey-U.S. fact-finding team, which laid out the evidence and rectified discrepancies. U.S.-Turkish relations remained tenuous, putting the United States in a difficult position when Turkey later pressured the United States to target the Kurdistan Workers Party in northern Iraq.¹⁰⁰ The incident was one of the first in Iraq in which a tactical event had significant strategic consequences.

Departure of the Marines, Arrival of a Multi-National Division

During July–August 2003, I MEF redeployed in its entirety to the United States and was replaced by a patchwork coalition division that became known as Multi-National Division–Central South (MND-CS). This division, incorporating military contingents from 19 countries under a Polish division headquarters, assumed responsibility for Karbala, Babil, Wasit, Qadisiyah, and Najaf Provinces by the end of August 2003.¹⁰¹

U.S. leaders had long intended to put a coalition face on military operations in Iraq, and at the beginning of 2003, the State Department and representatives of DoD, Joint Staff, and CENTCOM worked with donor countries to piece together a coalition unit to insert into Iraq after the regime fell. Most countries that the United States approached were only interested in providing forces to conduct stability and support operations and did not want their militaries participating in the invasion.¹⁰²

While the Marines had been reporting a deterioration of public order and an increase in small-scale attacks, their area, in general, appeared in July 2003 to be less hostile than northern or western Iraq. Most of the non-U.S. coalition contingents were only permitted by their governments to conduct stability operations and had much smaller numbers of troops and equipment than a U.S. Marine Expeditionary Force. Therefore, CENTCOM decided to have the polyglot coalition division take responsibility for the relatively quiet Shi'a provinces outside of the British sector.¹⁰³ Furthermore, some countries had standing military relationships with each other and understood their military contributions depended on those preexisting partnerships. Denmark, for example, had a bilateral agreement with the United Kingdom and thus expected to continue that relationship in Iraq. The Balkans experience, too, encouraged the United States to organize the smaller contributing nations into a single area and retain U.S. exclusive control in other areas.¹⁰⁴

When MND-CS began operating in southern Iraq, it contained just under 10,000 soldiers from 19 different contributor countries. Poland contributed 2,400 personnel spread across a division staff, an aviation battle group, an engineer detachment, support capabilities, and 2 infantry battalions. The second-largest contributor was Ukraine, which sent a brigade-sized unit of 1,621 personnel, followed by a 1,300-man brigade from Spain, and a 433-man engineer task force from Thailand. The rest of the member contributions ranged from 25 to 450 personnel with a variety of capabilities including light infantry, intelligence, engineer, civil-military operations, transportation, and medical units.¹⁰⁵

Putting all of the non-U.S. and non-UK coalition forces in the same unit and area of operations, however, presented serious challenges and inhibited MND-CS's ability to conduct the wide range of missions in which it immediately found itself involved. The memoranda of understanding between the United States and the coalition countries were

unclear, and military participation by many of the countries was a politically sensitive subject.¹⁰⁶ As a result, many MND-CS units needed to seek permission from their national capitals before executing MND-CS or CJTF-7 directives. The rules of engagement for each country, too, were different. Troops from Poland and Ukraine were authorized to conduct combat operations, but Denmark and Italy expected their troops to be used exclusively in peacekeeping operations. Consequently, conducting division-level operations for MND-CS was nearly impossible, and CJTF-7 orders to kill or capture targets within the MND-CS area of operations fell outside some coalition countries' guidelines. CJTF-7 also had difficulty incorporating MND-CS into its corps-level operations. It was challenging, if not impossible, to share intelligence across all countries in the coalition, and MND-CS units were already short on intelligence assets. Many MND-CS contingents brought communications equipment that was not compatible with U.S. equipment, complicating the already existing language barriers and other general communications problems. The MND-CS logistical systems were also not compatible with the U.S. logistical system, meaning that CJTF-7 often could not provide timely support to MND-CS. Finally, the Polish leadership in MND-CS frequently complained that it was not informed about CJTF-7's ongoing special operations and intelligence collection operations in its sector.¹⁰⁷

The steadily worsening security on the ground in summer of 2003 made MND-CS's shortcomings a serious matter. The Polish division commander observed a significant amount of mission creep in his area of responsibility. Instead of the kind of stability operations most of the participating countries had assisted within Bosnia and elsewhere, MND-CS contingents found themselves with large-scale reconstruction and humanitarian assistance responsibilities as well as limited combat operations, but shortages in engineer, military police, military intelligence, transportation, and civil affairs assets constrained MND-CS's ability to execute these activities. By summer's end, Abizaid's senior adviser at CENTCOM, Colonel Herbert Raymond "H. R." McMaster, recognized the growing difficulties of coalition operations in Iraq and on September 11 outlined the pros and cons of internationalizing the military mission. McMaster proposed "assigning smaller groups of coalition forces throughout the country" to U.S. or UK contingents to relieve those troops of less lethal missions such as guarding infrastructure and basic policing "while retaining American forces in all sectors to do the harder jobs." This move would potentially eliminate CJTF-7's intelligence and communications gap in Iraq's south and prevent political constraints and country caveats from affecting large sectors of CJTF-7's area of operations.¹⁰⁸ However, McMaster's recommendations never came to fruition. The transition from I MEF to MND-CS thus substantially reduced the footprint of coalition forces while creating a significant drop-off in operations in southern Iraq.

The Decision to Extend Unit Deployments

In late June and early July 2003, Sanchez and Abizaid together recognized the need for U.S. ground forces to remain in Iraq longer than Franks had envisioned, and after consulting with Abizaid, Keane agreed. In late July, Keane announced that the 101st Airborne Division, 4th Infantry Division, and 1st Armored Division would remain in the country for a total of 12 months before redeploying, as would some smaller Army units serving in Iraq. In addition to reconstruction and counterinsurgency operations, these

forces would assist CPA with “developing the new Iraqi police force, provincial defense force, and national army.” Keane added that the next major unit rotations would take place in February–April 2004, and announced the intent to make the coalition force more international.¹⁰⁹

The follow-on rotation had a significant contingent from the reserve component as well. Two National Guard Enhanced Separate Brigades – the 30th Infantry Brigade from North Carolina, and the 39th Infantry Brigade from Arkansas – would deploy to Iraq, augmented by the 27th Infantry Brigade from New York, and the 41st Infantry Brigade from Oregon. Unlike active duty units, these National Guard units were mobilized for 12 months, but would only serve a portion of that year in Iraq, owing to the long predeployment training period. Keane added that engineers and other specialized personnel from the Navy and Air Force would join the Army forces to assist with reconstruction efforts. These forces were supported by additional contractors, thus reducing the total amount of military forces required in Iraq.¹¹⁰

These announcements underscored that the seriousness of the situation in Iraq was running counter to the coalition’s original assumptions and timelines and that U.S. troops would remain in Iraq much longer than the 6 to 9 months CENTCOM had planned. CJTF-7 and its U.S. divisions braced themselves for 9 additional months of working in their complex and dangerous environments instead of returning home to the parades they had expected to attend by fall 2003.

* * *

The summer of 2003 brought many transitions in military operations and policy in Iraq. Some of the transitions occurred because existing organizations required more capacity to conduct their missions. Other transitions occurred as a function of differences of opinion with the SECDEF, the redeployment of large numbers of forces, or routine institutional movements. Bremer’s transition with both Garner and Khalilzad was hasty, owing to Bremer’s desire to take over without the involvement of those who had been managing Iraqi reconstruction and governance before his arrival.¹¹¹ Born of frustration with both McKiernan and Wallace, and an eagerness to reduce the profile of the Iraq conflict, Rumsfeld’s decision to replace Wallace immediately after the invasion put the Army’s most junior lieutenant general in command of an increasingly contentious theater. High levels of command and staff turnover left many unit leadership teams without experience working with each other, as well as without extensive knowledge of Iraq. Additionally, with the exception of Abizaid, the operational- and strategic-level general officers with the most resident expertise on Iraq and the emerging enemy picture and social dynamics departed the theater. This “brain drain” contributed to the loss of momentum in developing a strategy and campaign plan for postwar Iraq. The accompanying unit and individual turbulence resulted in haphazard coalition activities that dashed the hopes of many Iraqis for a quick transition to a stable, secure, and prosperous Iraq.

The senior leader transitions and gaps between commanders at the highest levels also created an internal power vacuum of sorts within the military. The virtual absence of a CENTCOM commander and a Chief of Staff of the Army during a critical period for

reestablishing control in Iraq made it difficult for the new CJTF-7 commander to convey the urgency of the Iraq situation to senior U.S. policymakers. Abizaid's and Sanchez's difficulties obtaining resources for Iraq were compounded by U.S. leaders' focus on disengagement and redeployment. Once Bush announced the end of major combat operations on May 1, the view of many U.S. officials in Washington was that the Iraq War was over. Meanwhile, armed groups and militias took advantage of the coalition's flat-footedness to gain footholds in various parts of the country, while unchecked reprisals exacerbated Iraq's preexisting ethno-religious rivalries and socio-political fault lines. The operational vacuum of summer 2003 provided foreign actors with the perfect opportunity to make Iraq a battleground between fundamentalist Islamists and the West.

At the same time, any momentum generated by CJTF-7 units at the local level was halted by CPA's hastily implemented orders dismantling the Iraqi state institutions and military. These policies, based on an inappropriate analogy between Ba'athist Iraq and Nazi Germany, effectively ceded the initiative to the burgeoning violent resistance organizations and armed militias. Instead of toppling the regime and instituting a transitional government as envisioned in the invasion plans, the U.S. deep de-Ba'athification policy and decision to dissolve the entire Iraqi security apparatus effectively collapsed the edifice of the Iraqi state, creating a national governance and security vacuum that would take another 6 to 7 years to refill. When combined with abortive reconstruction efforts and unmet popular expectations, these factors became major contributors to Iraq's gradual descent into full insurgency and civil war.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 6

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12. Interviews, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014; Godfroy with Major General (Ret.) Walter Wojdakowski, March 26, 2014, Fort Eustis, VA.

13. Interviews, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014; Sobchak and Godfroy with Sanchez, May 28–29, 2014.

14. Interview, Godfroy with Wojdakowski, March 26, 2014.

15. Warning Order 1 to CJTF-7 OPOD 03–036, Transfer of Authority to CJTF-7, June 11, 2003.

16. Interviews, Godfroy and Blythe with Wallace, June 17, 2014; Godfroy with Colonel (Ret.) John Agoglia, November 7, 2013, NDU.

17. Lieutenant General Ricardo S. Sanchez, *Wiser in Battle: A Soldier's Story*, New York: HarperCollins, 2008, pp. 110–112, 167–168; Interview, Sobchak and Godfroy with Sanchez, May 28–29, 2014.

18. Interview, CSA OIF Study Group with General (Ret.) Richard Myers, October 17, 2014, NDU; Franks, *American Soldier*, pp. 530–532.

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CHAPTER 7

MUQAWAMA WA INTIQAAM (RESISTANCE AND REPRISALS), MAY-AUGUST 2003

As anti-coalition violence mounted in the summer of 2003, the leadership at U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and Combined Joint Task Force 7 (CJTF-7) believed the enemy they faced was rooted in a former Ba'athist Sunni resistance movement with some involvement from foreign terrorist organizations and the resurgence of Ansar al-Islam.¹ However, this description far oversimplified the nascent resistance organizations and militias building footholds in the vast swaths of Iraq's uncontrolled territory. The sources of Iraq's instability in the summer of 2003 were far more complex than the Ba'athist holdovers and foreign terrorist organizations to which CENTCOM and CJTF-7 attributed the violence. All three of Iraq's primary ethno-religious groups – the Sunni Arabs, the Shi'a Arabs, and the Kurds – had preexisting armed militias or militant groups at their disposal with which to pursue their separate ambitions. After the regime fell, former Ba'athist leaders, the Badr Corps, the Kurds, Islamist terror groups, and some of Iraq's neighbors entered the power vacuum to advance their own separate interests, many of which ran counter to the coalition's objectives for Iraq and also gave rise to a bloody struggle for supremacy in post-Saddam Iraq.

THE SUNNIS: DISENFRANCHISED AND EXTREME

Although it was true that many Iraqi Sunnis resented the regime's removal from power, some Sunnis had hoped the coalition would eventually come to recognize the value of maintaining Sunni prominence in the Iraqi Government. Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Orders 1 and 2 obliterated that optimism and turned most Sunnis against the occupation force, lending popular support to the disenfranchised former Iraqi soldiers, Ba'ath Party officials, and Sunni tribes who were eager to expel the coalition presence. Throughout the summer of 2003, former Ba'athist resistance groups, led by Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri and a senior Ba'athist leader named Mohammed Yunis al-Ahmad, organized attacks against coalition targets in northern and western Iraq. At the same time, terrorist organizations, such as Ansar al Sunna and the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Tawhid wal-Jihad (Monotheism and Holy War), focused on breaking up international support for the coalition by conducting attacks against coalition partners and the United Nations (UN). Sunni insurgents also began intimidating and assassinating officials of the Iraqi Interim Government.

Disenfranchising the Sunni Tribes

In addition to empowering Sunni Ba'athist loyalists, Saddam had also cultivated supportive Sunni Arab tribes and used them to shore up state institutions and consolidate power within the Ba'ath Party. He had doled out important government security posts, including the minister of defense, the military bureau, and the national security bureau to members of his own tribe, and he recruited members of the tribes he favored in

Anbar, Ninawa, and Salahadin for service in the Iraqi armed forces, thereby linking his regime's defense interests with a vast tribal network. He had also allowed favored tribes to profit from illegal enterprises in their traditional tribal areas, many of which involved smuggling and black market activities, during the period of sanctions from 1991 to 2003. Saddam frequently allowed his preferred tribal leaders to administer justice and punishment to their tribesmen, and he doled out goods, services, and resources to tribes and tribal sheikhs in his favor.²

Not all of Iraq's major tribes had prospered under Saddam's patronage, however. In 1995, Saddam executed an influential member of the Albu Nimr tribe of Ramadi, after which the tribe revolted against the regime and attacked government outposts in Anbar. The Albu Nimr were joined in their resistance by the Albu Fahad and the Albu Alwan tribes, whose members attempted to assassinate Uday Hussein in 1996. Saddam used his military forces and more loyal Anbari tribes to crush these revolts, but resentment of Saddam and the regime simmered. Therefore, some Anbari tribes were primed to view regime change favorably.³

At the time Saddam and the Ba'ath Party were removed from power, much of the Sunni areas of Iraq – Anbar, Salahadin, Ninawa, and parts of Tamim – were still untouched by the coalition presence. Having never encountered or fought directly with the coalition, many Sunni tribal leaders believed they and their tribes had not lost the war or they attributed the loss to Saddam's foolishness. As the coalition gradually injected more forces into the areas and accepted the surrender of the remaining Iraqi Army units in Anbar, many tribal leaders in Anbar waited for the coalition to approach them. Speaking with Sunni tribal and religious leaders in summer 2003, CJTF-7 officers dispatched by Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez were surprised by what they learned about Sunni tribal expectations. The general (and inaccurate) perception among Sunni tribal sheikhs, they observed, was that the Sunnis held a numerical majority in the country and were the most appropriate choice to run Iraq. The Shi'a, Sunnis believed, were not naturally capable of doing so. Sunni leaders viewed themselves as the natural allies of the coalition, as they shared a common enemy – Iran – and expected that the United States would enact a patronage system similar to the one they had enjoyed under Saddam. In exchange for a coalition decision to put the Iraqi Government in Sunni hands, these tribes intended to keep the Shi'a Iranians out of Iraq and split oil revenues with the United States and its coalition partners.⁴ Many Sunni leaders who had chosen not to fight against the invading coalition troops had assumed they would be rewarded with key positions in the new U.S.-backed interim government. They had not been regime insiders, many Sunnis reasoned, and thus expected to be included and even privileged in the post-Saddam order. As one prominent Sunni cleric, Ahmed Kubaysi, put it, Iraqi Sunnis had been caught between Saddam and the coalition. "[T]hey were between two fires," Kubaysi told Al Arabiyah TV in 2004:

I used to refer to [Iraq] as that time as the Land of Two Fires rather than the Land of Two Rivers. They were between the fire of the occupation and the fire of Saddam. That's why people hoped [the best] about the occupation, especially us Iraqis. Our view of America was that it was a country of freedoms, democracy and human rights. So people believed Iraq would be put on a new path and remain a state cleansed of the elements needing to be cleaned out. . . . That's why the Iraqi Army did not fight in Baghdad.⁵

The coalition's failure to work with the Sunni tribes, combined with CPA's outreach to Shi'a leaders, quickly disabused the Sunni sheikhs of Anbar of the notion that the United States had any intention of reestablishing their patronage. When Sunni tribal leaders realized that the United States intended to allow the Shi'a the majority share of Iraqi Interim Government and, in so doing, reduce the amount of Sunni political control and access to state resources, they quickly turned against the coalition. Even before the CPA's actions, though, Anbari leaders, in particular, had already accumulated perceived grievances against the coalition. Some Anbari leaders later claimed to have agreed to a truce with U.S. troops in the early days of the invasion and that the entry of U.S. forces into Anbari cities after the fall of Baghdad was, in effect, an American violation of the truce.⁶ The April 28 riot in Fallujah that ended with U.S. Soldiers exchanging gunfire with militants (Iraqi sources claimed 17 locals were killed) had ostensibly begun as a protest against this perceived violation, although in hindsight, it is clear that the troops of the 82d Airborne Division in Fallujah had no awareness of any supposed truce.⁷ Sunnis were also overconfident in their ability to defeat the Shi'a factions and the Kurds in battle, after which they expected that the United States would be forced to realize that it must work with them rather than the Shi'a to control Iraq. Sunni sheikhs were certain that their layered network of tribal ties, kinship, and proven ability in battle would eventually restore them to power. In the meantime, many began to join forces with other Sunni resistance and terrorist organizations to expel the coalition violently from the Sunni areas of Iraq.⁸

The Ba'ath in Exile

As General John P. Abizaid and, later, CJTF-7 Intelligence "Red Cell" observed, a significant portion of the resistance against the coalition in the summer of 2003 stemmed directly from the organized remnants of Saddam's regime. After the regime fell, Saddam's deputy, Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, escaped to Syria with a large amount of the Iraqi regime's money and extensive contacts among former Ba'ath Party leaders, members of the Iraqi intelligence service, and Sunni and Sufi tribal and religious leaders with whom he had cultivated relationships during Saddam's faith campaign of the 1990s. Douri's influence under Saddam extended far beyond his official duties as the commander of Iraq's northern military region. Like Saddam, Douri came from impoverished circumstances in the Tikrit region. In 1968, he and Saddam participated in the July 17 Revolution, and the two served together in the early intelligence component of the Ba'ath Party. As one of the most trusted members of Saddam's inner circle after Saddam took the reins of power in 1979, Douri became the vice chairman of the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council (IRCC).⁹ During the 1990s, Douri operated a network that smuggled European luxury cars to Iraq through the Jordanian port of Aqaba, putting him in contact with mechanics, smugglers familiar with the cross-border region, and clandestine auto body shops, the kind of infrastructure that later was useful in deploying car bombs. Later, as commander of Iraq's northern military zone, Douri controlled the territory that most of his loyalists regarded as home, including command of all the Republican Guard units stationed there. Douri would later use the money and connections from these networks to become one of the chief Iraqi resistance leaders in exile.¹⁰



Source: Associated Press photo by Jassim Mohammed (© 2012 The Associated Press).

**Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, Vice
Chairman of the Iraqi Revolutionary
Command Council.¹¹**

Because Coalition Forces Land Component Command's (CFLCC) northern offensive had consisted of only a relatively small U.S. special operations force accompanying the Kurdish peshmerga, Douri was able to weather most of the invasion with his core supporters more or less intact; his power base only crumbled when Baghdad fell. The inability of the coalition's light northern footprint to prevent the retreat of Republican Guard and Iraqi Army personnel south from the Green Line left many of these military unit headquarters basically intact in terms of the personnel who staffed them, many of whom remained loyal to Douri. As coalition forces were largely unaware of Douri's personal connections, they made little effort to identify or dismantle his networks, which then went underground and awaited his orders.¹²

Once safely in Syria, Douri attempted to establish a quasi-legitimate government in exile. According to one former Syrian official, Douri proposed to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in 2003 that the two rival Ba'athist groups merge their parties into a single organization that would wage a war of liberation against coalition forces in Iraq. Assad responded by moving instead to subordinate the deposed Iraqi Ba'athists to a previously obscure Iraqi branch of his own Syrian Ba'ath Party. Only the substantial funds that Douri had taken from Iraq's coffers allowed him to operate with a measure of independence thereafter.¹³

The Ba'athist Islamists: Jaysh Muhammad, Mohammed Yunis al-Ahmad, and Jaysh al-Islami

The earliest organized Ba'athist resistance to the coalition occupation emerged in the form of an organization called Jaysh Muhammad (Army of Muhammad). Saddam directed the founding and initial growth of the organization from his hiding spot in Ad Dawr in Salahadin, and the effort was organized in Anbar shortly thereafter as well. In its early days, Jaysh Muhammad may have benefited from a large amount of foreign currency reportedly taken from Iraq's Central Bank in April 2003 by Uday Hussein for financing armed resistance against the coalition.¹⁴ The group planned to wage a guerrilla warfare campaign against the coalition to restore the Iraqi Ba'ath to power. Jaysh Muhammad initially consisted of a small cadre of low- and mid-level Ba'athist military personnel as well as tribesmen drawn from the regime's core support base.¹⁵ Meetings in Ramadi in the spring and summer of 2003 resulted in a decision to divide the group into four major contingents or battalions. The Awda (Return) Battalion was comprised of Ba'ath Party civilian cadres from the Hizb al-Awda (Party of the Return), while the

Fedayeen Battalion was drawn from the Fedayeen Saddam; the Army Forces General Command Battalion from remnants of the Iraqi military; and the Mujahideen Battalion from foreign fighters who remained loyal to the Iraqi Ba'ath after the fall of the regime.¹⁶

The group's access to existing Ba'ath Party networks, political leadership, and militias enabled it to grow rapidly and support thousands of former regime loyalists in Iraq and Syria.¹⁷ As Jaysh Muhammad grew, it maintained a disciplined cell structure and strict hierarchy modeled on the prewar Ba'ath Party. Like Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, the organization's leadership brokered deals with the Syrian regime that allowed its members to purchase supplies in Syria and infiltrate fighters back and forth across the border with Iraq.¹⁸ Jaysh Muhammad simultaneously created a sophisticated propaganda machine. Through its connections to the al-Buraq media establishment, *Al Fursan* magazine, and the al-Zawra satellite channel run by the would-be mayor of Mosul, Mishan al-Jabouri, and other Iraqi and Arab media, Jaysh Muhammad enjoyed the most broad-based propaganda efforts of any Sunni insurgent organization in Iraq.¹⁹ With plentiful resources at its disposal, Jaysh Muhammad eventually expanded its anti-coalition activities from Anbar to Ninawa, Salahadin, Tamim, Diyala, and Baghdad.²⁰

One of Jaysh Muhammad's top leaders was Mohammed Yunis al-Ahmad, a Moslawi who was almost unknown to the coalition but prominent in the Ba'ath Party. He had been head of the political guidance directorate of the Ba'ath Party under Saddam and, as of March 2000, reportedly served as Ba'ath Party leader in Salahadin, Tamim, and Sulaymaniyah. After the invasion, Ahmad used his connections and supporters in the northern provinces to expand his organization beyond Anbar, eventually organizing attacks against the coalition in Anbar and northern Iraq.²¹ From an early stage after Saddam's fall, Ahmad became a rival of Douri for the succession to Saddam, and the competition became the source of future schisms within the former regime component of the Iraqi Sunni resistance movement.

The relationship between the Ba'ath Party apparatus and Iraq's tribal elites under Saddam led to the formation of yet another Sunni resistance organization called Jaysh al-Islami (Islamic Army of Iraq). After the regime collapsed, a former Iraqi military intelligence colonel named Mohammed Kazem al-Janabi founded the organization in an effort to carry out the Iraqi intelligence service's final orders to continue fighting in the event coalition forces prevailed.²² The organization's principal aim was to force the coalition to depart and to establish a Sunni-ruled government in Iraq guided by Sharia law.²³ To that end, Jaysh al-Islami prosecuted a traditional guerrilla war first against the coalition military and later the new Iraqi Army, the Iraqi police, and the Iraqi Government.²⁴

Although Jaysh al-Islami accepted support from Douri's budding resistance group, it had little interest in restoring the former regime outright.²⁵ Its members were drawn primarily from the Janabi, Ubaydi, and Zobai tribes and saw themselves as the institutional continuation of the Iraqi military that was defeated in April 2003. Like Jaysh Muhammad, the Jaysh al-Islami leadership maintained a strict, military-style hierarchy and chain of command among its fighting groups. Jaysh al-Islami also developed a close relationship with the Fallujah-based Mujahideen Shura, or council, led by the Sufi sheikh Abdullah Janabi. Through Janabi's shura, Jaysh al-Islami eventually tapped into a network of extremist clergy and sympathetic donors in the Gulf, culminating in established contacts that included Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.²⁶ Jaysh al-Islami also seems to have been

bolstered by an influx of Islamist fighters who had been organized by the Ba'athist regime before the fall of Baghdad. One senior Islamist militant who had been among the "Iraqi Afghans" – Islamist fighters who had traveled to Afghanistan to fight in the anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s – said that he and other militants in the Ba'athist-sponsored Iraqi Quds Army continued an irregular resistance against U.S. troops after the fall of the regime and had eventually joined their fellow Islamist insurgents in Jaysh al-Islami.²⁷

Mohammed Yunis al-Ahmad's Jaysh Muhammad and Abdullah al-Janabi's Jaysh al-Islami operated separately from one another, but they shared a common approach that would eventually permeate other, similar organizations in Iraq: the use of Islamic imagery and themes in describing their resistance movements. Islamist rhetoric would grow with time into a major component of these groups' recruiting efforts, propaganda, and competition for resources as the conflict in Iraq's Sunni heartlands escalated.

The Salafi Resistance

The rise in Salafi influence sparked by Saddam's faith campaign in the 1990s continued as coalition forces prepared to invade Iraq in early 2003. Resistance to the invasion based on Islamic rather than nationalist principles became paramount in some sectors of society after the Islamic Research Center of al-Azhar University in Egypt issued a declaration legitimizing violent attacks against the coalition forces as jihad, or holy war, in March.²⁸ This development assisted Salafi militant group Ansar al-Islam as it worked to recover from the tactical defeat it suffered at the coalition's hands in March and April. The group had lost its enclave in northern Iraq, its training camps, and many of its veteran fighters, but the coalition's inability to close off escape routes from Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah into Salahadin and Diyala allowed surviving members of the organization to reach the Sunni Triangle and Iran, where they joined forces with al-Qaeda and other Islamist resistance groups. In short order, Ansar al-Islam established a network of safe houses and other logistics operations for foreign fighters inside Iraq.²⁹ Ansar al-Islam members who escaped the coalition bombings in March and April were able to use that network to regroup and broaden their appeal to Iraqis beyond Kurdistan with assistance from Douri's organization and from Zarqawi.³⁰ Signs soon emerged that Ansar al-Islam had relationships with surviving pre-invasion Islamist foreign fighters numbering in the hundreds in Fallujah, Tikrit, Bayji, and Baghdad.³¹

In June 2003, members of Ansar al-Islam working for the organization's military chief, Abu Abdullah al-Shafi, broke with group founder Mullah Krekar and initiated a strategy to expand Ansar al-Islam beyond its Kurdish roots into an umbrella organization that could unite Iraq's Sunni Islamist groups. In Anbar Province, this new branch of Ansar al-Islam established ties to al-Qaeda, which influenced Ansar al-Islam to develop a cell-based structure similar to al-Qaeda's, each of which was organized into small units of 10 to 15 members led by an emir or commander.³² As in al-Qaeda, only a small handful of people in the entire organization were aware of or connected to, multiple cells, making the organization more difficult to destroy.³³ As the group's membership grew, it reorganized some of its members and cells into battalions consisting of both Iraqi nationals and foreign fighters from al-Qaeda seeking to battle the coalition presence inside Iraq.³⁴

The preferred method of attack for the reenergized Ansar al-Islam was suicide bombings. Shortly after the fall of the regime, Shafi issued a statement on the group's website informing the world that "300 jihad martyrs" had "renewed their pledge to Allah . . . in order to be suicide bombers in the victory of Allah's religion," indicating that plans for suicide attacks were underway.³⁵ Use of this particular technique marked a dramatic shift in Ansar al-Islam's operations, as it had not previously used suicide bombings during its time in Iraqi Kurdistan. Ansar al-Islam's new relationship and ideological affinity with al-Qaeda meant that its core ideology now accepted participants in suicide bombings as shahids, or martyrs, in a military campaign against the enemies of God. Unlike al-Qaeda, however, Ansar al-Islam did not immediately claim credit for the suicide attacks it perpetrated, making it more difficult for the coalition to link attacks directly to the group.³⁶

Not all Iraqi Salafis supported armed resistance groups like Ansar al-Islam, however. Mullah Nadhim Jabouri, a senior Iraqi Salafi from Dhuluiyah who later became a leader of the Islamic State of Iraq before joining the Awakening against his former fellow insurgents, later recounted that at the time of the 2003-invasion Iraq's Salafi community was divided evenly into two camps. One camp believed that fighting the United States was futile, and another camp – led by Iraqi veterans of the Afghan and Chechen wars – wanted to create a resistance movement modeled on the anti-Soviet jihad. Among those who counseled against resistance, senior clerics advised Salafis to wait and observe the coalition's actions for 6 months before resisting, in hopes that the U.S.-sponsored post-Saddam order would offer a greater role for Sunni clerics like themselves.³⁷

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Tawhid wal-Jihad, and al-Qaeda Prepare to Fight in Iraq

Before becoming a militant icon, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi had been a street thug residing in Zarqa, Jordan, frequently in and out of prison for a variety of offenses. During one of his internments, he encountered a charismatic cleric named Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi, with whom he founded the Sunni extremist network Tawhid wal-Jihad ("Monotheism and Holy War"). Maqdisi convinced Zarqawi to dedicate his life to jihad, and Zarqawi subsequently went to Afghanistan to join the mujahideen fighting there. In addition to working with al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden, Zarqawi developed a separate network of militant Islamists across Syria, Jordan, and northern Iraq. Having established himself in Ansar al-Islam's territory after the United States toppled the Taliban in Afghanistan, Zarqawi remained affiliated with the Ansar al-Islam organization during and after the coalition invasion of Iraq. In addition to hating the Jordanian Government, Zarqawi was angry with the UN over its recognition of Israel and was especially angry that Jordan and the UN had supported the U.S. intervention in Iraq. He was also virulently anti-Shi'a and, like some of the Sunni tribes, viewed Iraq's Shi'a as the chief threat to Sunni power in Iraq and the wider region. In March 2003, Zarqawi and other members of Tawhid wal-Jihad began formulating a strategy to isolate and undermine the coalition occupation force and prevent Iraq's Shi'a from governing the country. To that end, he prepared his organization to initiate mass casualty attacks against the coalition and the new Iraqi Shi'a establishment, aiming to ignite a civil war along sectarian lines. With assistance from two lieutenants – Abu Mohammed al-Lubnani and Abu Anas al-Shami – he established a training camp in spring 2003 for foreign fighters in Rawah in Anbar that

was later destroyed by coalition troops during Operation DESERT SCORPION. After the training camp's destruction, these three worked to expand Tawhid wal-Jihad's support network across the Middle East and Europe.³⁸ Zarqawi's organization was also bolstered by absorbing many of the foreign fighters whom Saddam and his regime had invited into Iraq to join the resistance against the coalition in the weeks preceding the invasion. Some of these foreign fighters had been among the Fedayeen Saddam who defended the Baghdad Airport against the 3d Infantry Division. Still, others were Syrians or Saudis who had been sheltered even before the invasion by tribal relatives in western and northern Iraq. Many had simply stayed in place around Baghdad after the regime's fall and had gradually migrated into Zarqawi's Tawhid wal-Jihad rather than return to their home countries.³⁹

Meanwhile, al-Qaeda responded to the coalition invasion of Iraq by circulating propaganda videos and preparing for militant resistance against the coalition. Iraqi sympathizers in Fallujah allowed al-Qaeda to use the city as its base of operations for an anti-coalition insurgency campaign. Al-Qaeda reached out to Islamic nongovernmental organizations (NGO) for funding and invited Arab members of Ansar al-Islam and Sunni fighters from Baghdad to join its ranks as the coalition moved into Baghdad and northern Iraq. On April 25, 2003, al-Qaeda declared jihad in Iraq, and in July established the Armed Group of al-Qaeda in Fallujah under a commander known as Abu Iyad. For most of 2003, al-Qaeda maintained only a small presence in Iraq focused mainly on indoctrination, propaganda, and recruiting, as well as the development of smuggling networks



Source: Associated Press photo by Elizabeth Dalziel (© 2003 The Associated Press).

Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq.⁴²

to bring more foreign fighters into Iraq to wage war on the coalition.⁴⁰ Even with a small footprint, however, al-Qaeda was capable of organizing and conducting effective attacks on the coalition and its partners.

Although improvised explosive devices (IED) were frustrating the coalition's operations in the summer of 2003, the more problematic attacks were mass casualty suicide bombings. Foreign terrorists led by Zarqawi initiated a series of spectacular attacks against coalition and Shi'a targets beginning in August 2003, with the intent of undermining international support for the coalition while intimidating and fracturing the Iraqi Shi'a religious leadership. The first attack occurred on August 7, 2003, when a car bomb exploded outside the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad killing 17 and wounding 40. On August 19, a massive truck bomb struck the newly established UN headquarters in Baghdad, killing 22 people, including Sergio Vieira de Mello, the UN special representative in Iraq.⁴¹ Nine days after killing the UN's leader in Iraq, Zarqawi managed to kill the most prominent Iraqi Shi'a politician. On August 28, a suicide car bomb driven by

Zarqawi's Jordanian father-in-law, Yassin al-Jarad, detonated outside of the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf, killing SCIRI leader Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim and nearly 100 others.⁴³ These attacks heralded a grim pattern that Zarqawi would follow for nearly 3 years, during which time he would cause the coalition to fray and push Iraqis toward civil war.

THE COALITION PERSPECTIVE: GUERRILLA WARFARE AND INSURGENCY

The increase in the number of attacks as well as changing tactics against U.S. and coalition military targets in Iraq over the summer of 2003 was an enormous concern for CJTF-7 and CENTCOM and drew the attention of Washington as well. Attack numbers of 160 recorded incidents against coalition units in May increased to 300 in June, spiraling toward 500 in July. The number of attacks gradually increased to over 600 per month through August 2004. More than 90 percent of these attacks occurred in Baghdad, Salahadin, Anbar, Diyala, Ninawa, and Babil, areas with either Sunni majorities or a large Sunni minority. CJTF-7 determined after Operation DESERT SCORPION that the location of the Iraqi-initiated attacks "shifted from the western Fallujah-Al Qa'im corridor to the Balad-Tikrit-Mosul axis, where the perpetrators may have concluded they could find residual Ba'athist elements, more receptive locals, and more vulnerable targets."⁴⁴ The attackers in these areas used mostly guerrilla-type hit-and-run tactics such as opportunistic firefights, drive-by shootings, ambushes, rocket-propelled grenades, and sniper attacks against coalition military targets. Beginning in July, CJTF-7 also observed increasing numbers of mortar attacks against military compounds, particularly those in Baghdad, Tikrit, and Baqubah. The attacks had shifted from random targets to planned attacks against supply convoys, checkpoints, forward operating bases, and NGOs.⁴⁵ In August, CJTF-7 became aware that some groups – it was unknown whether they were criminals, terrorists, or insurgents – were using organized kidnappings for ransom to finance their operations. Iraqis saw this last activity as a consequence of the coalition's failure to fill the security vacuum left after removing the regime from power.⁴⁶

Insurgents also began perfecting their use of roadside bombs, a weapon that proved increasingly effective against coalition convoys and softer targets. Due to the easy access of explosives, mines, mortars, tank rounds, and artillery shells in Iraq, as well as the low level of expertise required to construct these devices, IEDs rapidly became the insurgents' preferred mode of attack against the coalition. IED attacks began sporadically in late April and increased steadily for the rest of the year, eventually averaging up to 20 per day from August to December 2003.⁴⁷ The casualty rate from these attacks was significant: as of early 2004, IED attacks caused approximately 54 percent of coalition casualties.

As insurgent attacks mounted in the summer of 2003, political considerations inhibited CENTCOM's and CJTF-7's ability for several months to characterize appropriately the enemy the coalition was facing in Iraq. On July 16, Abizaid publicly stated that U.S. forces in Iraq were facing a "classical guerrilla-type campaign."⁴⁸ Abizaid's statement earned him the ire of Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald H. Rumsfeld, who had essentially fired Lieutenant General William Wallace for a similarly candid statement about the unexpected nature of the enemy during the invasion. Realizing that the naming of the enemy had become a politically charged topic in Washington, Abizaid attempted to remove some of the constraints on the verbiage used to describe sources of violence

and instability in Iraq. He followed up his public comments with two memoranda to Rumsfeld on July 25. In the first memorandum, Abizaid clarified the term “guerrilla campaign” and argued that the composition, activities, and goals of the emerging armed groups in Iraq met the definition of an insurgency, “because portions of the enemy [constituted] an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government (i.e., CPA/IGC) through the use of subversion and armed conflict.” He noted that the Iraq insurgency was not yet at the level of intensity that the U.S. military had encountered in Vietnam, but he advised Rumsfeld “we should not deny ourselves the ability to use the term insurgency in the future.” In the meantime, he recommended that the U.S. military conceive of the enemy in Iraq as employing a “terrorist strategy” and using “terrorist attacks and guerrilla warfare tactics.” Abizaid added that coalition operations against these actors should be considered “counterterrorist” and “counterguerrilla” activities.⁴⁹

Abizaid’s second memorandum to Rumsfeld contained his estimate of the enemy in Iraq. Reviewing the results of recent offensive CJTF-7 operations in the Sunni Triangle, Abizaid judged the “continuation of our offensive campaign against the Ba’athists and other adversaries” as the most urgent priority for the Iraq theater. The two primary sources of enemy activity, Abizaid noted, were loyalists of the former regime and radicalized Islamists who had found fertile recruiting grounds among a large pool of unemployed and angry youth, especially in the Sunni heartland. These adaptable fighters and organizations, however, lacked regional or national command and control and were therefore limited to using guerrilla tactics and terrorism to build more popular support.⁵⁰ Abizaid also noted that the resistance had a political component, evidenced by names of insurgent elements like the Party of the Return (Hizb al-Awda), and he argued that the greater problem facing the coalition was the lack of economic opportunity and legitimate governance in Iraq:

[The] potential recruits are disaffected mainly because they perceive a lack of progress in economic development and political reform. They are facing loss of livelihood, are frustrated by a lack of security and basic services, have the perception that they are “losers” due to the termination of Saddam-era patronage and de-Ba’athification, have strong nationalist feelings, feel humiliated by the rapid coalition military victory over Iraqi armed forces and are suspicious of coalition motivations for liberating Iraq as well as coalition designs for the future.⁵¹

To combat these sources of instability and violence, Abizaid proposed a reorganization of CPA which would extend its presence beyond Baghdad, a comprehensive strategic communications campaign, programs for economic development, the strengthening of political and judicial systems, and a campaign to gain international support for the reconstruction effort.⁵² Abizaid believed the enemy in Iraq, as in Vietnam, was best described as a popular resistance organization attempting to overthrow what it considered an illegitimate regime. Thus, without using the politically inflammatory word “insurgency,” Abizaid had essentially outlined the roots of an Iraqi insurgency and a coalition counter-insurgency campaign.

Although Abizaid’s picture of the enemy was accurate in many respects for many areas of Iraq, it was missing a few key dimensions. First, Abizaid (and to an extent CJTF-7) believed that the resistance he was facing was an organized movement that Saddam’s security forces had planned in the event of regime collapse.⁵³ In actuality, the former

Ba'athist resistance was organized loosely at first, in spite of the emergency directive Saddam had issued shortly before the invasion. Second, CENTCOM and CJTF-7 assessments did not place the Sunni-based resistance in the context of Iraq's tribal system and culture or within the rise of Iraq's conservative religious movements that had begun during Saddam's faith campaign. Finally, the Abizaid memoranda did not mention the emergence of Shi'a militias and the extent to which Sunni resistance groups were organizing to fight against a potential Shi'a ascendancy and Iranian influence.

Despite its concurrence on general themes and trends, CJTF-7's ability to conceptualize the enemy forces lagged far behind CENTCOM's. Many of the same analysts and operations staff members whose Cold War-era training and simulations prevented them from recognizing the role of the Fedayeen and other irregular forces during the invasion were also slow to recognize the activities of an insurgent force when V Corps found itself transformed into a theater headquarters overnight. Thus, they continued to try to explain the enemy in terms of large land forces and other paradigms that were poor fits for the intricate, interwoven networks of political militias, former military organizations, and tribal and religious affiliates that overlaid all of the hostile activity in Iraq. "One thing that always frustrated me was the idea that, unless you could lay out a military-style hierarchy of command and control, a bad organization didn't exist," recalled Col. Derek Harvey, an intelligence officer whom CENTCOM sent to assist CJTF-7 in the summer of 2003 and who ended up leading the command's intelligence Red Cell.⁵⁴ U.S. units were also accustomed to detecting enemy activities and intentions by monitoring large camps and military equipment or tracking al-Qaeda-type communications used by comparatively few foreign fighters in Iraq. They were not used to gathering information on the tribal and other informal networks that were emerging in the aftermath of regime collapse. At the tactical level, the human intelligence teams that were capable of collecting information on those networks tended to lack the experience, analytical skills, and interpreters necessary for the task.⁵⁵ It would take months of on-the-job training, and the introduction of additional personnel and systems focused on human intelligence, network-based analysis, and cultural analysis before CJTF-7 would gain much traction in understanding the true source and nature of the resistance in Iraq.

THE SHI'A: DIVIDED WE STAND

Meanwhile, Iraq's Shi'a factions fought mostly among themselves in the summer of 2003, with some breaking off to attack the coalition military or to conduct reprisals against Iraq's Sunni population. Although most were happy to see the Ba'athist regime go, they did not agree with the United States and the coalition about the future of Iraq. They had long viewed the U.S. decision not to intervene in the 1991 uprisings as a betrayal of the Shi'a population, and, despite some collaboration with the United States, many remained deeply suspicious of coalition motives for the invasion. Many Iraqi Shi'a leaders also had no intention of entrusting the security of their constituencies to the coalition military forces and saw regime collapse as an opportunity to exert Shi'a identity and majority control in Iraq. Efforts to achieve that objective led various Shi'a militias and armed groups to attack their Sunni competitors, coalition parties that obstructed those objectives, and each other. The Badr Corps remained the best organized of these armed groups, but Moqtada

Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM, also known to Westerners as the Mahdi Army) quickly rose to prominence as the largest – if not the most proficient – of the Shi'a militias.

Competition within Iraq's Shi'a Community

Saddam's fall from power created a political vacuum that at least four major forces within Iraq's majority Shi'a population vied to fill. The best organized of these forces was the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) led by Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim and his younger brother Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and its affiliated Badr Corps militia. Although SCIRI was well organized and funded, many Iraqis distrusted the party because of its ties to Iran and its improving relations with the United States. The Shi'a religious community, or *hawza*, in Najaf and Karbala had far more influence on Iraq's Shi'a constituencies than any political party. However, led by the Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani (who tended to espouse the "quietist" tradition of Shi'a clerisy rather than an activist one), their reaction to the change of government in Iraq and the confusion that ensued was cautious and hesitant. The third force consisted of educated Iraqi Shi'a expatriates like Ahmad Chalabi and Ayad Allawi who had led anti-Saddam opposition groups before the war. The fourth and final force was comprised of Shi'a religious families and leaders, Moqtada Sadr among them, who had remained in Iraq during the 1980s and 1990s when they were suppressed under Saddam's crackdown in southern Iraq.⁵⁶



Source: Photo published by Muslim Press.

Moqtada Sadr.⁵⁷

could be targeted. SCIRI and the Sadrists began a low-level propaganda and arms race through their militias, while the Da'wa Party worked to gain ascendancy within the political process. The Shi'a religious community did little to defuse tensions among these groups until violence erupted.⁵⁸

SCIRI and Da'wa

SCIRI was not the only major Shi'a Islamist political party to oppose Ba'ath Party rule. The Islamic Call, or Da'wa Party, was Iraq's oldest Shi'a Islamist party, forced outside

The murder of the young Ayatollah Abdul Majid al-Khoei by the Sadrists in Najaf in April 2003 and Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim's assassination by the Zarqawists in August exacerbated the divisions among the prominent Shi'a leaders of Iraq, especially between expatriates and those who had stayed behind and suffered under Saddam. These killings ended any hopes that the intra-Shi'a competition for power could be addressed purely through a political process and demonstrated that Shi'a leaders, too,

Iraq by a Ba'athist crackdown in 1979. From the Da'wa Party branch that fled to Iran, the Iranian regime had carved out a portion that became SCIRI in 1982 during the Iran-Iraq war. Iran supported both SCIRI and Da'wa against Iraq and its Western allies during that war, and Da'wa's most effective militant strike was the bombing of the American and French embassies in Kuwait in 1983. For 2 decades, Da'wa remained suspicious of U.S. motivations and intentions and participated only reluctantly in discussions between the United States and Iraqi expatriate political parties in 2002–2003.⁵⁹

Although the Iranian regime continued to provide some support to Da'wa after the Iran-Iraq war ended, most Iranian aid went to the SCIRI-organized anti-Saddam militia force, the Badr Corps, an organization initially formed during the Iran-Iraq war by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran (IRGC) from Iraqi prisoners of war.⁶⁰ By May 2003, CJTF-7 was tracking the Badr Corps presence in Iraq but was largely unaware of Badr's systematic reprisal attacks against former Ba'athists, which included targeted assassinations of Iraqi Air Force pilots.⁶¹ Soldiers of Major General Raymond T. Odierno's 4th Infantry Division also monitored some of Badr's reprisals in Diyala and arrested militia members in a Badr headquarters in Baqubah. Odierno was confused and frustrated when orders came from CJTF-7 and the CPA to release members of the Badr Corps, not realizing that SCIRI leaders were already using their growing influence with the coalition to facilitate Badr activities.⁶²

The Badr Corps had ample time to prepare for these attacks. Captured Iraqi and Iranian documents later revealed that the Badr Corps had four geographic commands, or axes, inside Iraq that dated to at least 1999, and each of these commands had experience conducting operations against the regime and the Saddam-sponsored Iranian opposition group Mujahedin e Khalq. Iraqi intelligence officers believed Badr Corps outposts were spread throughout Iraq in hospitals, businesses, and NGOs, including the Red Crescent. The Baghdad-based axis of the Badr Corps, one of the group's more powerful arms, was supervised from nearby Bakhtaran in Iran by Hamid A'atabi al-Sheibani, also known by the nom de guerre Abu Mustafa al-Sheibani. Sheibani's group developed extensive smuggling routes for moving weapons, relief supplies, men, money, and propaganda from Iran into Iraq to resource Badr activities in Baghdad, Diyala, and Wasit. It is likely that Sheibani's group was the arm of the Badr Corps with which Odierno's 4th Infantry Division had difficulties in the summer of 2003.⁶³ These smuggling networks and Iran's involvement with Badr would later be instrumental in funneling lethal support such as explosively formed penetrators (EFP) into Iraq to be used against Iran's enemies and the coalition military.

Despite being suspicious of U.S. intentions, SCIRI did not sanction attacks against coalition military targets in the summer of 2003 but was unable or unwilling to stop some portions of the Badr Corps from collaborating with Iran and attacking the coalition. One senior Badr commander, Jamal Jafar Mohammed Ali, who went by the nom de guerre Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis or "the Engineer," had participated in the Da'wa attacks on the U.S. and French embassies in 1983 along with Lebanese Hizballah, and he had no love for the United States.⁶⁴ Muhandis and some senior Da'wa members were reportedly unhappy with SCIRI for participating in talks with the United States in 2002, and Muhandis allegedly resigned his leadership position in the Badr Corps, leaving the group under the control of Hadi al-Amiri.⁶⁵ Muhandis would later be elected to the Iraqi

Parliament in 2005, before fleeing to Tehran once it was discovered that he was linked to attacks on the coalition.

SCIRI was weakened politically when Zarqawi's operatives killed Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim in Najaf on August 29, leaving the organization with his younger brother, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, as its leader. The assassination of the elder Hakim brother left the Shi'a political sphere more open to competitors like Da'wa, Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, Allawi's Iraqi National Accord, and Moqtada Sadr.⁶⁶ Competition particularly increased after Abdul Aziz al-Hakim alienated some of his would-be Iraqi constituency by declaring in August 2003 that Iraq should pay Iran \$100 billion in reparations for the Iran-Iraq war—a hard pill for Iraqis to swallow, coming as it did from an Iranian-sponsored expatriate party.

Moqtada Sadr and Jaysh al-Mahdi

For a half-century before 2003, the Iraqi Shi'a religious community had been dominated by three great families: the Sadrs, the Hakims, and the Khoeis. The rivalry among these families, each of whom enjoyed a large popular following, had occasionally spilled over into violence in the 1990s and would do so again after Saddam's fall. Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim was viewed in the 1990s as the main Shi'a religious rival to Moqtada Sadr's father, and this rivalry reignited as a violent struggle between SCIRI and Sadr in 2003. Competition and conflict between the Hakims and Sadrists intensified after Hakim's August 29 assassination. Shortly after the bombing that killed him, the Badr Corps sent black-clad militiamen ostensibly to guard the sacred Imam Ali shrine in Najaf, while the Najaf-based hawza and local tribes hastily pieced together groups of fighters to prevent SCIRI from taking control of the city. In the meantime, Sadr increased the size of his Mahdi Army militia and established a firm hold on Sadr City in Baghdad. He continued to build the Mahdi Army and eventually pushed its overt presence into Najaf.⁶⁷

In public, Sadr attempted to maintain distance from both Iran and the U.S.-led coalition to signal that he was unbound by foreign influence, a nationalist message that resonated with many Shi'a and compensated for the youthful Sadr's lack of religious credentials.⁶⁸ Unlike his deceased grandfather, father, uncles, and brothers, Sadr was not a prominent religious scholar or ayatollah. While this lack of religious education affected his ability to influence and gain the support of the hawza, it was not a problem for him in street-level politics.⁶⁹ Privately, however, Sadr needed and eventually accepted support from the Iranian regime to achieve his political goals. Even though the main leaders of the Khoei and Hakim factions were removed from the equation, Sadr was far from politically dominant in Shi'a Iraq in August 2003, and had no specific strategy to gain power. However, he did receive support from some senior clerics associated with his family, such as Grand Ayatollah Kazim al-Haeri, an Iran-based Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps affiliate, who announced on April 7, 2003, that Sadr was his official representative in Iraq. In accordance with Haeri's instructions, Sadr ordered his Iraqi Shi'a followers to fill vacant administrative and governance posts in the south and in Sadr City.⁷⁰

Like SCIRI, Sadr needed a powerful militia at his disposal to protect his constituency's interests. In April 2003, armed Sadr followers had provided security for the Arba'een pilgrimage and engineered the assassination of Sadr's political rival, Ayatollah Abdul Majid

al-Khoei. On July 18, a few days after the CPA formed the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC, [see Chapter 8]), Sadr gave a sermon in the Great Mosque in Kufa in which he branded the new Iraqi Government nonbelievers and claimed he was setting up a religious army called the Mahdi Army.⁷¹ Now calling themselves Jaysh al-Mahdi, members of this Sadr paramilitary club sought to enlarge the organization by incorporating members of the network established by Mohammed Sadiq Sadr in the 1990s. Jaysh al-Mahdi also absorbed some of the Shi'a soldiers of the Fedayeen Saddam who lacked employment after CPA Order 2 dissolved the Iraqi security organizations.⁷² Most of Jaysh al-Mahdi's members, however, were the uneducated Shi'a males whom the Ba'ath had repressed. Although they were eager to exact revenge on former Ba'athist supporters and to escape poverty and political disenfranchisement, the militia was an amateur organization with no formal hierarchy. It was, in the words of one of its former leaders, "just groups of armed men."⁷³ Capable military leaders rapidly emerged from its ranks, however, and they began training companies and battalions in southern Iraq by the late summer of 2003.⁷⁴ In the meantime, Sadr used his Friday sermons at the Great Mosque in Kufa, his chosen headquarters, to mobilize his supporters and the Mahdi Army against the coalition presence using protests, propaganda, and other disruptive activities.⁷⁵

THE KURDS: AMBITIOUS FOR AUTONOMY

Far to the north, the Kurds had enjoyed the advantages of secure autonomy under the protection of the northern no-fly zone before 2003. They were hardly eager to give up that autonomy after Saddam's fall. Kurdish leaders had ambitions to extend the geographic territory of their autonomous region to incorporate the population center of Mosul and, more importantly, the oil fields and financial independence possessing Kirkuk could afford them. Moreover, Kirkuk was intrinsically linked to Kurdish identity, and most Kurds could not envision a future Kurdistan that did not have Kirkuk as its capital.⁷⁶

The Kurds already recognized that autonomy demanded patience and a strategy to avoid direct confrontation with their U.S. partners. Once the peshmerga and the Kurdish intelligence organization (the Assayaish) entered Mosul and Kirkuk with American Soldiers in April 2003, they established offices under the auspices of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), respectively, and encouraged a gradual migration of Kurds to those population centers. In Kirkuk, Kurds moved into homes recently vacated by Sunni Arabs who had either left of their own accord or were intimidated by reprisal attacks the peshmerga carried out against them.⁷⁷ The Kurdish parties then wove themselves into the political and security apparatus of both cities, ensuring that Kurdish politicians held key government positions and that members of the peshmerga and Assayaish joined the new Iraqi Army and police forces. At the national level, Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani used their positions within the Iraqi Interim Government and, eventually, Iraq's elected government, to press for Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq.⁷⁸

Like the Badr Corps, the Kurdish parties also carried out attacks against Iraq's former Sunni ruling class in the spring and summer of 2003, though the degree of the reprisals was not apparent to the coalition at first. Although Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-North (CJSOTF-N) personnel had observed Kurdish resettlement in



Source: DoD photo by Helene C. Stikkel
(Released).

**Jalal Talabani, Secretary General of the
PUK, President of Iraq (2005-2014).⁸²**

and bringing them to coalition leaders to show their dedication to the cause.⁸³ Thus, the true extent of Kurdish attacks and intimidation against Iraq's Sunni Arab population and the additional resentment it engendered remained largely invisible to CJTF-7.

INTERVENTIONS BY IRAQ'S NEIGHBORS

Turkey

Turkey's strategic calculus in the wake of Saddam's fall was dominated by the prospect of Kurdish autonomy. As the coalition would soon discover, Turkey's most pressing concern was that the Iraqi Kurds might gain independence, which, in turn, might encourage separatism among the large population of Turkish Kurds residing in southeastern Anatolia.⁸⁴ Turkey was also worried that a Kurdish state would permanently separate Turkey from the communities of ethnic Turkomans in northern Iraq, leaving them stranded in a new Kurdish-dominated northern Iraq. More importantly, the Turks feared that Kurdish autonomy would create an alliance between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the major Iraqi Kurdish parties, after which the KDP and the PUK might support renewed PKK attacks into Turkey. Therefore, CENTCOM believed that Turkey

Kirkuk, they were either unaware of or minimized Kurdish reprisals against the former Ba'athists who had not fled the city as part of forced relocations after Saddam Hussein's fall.⁷⁹ The 101st Airborne Division, 173d Airborne Brigade, and 4th Infantry Division troops who moved into Mosul and Kirkuk had seen the Kurds as partners because of the Kurdish role in the invasion. They, like the CJSOTF-N Soldiers, did not realize the extent or implications of the ongoing Kurdish reprisals.⁸⁰ CJTF-7 senior intelligence officers observed signs that the KDP and PUK were "doing assassinations all the way down to Baghdad," but they believed Sanchez considered Badr Corps and Kurdish reprisals to be matters that would sort themselves out.⁸¹ Many coalition commanders thought the same and, in any case, were uninterested in angering their Kurdish partners or creating more sources of conflict in an already troubled theater. For their part, the Kurds, in addition to serving their own self-interest, also believed they were assisting the coalition with countering the former Ba'athist resistance to the point of detaining and, in some cases, killing former Ba'athists

intended to mobilize opposition within Iraq to the Kurds' bid for autonomy or independence, especially to prevent the Kurds from controlling Kirkuk.⁸⁵ This idea and Turkish intentions to maintain the integrity of Turkoman communities were evidenced by Turkey's support for Iraqi Turkoman groups that sought to carve out enclaves for themselves in Kirkuk and other areas where Turkomans were a significant population. In the summer of 2003, Turkey began hosting paramilitary training for Turkomans in northern Iraq, a development that alarmed the Kurds.⁸⁶ For Turkish leaders, the Iraqi Turkomans served as a useful tool, allowing Ankara to insert itself into Iraqi politics in order to prevent the United States and the Iraqi factions from taking steps that might compromise Turkish interests.

CENTCOM also determined that Turkey would not be reassured by the presence of its American North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies in northern Iraq. That presence instead "made them nervous and suspicious that the United States intend[ed] to play the 'Kurdish Card' against Turkey to force Ankara to do what it want[ed]." Furthermore, the Turkish Government and military had suspected since the 1990s that the United States had been planning to foster an independent Kurdish state, through which the United States could "threaten Turkey and dominate the Middle East." "When the Turks look at the U.S.," one prominent American scholar advising CENTCOM on Turkish perspectives noted, "they do not see an ally so much as the latest Great Power; and a Great Power by its nature seeks to increase its influence throughout a region and will do what it must."⁸⁷

Abizaid and his advisers judged that the Turkish Government and military meant to increase pressure on their American counterparts to target the PKK in northern Iraq, both as a means of testing where U.S. loyalties lay and eliminating a long-time Kurdish rebel enemy. Turkey intensified its demands for the United States to attack the PKK – which had renamed itself the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK) – after the July 4 incident involving American troops' detention of Turkish special forces.⁸⁸ While U.S. officials agreed that the PKK could not be allowed to continue controlling segments of Iraq's northern border in the long term, CENTCOM, CJTF-7, and 101st Airborne Division Commander Major General David H. Petraeus were against taking military action against the PKK, given the scale of the other challenges the coalition faced in Iraq. Instead, CENTCOM offered to process PKK surrenders and facilitate as many voluntary returns as possible from the PKK-populated UN refugee camp in Makhmur in Ninawa Province.⁸⁹ This answer was hardly satisfactory for Turkish leaders, who would continue to pressure the United States on this issue for years to come.

Syria

The Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad responded to the invasion of Iraq in the context of a broader regional struggle that pitted Assad against the United States and its allies. Assad's posture during the Palestinian Intifada of 2000 made clear that he intended to continue his father's, Hafez al-Assad, policy of support to anti-Israeli militant groups. Although Syria denounced the September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks and assisted a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) team in investigating al-Qaeda in 2002, Assad adopted a generally anti-Western stance. He was known to have a weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program, and was in the process of developing closer ties with "axis of evil"

states Iran and Iraq when Saddam's regime fell.⁹⁰ In May 2002, U.S. Under Secretary of State John R. Bolton had labeled Syria one of the seven most worrisome state sponsors of terror, and American officials were unsurprised when Syria became one of the few Arab states in the region to oppose the invasion of Iraq openly and provided military assistance to the Iraqi regime during the invasion itself.⁹¹

Although the Assad regime continued to oppose the coalition military presence in Iraq, it had no desire in the summer of 2003 to provoke the United States openly. Privately, however, Assad sensed an opportunity to use the conflict in Iraq to undermine the United States and strengthen his regime's leverage in the region. As a result, the Assad regime secretly allowed armed insurgent and terrorist organizations to operate from Syria so long as none of their attacks occurred within Syria's borders, a strategy in keeping with that practiced by Hafez al-Assad. For most of the 1980s and 1990s, he hosted the armed opposition to each of his five neighboring governments.⁹² Even before the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, Bashar al-Assad and his regime encouraged Arab mujahideen to enter Iraq from Syrian territory in order to fight against coalition forces. One former Iraqi military officer who was assigned to work with Arab foreign fighters ahead of the 2003 invasion recalled that the fighters often brought with them personnel files compiled by Syrian regime officials.⁹³ Similarly, the former Syrian governor of Deir ez Zour Province, Nawaf Faris, revealed in 2012 that after the 2003 invasion:

the regime in Syria began to feel danger, and began planning to disrupt the U.S. forces inside Iraq, so it formed an alliance with al-Qaeda. All Arabs and other foreigners were encouraged to go to Iraq via Syria, and the Syrian government facilitated their movements. As governor at the time, I was given verbal commandments that any civil servant that wanted to go would have his trip facilitated, and that his absence would not be noted. . . . Al-Qaeda would not carry out activities without knowledge of the regime. The Syrian government would like to use al-Qaeda as a bargaining chip with the West – to say: "it is either them or us."⁹⁴

In addition to the relationships he maintained with Iraqi resistance leaders like Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri and Mohammed Yunis al-Ahmad, Bashar al-Assad also allowed many former Iraqi regime leaders, military commanders, and intelligence service members to reside inside Syria.⁹⁵ As the summer of 2003 waned, the United States became increasingly frustrated with Syria's refusal to turn over senior ranking Ba'athists residing in Syria and Assad's seeming ambivalence about putting more security forces on his borders to stem the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq.

Assad also had more personal motives for sponsoring former Ba'ath Party members on Syrian soil. He wished to resolve the long-standing dispute over regional leadership of the Arab socialist Ba'ath Party that had raged between the Syrian and Iraqi Ba'ath Party branches since the late 1960s. Beginning in the 1970s, Syrian leader Hafez al-Assad and Saddam had both claimed that their regimes were the true leaders of the regional Ba'ath Party, and each had hosted a wing of the Ba'ath Party comprised of each other's expatriate oppositionists. When Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri arrived on Bashar al-Assad's doorstep in summer 2003 asking for Assad's assistance in building an armed Iraqi Ba'ath organization in exile, Assad seized on the opportunity to assert authority over the Iraqi Ba'ath Party once and for all.⁹⁶ A former adviser to Assad also intimated that Mohammed Yunis al-Ahmad's rise to prominence might have originated as a Syrian initiative in the

interest of dividing and controlling the Iraqi Ba'ath Party. Assad reportedly sponsored Ahmad and approximately 100 of his followers as an artificial competitor wing to Douri's much larger following, with Ahmad's branch sustained by Syrian regime money.⁹⁷ In any case, Assad allowed both organizations to gain substantial footholds inside Syria and created an easy path for men, money, and materials from a host of insurgent and terrorist organizations to transit between Syria and Iraq with comparative ease.

The Iranian Regime

Iran had a greater stake in the future of Iraq than any of Iraq's other neighbors, and Iranian regime leaders had long considered the survival of their Islamic republic to be intertwined with Iraq's future. Although Iranian leaders were pleased with the disappearance of their number one enemy, Saddam, and his Sunni-dominated Ba'athist regime, it was unlikely that the United States would establish a new Iraqi Government friendly to Iran. While Iranian leaders hoped to see a Shi'a majority rule in Iraq, a Shi'a-led democratic government in Iraq might threaten the legitimacy of Iran's clerical regime. Iranian leaders also had to consider that, absent Ba'athist repression, the Shi'a religious centers in Najaf and Karbala could become competitors to Iranian primacy in Shi'a Islam, as pilgrims and clerics moved far more freely to the Iraqi holy cities than they had been able to do under Saddam.⁹⁸ Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's religious credentials were meager, and since he ruled via the principle of *velayat e faqih*—the belief that an Islamic government should be ruled by its supreme clerical judge—the proximity of a non-authoritarian Islamic democracy supported by better-credentialed, Iraq-based religious leaders such as Grand Ayatollah Ali Husayni Sistani might show the Iranian people an alternative to the supreme leader's Iranian Government.⁹⁹

Iranian leaders were also likely concerned about the proximity of the American military, now present on Iran's western and eastern borders. To Iranian eyes, if the United States retained a close relationship with a democratic Iraq, the new Iraq might become an American platform for targeting the Iranian regime.¹⁰⁰ To prevent the new Iraqi state from becoming too close to the United States, the Iranian regime embarked on a multifaceted strategy to bind a new, more federated Iraq closer to Iran while simultaneously forcing the United States to withdraw from the region. This strategy involved creating instability inside Iraq, placing the responsibility for the chaos on the United States and its Iraqi partners, and ensuring pro-Iranian politicians dominated the new Iraqi Government. Once pro-Iranian Iraqi leaders were in place, Iran could then reduce the violence, and their Iraqi proxies could claim to be strong leaders who had brought peace and order.¹⁰¹ To that end, the Iranian regime would support multiple Shi'a political parties and Shi'a militias. The regime, through its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, already had close relationships with Da'wa and SCIRI and would support members of these parties in leading positions in Iraq's transitional government. Iranian leaders also aimed to broaden their popular influence in Iraq, and, with this in mind, they reached out to the Sadrists through Grand Ayatollah Haeri in the spring of 2003, eventually arranging Sadr's visit to Tehran later in the summer.¹⁰²

Iran's IRGC was well equipped to develop the emerging Iraqi Shi'a militias. Through its preexisting relationships with the Badr Corps and Lebanese Hezbollah, the IRGC had created extensive support networks in Iraq and Lebanon and hoped to develop new

networks elsewhere. The IRGC's Qods (Jerusalem) Force also had experience supporting militias in the Balkans, and its leader, Brigadier General Qassem Soleimani, had expanded the organization's capabilities to include paramilitary, diplomatic, and intelligence activities. The Ramazan Corps of the Qods Force was assigned to Iraq in the 1990s to work with resistance organizations against the Ba'athist regime and the Mujahedin e Khalq. The Qods Force used members of Lebanese Hizballah, the Badr Corps, and, later, Jaysh al-Mahdi to establish Iranian surrogate military cells throughout Iraq that could increase or reduce violent attacks against the coalition on order. The Iranian regime was careful not to implicate itself in these attacks, however, because, like the Assad regime, it had little desire to engage the United States in open warfare.¹⁰³

* * *

Tribal disenfranchisement, Sunnis' gradual return to their Islamic roots, and Syrian support for former Ba'ath Party leaders and terrorist organizations fueled Iraq's Sunni insurgency, while terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda and Ansar al-Islam maneuvered their way into the same networks in Iraq's Sunni heartland – a territory covered with only a thin coalition presence. CENTCOM and CJTF-7 understood that the bulk of the violence directed against them arose from a Sunni insurgency, but were constrained from labeling the activity as such and, in CJTF-7's case, lacked the tools and intelligence experience to analyze and comprehend fully this environment. They also overlooked some other important contributors to Iraq's increasingly unstable security situation. Because most of the attacks against CJTF-7 appeared to emanate from Sunni resistance and terrorist groups and because both CJTF-7 and CPA believed that the bulk of Iraq's Shi'a remained sympathetic to and supportive of their coalition liberators, coalition leaders took the comparatively calm security situation in the majority Shi'a provinces for granted. Additionally, the deteriorating security situation in Baghdad and northern Iraq made the coalition reluctant to open a second front by attempting to rein in Kurdish or Shi'a militias and armed groups. By the time CJTF-7 realized this mistake, the Badr Corps and Moqtada Sadr's JAM militia had spent months extending their grasp on territory and stockpiling equipment and ammunition in preparation for war.¹⁰⁴

More generally, the power vacuum created by the collapse of the Iraqi state had sent a bewildering array of factions rushing to fill the void. The coalition recognized the danger posed by the Sunni insurgency, and leaders like Abizaid began to analyze its implications, but coalition leaders were little aware of the strategic dangers posed by other factions. An impending Shi'a power struggle, the Arab-Kurd struggle in northern Iraq, and the destabilizing intent of each of Iraq's interventionist neighbors were dynamics the coalition did not fully recognize in the first half-year after the invasion. As the months passed, these dangerous factors would combine to create a violent political conflict that the coalition was hard-pressed to contain.

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CHAPTER 8

MUDDLING THROUGH, AUGUST-OCTOBER 2003

As attacks mounted in the summer of 2003, so, too, did pressure from Washington, DC, on the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), and Combined Joint Task Force-7 (CJTF-7) to produce a strategy to stabilize the country, reduce the coalition military footprint, and transition the reins of government to Iraqi control quickly, with oversight from the United Nations (UN)-led international community. Efforts to plan the new stabilization campaign and build capacity within the Iraqi Government and military were constrained by short time horizons, troop shortages, and unrealistic expectations of both the coalition and Iraqi leadership to manage an increasingly complex and hazardous environment. These efforts were further hindered by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's spectacular attacks against coalition partners and the new Iraqi Governing Council's even more restrictive de-Ba'athification policy. The theater-wide focus on hunting down foreign fighters, weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and former regime leaders masked the seriousness of the threat posed by intra-Shi'a fighting and the rise of Moqtada Sadr's militia. As these threats gathered, CJTF-7 and the CPA struggled to launch the security, reconstruction, governance, and security assistance activities that were needed to stabilize the country.

DIFFICULTIES IN FORMULATING A NEW CAMPAIGN

Like many other American leaders, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Richard B. Myers was concerned by the 3 months of rising instability that followed the April toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime. Seeking confirmation from U.S. leaders in Iraq that the military operations there nested within a viable broader strategy, Myers instructed General Tommy Franks, in early July 2003, to work with the CPA to produce an integrated strategic campaign plan for stability and support operations in Iraq. He indicated that Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld had instructed Ambassador L. Paul Bremer along similar lines. Myers specified that Franks's campaign plan should be ready to present to himself and Rumsfeld by July 23.¹

Franks retired 4 days later, handing command of CENTCOM to General John Abizaid without responding to Myers's request, and the newly installed Abizaid did not take up the task of writing a military strategy for Iraq until August. Conversely, Bremer published a 57-page "Strategic Plan and Vision for Iraq," laying out his vision of what the coalition needed to accomplish in security, essential services, economic growth, and governance on July 22. These four key areas were similar to those in Eclipse II and were soon adopted by CENTCOM, CJTF-7, and most of the multinational divisions (MNDs) under CJTF-7 command.²

The CPA's strategic plan, however, was more a list of tasks than a strategy, with overly optimistic assessments of the current state of affairs. Most of the document focused on the need for future improvements in restoring essential services; much less emphasis was placed on security, the economy, and Iraqi governance. Apart from advocating an "unprecedented joint civilian and military planning process," the document did not

mention the coalition military troops that would ultimately be responsible for executing those tasks.³ At CENTCOM, Abizaid's approach was more organized, built around "five Is" — internationalization, Iraqization, improvement of intelligence, infrastructure construction, and information and strategic communications — the areas Abizaid believed were essential for winning Phase IV of the Iraq campaign.⁴ In late August, the CENTCOM commander pressed CJTF-7 and CPA to formulate a joint strategy under which, as international support and the numbers of capable Iraqi security forces increased, the United States and its partners could gradually withdraw their military forces into what he called "strategic overwatch." In Abizaid's plan, Iraqi security forces (supported by a deterrent force of two U.S. Army brigades, special operations units, and strategic air and maritime assets) would assume responsibility for Iraq's internal and external security, and U.S. troop levels in Iraq and Kuwait would decrease from a high of 155,000 in the fall of 2003, to fewer than 30,000 by the end of 2004.⁵

While CJTF-7 began building its own plans based on CENTCOM's, there were essential differences between Baghdad and Tampa. Unlike Abizaid, who advocated quickly putting the main effort in the hands of the future Iraqi Government and security forces, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez intended first to establish security by conducting offensive operations against the remaining paramilitary forces in Iraq and hunting down former regime leaders on CENTCOM's "Deck of Cards," a focus that most CJTF-7 subordinate divisions shared. In addition, CJTF-7 complained to CENTCOM that the CPA turbulent turnover and its overly tight control of resources were limiting the coalition's capacity to create capable Iraqi local governments and security forces in any case. The undermanned CPA staff worked on 90-day rotations that hampered any continuity of policy and relationships and prevented the organization's leaders from developing an "accurate appreciation of the situation."⁶ While CJTF-7 devoted its scarce resources to filling offices and providing staff for CPA and enabling important operations like the exchange of Iraq's currency, CPA officials were reluctant to decentralize the sizable funds and other resources at their disposal down to the provincial level, creating a disconnect between the means and ends for the military units and governance teams charged with executing Bremer's strategic plan.⁷ The situation was compounded by the fact that CJTF-7's future planning was frequently overtaken by events on the ground, so much so that the headquarters in its year of existence never completed a written campaign plan to synchronize the six divisions it was overseeing.⁸ This absence of operational guidance, combined with Sanchez's tendency to endorse the various division's initiatives in their disparate regions rather than tell them what to do, meant that his division commanders were left mostly to their own devices, managing their own areas, and coordinating laterally on enemy organizations or reconstruction projects that crossed coalition unit boundaries. Years later, General Raymond T. Odierno recalled that from his perspective as a division commander in 2003, he received no operational guidance and had no sense of unity of command or a theater-level effort synchronizing division operations across the country. As a result, Odierno noted, the 4th Infantry Division's 2003–2004 rotation had been a year-long "movement to contact" — a scenario in which divisions found themselves reacting to events on the ground and unable to seize the initiative.⁹ For his part, Sanchez believed his place was at Bremer's side for much of his command tour, leaving his CJTF-7 deputy, Major General Walter Wojdakowski, to interact with the division

commanders—his peers in rank—on operational matters. Sanchez also had no authority to countermand Bremer's orders and policies in writing, meaning that he was unable to issue written guidance on how units should manage the difficulties created by de-Ba'athification and the disbanding of the Iraqi security apparatus, or on the development of the Iraqi police and the new Iraqi Army. The result was that both operational and tactical commands spent the balance of 2003 reacting to near-term crises without placing their activities in the context of a longer campaign.¹⁰

The Iraqi Governing Council

On July 13, CPA Regulation 6 recognized a new 25-member Iraqi Governing Council as the principal body of the Iraqi interim administration, pending the establishment of an internationally recognized, representative government by the people of Iraq.¹¹ Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, a senior U.S. diplomat, was responsible for organizing a council that would be acceptable to the Iraqi people, but he soon found that the leadership body and composition of the council were contentious issues. Having hoped the Iraqi Governing Council could quickly become the executive arm of the new Iraqi Government, Crocker and other U.S. officials were dismayed when the governing council's members decided that each of the nine members of the executive council would take turns leading the group for 1 month, beginning with Ibrahim al-Ja'afari of the Da'wa Party in August 2003.¹²

The creation of the Iraqi Governing Council was also problematic in that it immediately pitted expatriate elites against Iraqi leaders who had remained inside Iraq. Despite the fact that the 25 members were from diverse ethno-religious backgrounds, it was not nearly as representative as the CPA had envisioned; rather, it was heavily populated by expatriates and reflected its creators' image of an Iraqi society rather than that of the Iraqi people. Two of the most prominent nonexpatriate Iraqi leaders were excluded. The coalition considered but decided against including Harith al-Dhari, the head of the Association of Muslim Scholars. Coalition leaders also considered including Moqtada Sadr (or one of his representatives) but decided to exclude him because of his role in the murder of Abdul Majid al-Khoei in April, after which the spurned Sadr denounced the Iraqi Governing Council as an illegitimate, foreign-imposed body. Additionally, as former Ba'ath Party members were barred from participating in the government by CPA Order 1 and the most prominent Sunni leaders were Ba'ath Party members, the council's creation gave the Sunni community the sense that it was being pointedly marginalized. Sunnis in northern Iraq complained to Odierno and David Petraeus that they did not see the Iraqi Governing Council as legitimate because of its limited Sunni representation, and the generals reported to CJTF-7 that the popular perception of Sunni disenfranchisement was becoming a major problem for them. Odierno further warned that the ambivalent majority of Sunnis in the north would "go to the other side" if the trend continued.¹³ Bremer pushed forward with plans to transition sovereignty to Iraqi authorities in spite of these problems and, on September 7, published a description of his planned "Seven Steps to Sovereignty" in *The Washington Post*. Bremer proposed that the Iraqi Governing Council should lead the writing of a new constitution, followed by elections, the subsequent dissolution of the CPA, and the transition to a normal diplomatic mission in Iraq led by the

State Department. These steps came as an unpleasant surprise to Iraqi leaders like Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who wanted an elected, sovereign Iraqi Government in place to write the country's new constitution. They also startled U.S. officials in Washington who were unprepared for Bremer's public declaration of a transition process that most senior American leaders had not yet endorsed.¹⁴

THE RESISTANCE GAINS MOMENTUM

The Sadrist Challenge

As the summer of 2003 waned, Abizaid became increasingly concerned about sectarianism, Iraq's Shi'a south, and Iranian regime influence in Iraq. On August 3, he outlined these issues to Rumsfeld and Myers, noting that "the most significant long-term threat is the sectarian nature of Iraqi society (i.e., ethnic, religious, and tribal factionalism)," and described "intra-Shi'a tensions between the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), Da'wa, and Sadr" and Iranian efforts to delegitimize the coalition as major sources of instability. These thoughts, however, did not reach CJTF-7, and coalition military leaders inside Iraq were unprepared for what happened next.¹⁵

On August 13, 2003, Moqtada Sadr's constituents staged a large demonstration in Sadr City after U.S. helicopters allegedly flew over a tower where the Sadrists were flying religious flags. Someone in the crowd fired a rocket-propelled grenade at 1st Armored Division Soldiers, killing one and wounding four.¹⁶ This incident, combined with evidence that Sadr had had a hand in the Khoei killing in April, prompted Wolfowitz and Bremer to ask Sanchez to generate military options for seizing Sadr. Sanchez, however, pushed back on the idea. In a private e-mail to Abizaid on August 20, Sanchez itemized the pros and cons of detaining Sadr, noting that it was impossible to put an Iraqi face on the operation and that Sadr's arrest, injury, or death could make a martyr of him and spark violence, creating a "chaotic period of instability that would divert resources and play right into the hands of former regime loyalists."¹⁷ Sanchez also judged that Sadr himself posed no immediate threat because the young cleric's ability to muster large numbers of people rapidly was unclear and since the hawza (Shi'a clerical seminary in Najaf) supposedly was already engaged in a campaign to contain and marginalize him.¹⁸ The CJTF-7 commander was then preoccupied with the devastating suicide attack on the UN headquarters in Baghdad that had occurred the previous day and was disinclined to arrest Sadr and risk opening a second front with a militant Shi'a movement. Given the CJTF-7 commander's opposition, coalition leaders tabled the matter, though it would return to the fore soon enough.

Zarqawi Seizes the Initiative

CJTF-7's immediate concerns in early August 2003 did not revolve around a new campaign plan or the long-term problem posed by Shi'a militants or the Iranian regime, but rather around the increasing numbers of attacks carried out by groups categorized as

former regime elements and other Sunni insurgent terrorist organizations. As CJTF-7 struggled to stabilize Iraq with its multinational partners, Zarqawi moved forward with his strategy to fracture the coalition, isolate the United States from international support, and ultimately cause the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq. The initial wave of attacks began with the car bombing of the Jordanian Embassy on August 7, followed by the successive attacks against the UN headquarters and the assassination of SCIRI leader Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim at the end of the month.¹⁹ Although the UN vowed to continue its mission with a smaller number of people, CENTCOM became pessimistic about obtaining more international military donors for the mission in Iraq. "After the UN bombing, it seems unlikely that we will get the international forces we need for the next rotation," wrote Abizaid's advisers on August 27. "We should, therefore, bias our efforts in favor of Iraqization," meaning that Zarqawi's attacks had already altered the coalition.²⁰

Hakim's assassination marked Zarqawi's first major attempt to provoke the Iraqi Shi'a parties into a violent confrontation against their Sunni enemies. Although Abizaid's advisers believed that Hakim's assassination could draw Sadr and SCIRI closer together in an anti-coalition alliance, the exact opposite scenario unfolded. The CPA and CJTF-7 had bestowed much of their attention on SCIRI as one of the only pro-coalition Islamist Shi'a political parties to have national appeal, and this relationship strengthened after SCIRI gave the appearance of pacifying a large anti-coalition protest at Hakim's funeral on September 2. Sanchez and other CJTF-7 leaders developed close ties with Hakim's successor and Moqtada Sadr's principal rival, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, to the point of having almost daily discussions with the new SCIRI leader. The perception that the coalition favored the expatriate Hakim hardened Sadrism sentiment against both SCIRI and the coalition. Thus, Zarqawi's Najaf attack had the unintended consequence of bringing SCIRI and the coalition closer together and turning the major Shi'a parties further against each other rather than immediately igniting a sectarian civil war.²¹

Troubles in the Sunni Triangle

In August and September, the 82d Airborne Division's headquarters and its 3d Brigade returned to Iraq to assume control of Anbar from the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, which, in turn, moved to the task of securing Iraq's western border. The 82d Airborne Division commander Major General Charles H. Swannack moved his division headquarters to Ramadi to interact more closely with the provincial governor and the province's influential sheikhs, and he was augmented there by the 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, and a National Guard battalion from Florida. The 82d also inherited a battalion from the 10th Mountain Division in Iskandariyah in the eastern portion of the division's area of operations.²²



Major General Charles H. Swannack (left). Source: DoD photo by Staff Sergeant Quinton Russ, USAF (Released).

Major General Charles H. Swannack, CG, 82d Airborne Division (2002-2004) and Ambassador Paul Bremer in Front of 82d Airborne Headquarters, Ramadi.²³

On September 12, 82d Airborne Division Soldiers on a nighttime patrol near a Jordanian field hospital in Fallujah observed a police patrol chasing a BMW that had just fired on an Iraqi police station. The police patrol turned around when it realized it would not catch the BMW, but the Americans mistook the police for insurgents and opened fire, killing at least eight policemen and a Jordanian military officer who was with them. The 82d Soldiers also damaged the hospital and wounded several other Jordanians in the area. This incident, which echoed the 82d Airborne Division's deadly clash with a Fallujah mob in April, came during a period in which Anbari sheikhs began to realize the coalition was not going to empower them, and it inflamed local emotions in areas that had quieted down after a restive summer. It also compounded Anbaris' resentment over coalition raids and detentions.²⁴

The September 12 Fallujah incident was also emblematic of the greater problem the U.S. divisions were having in balancing the winning of hearts and minds with the need to protect themselves among regions and societies they did not fully understand. The challenge of finding the true enemy actors, combined with mounting casualties and insufficient troop numbers, had the potential to prompt emotionally driven reactions rather than the precise operations necessary to reduce collateral damage and maintain the Iraqi citizens' support. Wrestling with the potent insurgency in Saddam's home territory of Salahadin Province, the 4th Infantry Division began to receive criticism for its tactics, which groups, such as the International Red Cross, claimed were heavy-handed. The division was conducting neighborhood sweeps without actionable intelligence and arresting angry Iraqis who would join the insurgency after being released, the Red Cross

charged. From the division's perspective, however, its clearing tactics were necessary in a region where support for Saddam and hostility toward the coalition had started out intense and had only increased. Lieutenant Colonel Steven D. Russell, one of Odierno's battalion commanders in Tikrit, concluded Saddam's hometown and the surrounding areas detested the Americans and would only respond to demonstrations of strength, an assessment many other commanders in Salahadin and Diyala Provinces came to share as insurgent attacks mounted. Unlike the 101st Airborne Division in Mosul, the 1st Armored Division in Baghdad, and the British 1st Armoured Division in Basrah, the 4th Infantry Division had no major urban centers in its area, which was dotted with small-to-medium-sized towns spread over a vast swath of land of 20,000 square kilometers. Insurgent attacks in the division's area often took the form of indirect fire on the far-flung units' operating bases, and the division thus used counterfire to respond more than other divisions did. By the end of his division's tour, Odierno was controlling 13 counterfire radars, virtually as many as a standard U.S. Army corps, and covering as much territory as a corps would have been expected to cover before 2003.²⁵

Regardless of the vast differences among the division headquarters, over time, most units came to the realization that after engagement with local leaders the nature and quality of their Soldier's interactions with the Iraqis could make or break stability operations. In urban Ninawa, Petraeus restricted the use of artillery and artillery counterfire because of the potential for collateral damage, and also eschewed cordon and sweep operations—in which tactical units detained large numbers of military-aged males in a single operation—in favor of so-called cordon and knock operations, in which 101st Airborne Division Soldiers would knock on the doors of suspects' residences and ask them to turn themselves in to the proper unit. One helpful innovation in division operations was the use of female Soldiers to search Iraqi women at checkpoints and to participate in search operations. After meeting with local tribal leaders and mukhtars, some commanders also began allowing sheikhs to keep women under house arrest or sending female Soldiers on cordon and knock operations in order to manage the female family members of detainees and female detainees as required. These efforts were crucial to protecting the Iraqi male notion of *wasta*, a combination of influence, honor, and clout. By themselves, these measures were not sufficient to impact positively on the entire theater. The September 12 incident in Fallujah alarmed Abizaid, who was already anxious about the coalition's messaging to the Iraqi people. Abizaid believed that harsh tactics by coalition soldiers hurt the U.S. reputation in the Global War on Terrorism, and, after the Fallujah shootings, he spoke in person with Sanchez and the commanders of each U.S. division to admonish them about the danger of alienating the Iraqi population.²⁶

Also concerned about alienating the Iraqi people, Sanchez subsequently made a deliberate decision to forgo large-scale offensive operations in favor of smaller, more precise operations, a step that added to the perception that CJTF-7 was abdicating its responsibility to organize the mission at the operational level of war.²⁷ Even so, CJTF-7 did organize some corps-level operations during fall 2003. On October 3, CJTF-7's Operation CHAMBERLAIN aimed to disrupt foreign fighter networks and routes from Syria into Iraq. The 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, moved from Fallujah to the Syrian border to oversee Iraqi-manned border points and to deny enemy infiltration from Syria, was joined by small contingents of other units, including the 101st Airborne Division, which cracked down on smugglers in the Sinjar area. The U.S. units were to prevent all non-Iraqi

military-aged males (16–45 years old) from entering Iraq from Syria except those clearly engaged in legitimate commerce.²⁸ Unfortunately, Operation CHAMBERLAIN was largely ineffective in sealing the border. “It was pointless to move forces out to the Syrian border because there were too many ways around it,” recalled Col. Derek J. Harvey, noting that CJTF-7 did not have the capability to “fully seal the border as it was already far understrength in the higher priority areas.”²⁹ Operation CHAMBERLAIN was the first of many surges of coalition troops from the country’s center to its border with Syria, none of which had a lasting impact on the militant groups that used the border zone as a sanctuary.

Militant groups did not need to travel far to find the materials they needed to wreak havoc inside Iraq. The enormous amount of ammunition scattered across Iraq remained problematic for CJTF-7 because resistance organizations had easy access to small arms, rocket-propelled grenades, and artillery shells with which to attack coalition military targets, Iraqi civilian leaders, and infrastructure. By mid-September 2003, CJTF-7 units collectively identified more than 600,000 tons of ammunition in U.S.-only sectors, including 102 large ammunition caches and 3,000 ammunition sites (requiring more than 10 tractor-trailer loads to move) within the 4th Infantry Division’s territory alone. In Anbar, Soldiers of the 82d Airborne Division and 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment counted more than 90 ammunition depots in addition to the arms pre-dispersed throughout the province. By September 8, 2003, Major General Martin Dempsey’s 1st Armored Division in Baghdad had cleared over 1,900 munitions caches. Odierno’s engineers expended all of their C4 explosives by September. He proposed letting a contract to assist with ammunition disposal, after which CJTF-7 and the Army Corps of Engineers received funds to contract those missions and relieve U.S. Soldiers of the task.³⁰



Brigadier General(P) Martin Dempsey (left), Ambassador Bremer (right).
Source: DoD photo by Staff Sergeant Reynaldo Ramon, USAF (Released).

**Brigadier General(P) Martin Dempsey, CG, 1st Armored Division (2003-2004)
Briefs Ambassador Bremer About Plans to Renovate the Iraqi Civil
Defense Corps Academy.³¹**

More De-Ba'athification

Discontent in the Sunni Triangle deepened as the expanded Iraqi Governing Council released a new de-Ba'athification policy on September 20, calling for all level four and above Ba'ath Party members to be fired immediately – rendering any exceptions Bremer, Sanchez, or division commanders had previously made null and void. Bremer urged the governing council to introduce due process and case-by-case exemptions rather than the total exclusion of former Ba'athist leaders, to no avail. Despite the draconian nature of the Iraqi Governing Council's measure, Bremer, perceiving himself bound to transition the reins of government to a sovereign Iraqi authority as quickly as possible, transferred full responsibility for de-Ba'athification to the council on November 4, 2003. The governing council promptly set up a de-Ba'athification committee led by Ahmad Chalabi's nephew, Salem "Sam" Chalabi, a move that Sanchez later recalled, "might have been the worst possible choice, because, from the very beginning, Ahmad Chalabi was adamant that no Ba'athists would ever be allowed back into government service. And that's one reason the whole de-Ba'athification order became a catastrophic failure."³² Ahmad and Sam Chalabi wasted no time in exercising their new power, firing 28,000 teachers and hundreds of civil servants for alleged Ba'ath Party ties in November alone. Shocked by the committee's aggressiveness, Bremer attempted to rein in Ahmad Chalabi through the Iraqi Governing Council behind closed doors but was unsuccessful. Chalabi, at least, was unwilling to relinquish the opportunity to use his access to Ba'ath Party records to extort and blackmail former Ba'athists for financial and political gain.³³ Speaking to Army historians years later, Bremer regretted his decision to hand control of the de-Ba'athification effort to Chalabi and other Iraqi politicians, adding in retrospect that he should have given the portfolio to a panel of Iraqi judges instead.³⁴

The Chalabis' new wave of Ba'athist firings came as most coalition divisions had begun to manage the fallout from the earlier CPA Orders 1 and 2. The new firings, which extended to a large number of Iraqis who were already partnered or even employed by coalition units, threw the civil administration of Iraq's Sunni provinces into disarray again. The development worsened the Sunnis' already intense fears that they were being cut out of Iraqi public life. It also left thousands unemployed without hope of being able to get new jobs, and therefore provided a host of new recruits for Sunni resistance groups. The division commanders with large Sunni populations in their areas (Petraeus, Odierno, Dempsey, and Swannack) argued strongly against the Iraqi Governing Council's new policy and the de-Ba'athification committee's actions, with Petraeus sarcastically remarking to Chalabi that, if he insisted on permanently disenfranchising so many people, he might as well throw them all in jail. Unmoved, Chalabi retorted, "at least they can eat there."³⁵

With CJTF-7 forbidden to provide formal guidance on managing the fallout from the more restrictive de-Ba'athification policies, divisions were left to develop their own consequence management strategies. In Anbar, Swannack and leaders in the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment developed a relationship with a group of 20 former Sunni general officers living in the province. These officers, for a small sum, were assisting them with local projects and educating them on the needs and attitudes of the province and its citizens, and whom Swannack was trying to get to command segments of the Ramadi police

and Anbari Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) battalions. After the 82d Airborne Division could no longer formally pay these officers for their advice, Swannack established a “grey beard society” consisting of these “retired” officers that he could now continue to meet with and pay for their assistance building the new Iraqi security forces in Ramadi and Fallujah. The 101st Airborne Division created and funded a similar former Ba’athist advisory body in northern Iraq and used some legal loopholes to continue paying salaries to former Ba’athists who were working in key administrative roles or as university professors.³⁶ Other units affected by the additional Iraqi Governing Council de-Ba’athification requirements attempted continued engagement with former Ba’athists who had been helpful, but the damage was already becoming permanent in Sunni Iraq.

Challenges Determining the Makeup of the Insurgency

The brewing trouble with Iraq’s Sunni population was not necessarily reflected in CJTF-7’s operational priorities, which remained focused mainly on capturing the former regime leaders on the CENTCOM Deck of Cards list. There was progress to show on that line of effort. On August 21, 2003, 1 month after the operation that resulted in the deaths of Saddam’s sons Uday and Qusay in Mosul, special operations forces captured Ali Hassan al-Majid (Chemical Ali) north of Baghdad. Chemical Ali’s capture was hailed as a major success because coalition leaders believed that many Iraqi Shi’a were reluctant to cooperate openly with the coalition out of fear that he might continue from his hiding place the reprisals he carried out in 1991.³⁷

Number 27 on the Deck of Cards list, former Minister of Defense General Sultan Hashem fled to his family’s residence in Mosul after the regime collapse. Encouraged by the new Ninawa government leadership, who had had positive interactions with 101st Airborne Division leaders, members of Sultan Hashem’s family approached the 101st Airborne Division leadership through interlocutors claiming that Hashem was prepared to surrender to U.S. forces. The 101st Airborne Division subsequently drafted a surrender memorandum promising fair treatment, which it sent to Hashem through his family. He surrendered at a 101st Airborne Division compound on September 19. After Hashem was sent to Baghdad, however, the Iraqi Governing Council demanded that he be hanged, a request the coalition fought. Meanwhile, one of Hashem’s relatives, an influential leader in the Ta’ i confederation, wrote increasingly hostile papers advocating Hashem’s release, which had the unfortunate impact of leading the coalition to arrest him. This arrest outraged the Ta’ i tribe, adding to the brewing Sunni tribal resentment in Iraq.³⁸

These significant captures did not take place quickly enough for Rumsfeld, who in early November wrote to Abizaid and Myers expressing his frustration with CENTCOM’s inability to capture Saddam, his senior lieutenants, and Osama Bin Laden quickly. In response, Abizaid wrote to Myers on November 10:

This is really an incredible sort of communication. Is this some sort of historical I told you so? Is this to cover impending bad news? It is professionally insulting . . . can’t quite fathom why [Secretary Rumsfeld] doesn’t understand . . . we follow the Secretary’s orders and guidance without complaint or question. We accord him great respect. A little bit of respect in return would do wonders for teamwork in this fight.³⁹

In reality, this top-down focus on high-value targets was inhibiting CJTF-7 efforts to understand and seize the initiative against emerging terrorist and resistance organizations in Iraq. CJTF-7 was still employing a traditional top-down intelligence model in which it might push down intelligence and a list of targeted individuals, compounds, and organizations to its divisions. However, the operational command was not using intelligence generated by its divisions to synthesize a common operating picture of the security situation across Iraq. Sanchez's intelligence director, Brigadier General Barbara Fast, attempted to fix the dearth of intelligence resources by asking the 900-man Iraq Survey Group for assistance. However, Major General Keith W. Dayton, the ISG leader, rebuffed her request.⁴⁰



Source: DoD photo by Helene C. Stikkel (Released).

**Major General Keith W. Dayton,
Director of the Iraq Survey Group (2002-2004).⁴¹**

Meanwhile, the theater-level intelligence assets that CJTF-7 did have access to tended to draw the commander's attention toward foreign fighters who used technology to communicate instead of the former regime elements and tribal networks who communicated by word of mouth along complex, interconnected family lines.⁴² CJTF-7 overestimated the number and prominence of foreign fighters and foreign terrorist organizations while underestimating—and failing to target—the extensive tribal and nationalist influence of some of the former Ba'athist organizations. It also failed to detect the evolving alliances between tribes and Islamist terrorist organizations in the summer and early fall of 2003, all factors that were creating a broader Iraqi insurgency.

The coalition divisions also had difficulty understanding this new kind of enemy organization, and they developed their own independent assessments that were often biased and oversimplified. General Martin Dempsey saw his enemy in Baghdad as threefold: Fedayeen and other former regime paramilitary units that survived the invasion; criminal activity; and Islamic extremists, with Ansar al-Islam chief among them. Since they viewed extremism as the greatest and most unpredictable threat, Dempsey and his 1st

Armored Division primarily focused their operations against Sunni Islamist extremists and terrorists and their associated networks moving in and out of Baghdad.⁴³ In Anbar, meanwhile, Swannack recalled that his biggest headaches came from the networks of fighters that were blossoming in Fallujah, Habbaniyah, and Al Qa'im. Swannack and his command identified some of the key sheikhs involved, but like the 1st Armored Division, they failed to make the connection between disaffected Sunni sheikhs and Islamists. Swannack instead complained that the people of Fallujah lived with a "16th-century mentality" and a tribal righteousness that was spawning strong tribal alliances against the 82d Airborne Division and 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment units in the province.⁴⁴ In the northern provinces, the 101st Airborne Division and 4th Infantry Division had a focus similar to that of the 1st Armored Division and the 82d, but the divisions' close partnerships with the Kurds tended to fuel Sunni discontent as the Kurdish presence in local governments along and beyond the Green Line continued to expand with coalition help. In other words, the relationships that had been so useful during the invasion were not entirely productive in the post-invasion period.

Although he was not originally on the Deck of Cards, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi appeared at the top of tactical, operational, and strategic target lists beginning shortly after the August car bombings, marking a shift from the previous practice of including only leaders of the former regime on high-value target lists. As the coalition would later discover, the epicenter of the Sunni insurgent movement in August–October 2003 was in Anbar, where insurgents aimed to defeat the Iraqi police and control the border areas, both of which were necessary for insurgent groups to expand their operations. Police in Fallujah and Ramadi and in the border towns of Al Qa'im, Qusaybah, and Rutbah were attacked repeatedly. Qusaybah and Al Qa'im were also valuable to insurgents because of their location along the same smuggling routes that Saddam's regime had used during the sanctions period, and the profits available from black market trade routes in the area led to the rise of a sizable former Ba'athist criminal syndicate from within the Sunni insurgency. The coalition did not yet realize that these activities provided resources and momentum for the various Sunni terrorist and resistance groups.⁴⁵

However, the coalition did correctly assess that the Islamist terrorist groups in Iraq were becoming increasingly capable and dangerous. In the wake of the CPA and Iraqi Governing Council's de-Ba'athification measures, groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and Zarqawi's Tawhid wal-Jihad in Fallujah began recruiting directly from some of the former regime organizations that were blossoming in the province. Zarqawi's rise—and his polarizing influence—also created schisms within the resurgent Ansar al-Islam. Many Ansar al-Islam members who had fled to Iran after the April 2003 battle against the coalition ultimately left the group to join either Zarqawi or a new Ansar al-Islam splinter group, Ansar al Sunna. International support for the Iraq insurgency also gained more traction. During a summit of al-Qaeda leaders in Pakistan in November 2003, Osama Bin Laden announced that al-Qaeda would begin providing \$1.5 million per month to the Iraqi insurgency, and he subsequently ordered two associates, Hassan Ghul and Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi, to carry that message and a war plan for jihad in Iraq to Zarqawi and other like-minded militant leaders. In a stroke of good fortune, the U.S. military unexpectedly intercepted that correspondence in early 2004.⁴⁶

CJTF-7 AND THE CPA: A TROUBLED QUEST FOR STABILITY

From Caretaker Command to Four-Star Headquarters

When V Corps replaced the Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) as the CJTF-7 in June 2003, Rumsfeld and Franks both believed that the smaller corps headquarters would be a sufficient caretaker command that could manage redeployment operations and a transition to Iraqi sovereignty. Abizaid's July announcement that units on the ground would remain in country for 12 months effectively nullified those expectations. As the security situation deteriorated, it became clear that the coalition presence would be required beyond March 2004 to ensure the transition to a capable Iraqi authority and security forces. On November 6, 2003, Rumsfeld announced that the nearly 100,000 U.S. troops on the ground in Iraq would be succeeded by a second rotation of approximately 70,000–75,000 forces, including 20,000 Marines. The Department of Defense (DoD) later revealed that the second rotation would consist of a considerable number of Reserve and National Guard troops across all the services.⁴⁷

From an early stage, both Abizaid and Sanchez concluded that the demands placed on CJTF-7 were too heavy for an operational headquarters. The military tasks involved in supporting the CPA and standing up a functioning Iraqi Government with capable security forces would require a fully staffed joint and international strategic headquarters commanded by a four-star general, they judged. Raising the profile of CJTF-7 to a four-star command would also preclude Bremer's wish to subordinate CJTF-7 to the CPA, an idea that Abizaid and his advisers opposed in the interests of protecting CJTF-7 and its small staff from being burdened with CENTCOM-level requirements and becoming a competitor organization for theater resources.⁴⁸ In August, the two commanders, Abizaid and Sanchez, agreed to propose the establishment of two new headquarters in Iraq: a strategic Coalition Forces Command–Iraq (CFC-I) headquarters responsible for theater command and control, nation building, and oversight of the strategic campaign plan, and an operational-level Multi-National Corps–Iraq (MNC-I) focused on the operational-tactical fight. As for how to build those two commands out of the existing CJTF-7 manning and staffing, Sanchez proposed that the U.S. III Corps based in Fort Hood, TX, serve as the foundation for the new MNC-I headquarters, and that the CFLCC and Third Army headquarters, then in Kuwait, provide the basis for the CFC-I. Abizaid discussed these proposals with CFLCC and Third Army Commander Lieutenant General David D. McKiernan, who would present the recommendations for both headquarters to the secretary of defense and the Joint Chiefs months later, in December 2003.⁴⁹

The Troop Number Debate

As the scope of the mission in Iraq expanded in the late summer and fall of 2003, Sanchez and CJTF-7 sought CENTCOM and DoD approval for a troop increase to handle the growing military tasks in Iraq. One of the most significant resource limitations Rumsfeld imposed on the strategy for Iraq was in the number of troops, which became a politically charged topic in the summer of 2003. Even though CJTF-7 had requested additional forces for Iraq, and the Army had recommended increasing its total end strength to meet

the demands of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Rumsfeld was reluctant to commit additional forces to Iraq and disagreed with Army leaders that the service's end strength was inadequate for the existing U.S. military commitments. The institutional Army, too, wanted forces returned home quickly to reset and prepare for Army transformation, a point U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) Commander General Larry R. Ellis made in response to General Sanchez's requests for more forces.⁵⁰

Instead, on September 16, Rumsfeld directed that the force in Iraq be cut from its existing 125,000 to under 100,000 by March 2004, essentially reducing the force by a division's worth of soldiers. The number of allied troops would also eventually have to be reduced from 35,000 to fewer than 25,000 by March. Rumsfeld's insistence on reduced troop numbers for Iraq came at a time when the Reserve and National Guard personnel who had been mobilized since 9/11 were approaching their 2-year statutory mobilization limits, meaning that the Army was about to face critical shortages in intelligence, military police, civil affairs, psychological operations, and engineer personnel, many of which came from the reserve components.⁵¹ By the end of October 2003, Army leaders considered re-imposing stop-loss (a policy that blocked Soldiers from leaving active service) for the active component and using individual ready reserve Soldiers—reservists not assigned to any unit, who often had not performed military duties for years—to generate augmentees to man the joint headquarters in Iraq.⁵² Army leaders were also concerned about the unpreparedness for combat of reserve component units in light of the 507th Maintenance Company ambush in Nasiriyah during the invasion. They estimated that any mobilized reserve units would require 3 to 6 months of preparation before entering the theater, so that reserve units on a 12-month mobilization would likely only be able to serve in Iraq for a total of 6 months.⁵³

"We can barely resource CENTCOM requirements under current conditions and our nation is unprepared for global contingencies," wrote Abizaid's advisers on October 1. "Many describe the current situation as over commitment, but we are really under-resourced. We are committed in areas vital to U.S. national interests."⁵⁴ Because the public debates about these issues occurred simultaneously, many involved in them conflated the request for more troops in Iraq with the discussions about increasing the total Army end strength, and Abizaid found himself in the middle of arguments about whether his recommended force commitments would "break the Army." Abizaid's advisers had acknowledged this difficult predicament in a memorandum on August 27:

It is a strange situation when [Senator] Kay Bailey Hutchinson [R-Texas] is calling for an increase in Army end strength and the Secretary of Defense (whose options are limited by a shortage in land power) is resisting that call. The administration . . . is confusing the troops-in-Iraq issue with the debate over force structure and [Army] end strength. It is our sensing that the DoD is using you (i.e., "General Abizaid says we do not need more troops.") to escape from confronting the grand strategic dilemma it faces due to a shortage of land power . . . the train wreck in Army readiness has already happened—we have simply not yet felt the full effects.⁵⁵

An Army of Contractors

Rumsfeld's cap on troop numbers for Iraq had the unintended consequence of bringing more contractors into the theater of operations to compensate for shortfalls in military

capacity, greatly expanding the 1990s phenomenon of contracting out traditional military functions. American units in Iraq relied on civilian contractors to run military systems, assist with reconstruction, and provide logistical support. The greater numbers of contractors on the battlefield brought important benefits but also created some significant drawbacks. On the one hand, contractors provided life support that military systems alone could not sustain and assisted with missions too large for the overly taxed coalition soldiers to handle, such as the destruction of Iraq's vast ammunition caches. On the other hand, as contracts flowed into Iraq, CPA and CJTF-7 had difficulty overseeing the influx. At CJTF-7, only 24 personnel were available to manage contracts for all of Iraq, a lack of sufficient oversight that reduced the contractors' overall effectiveness.⁵⁶ For example, Sanchez and his U.S. division commanders complained to Abizaid that the Bechtel Company – which worked reconstruction-related projects for the coalition – was “wasting time and money on assessments and working on the wrong priorities such as schools instead of electricity,” and that reconstruction contracts were “weakly written,” with no one to ensure their contractual mandates were fulfilled. Other contracts were not appropriately resourced, requiring commanders to redirect scarce troops to support the contracts. The Vennell contract to provide trainers for the new Iraqi Army, for instance, lacked provisions for Vennell to transport and secure its contractors. As a result, CJTF-7 divisions had to transport and secure the contractors.⁵⁷

The Governance Support Teams

In August 2003, CPA followed up the previous month's establishment of the Iraqi Governing Council in Baghdad by establishing small teams of governance capacity advisers for each of Iraq's 18 provinces. The purpose of these teams was to “bridge the gap between national government and the multitude of local governments within Iraq,” and to work with the United States Agency for International Development and coalition military units to execute CPA directives in each of the provinces. Each team was led by a CPA governorate coordinator and was meant to have up to five governance specialists from the Department of State or a similar organization capable of governance capacity building.⁵⁸ Most “teams,” however, consisted of only one or two personnel at best, observed Emma Sky, the governance coordinator for Kirkuk, whose colleagues in other provinces included, among others, the Kurdish-American diplomat Herro Mustafa in Ninawa, the British writer Rory Stewart in Amarah, British official Marc Etherington in Kut, and American diplomats Michael Gfoeller and Henry Ensher in Hillah and Diwan-*iy*a, respectively.⁵⁹

To support the governance teams, CJTF-7 directed the divisions to establish governance support teams to act as the military arm of each governorate team and ensure that CPA representatives and CJTF-7 units integrated their operations. Consisting of about 14 Soldiers from the civil affairs branch and other combat support specialties, the governance support teams answered to the division commanders and were supposed to provide security, communications, and life support for CPA governorate teams until those teams became self-sustaining. Most of the divisions housed the governorate teams and governance support teams in their Civil Military Operations Centers (CMOC) and took instructions to support the governance support team program seriously. Abizaid also saw

the concept as an opportunity to redeploy the overworked civil affairs units in the short term so that they could refit for future operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶⁰ The governorate teams, however, were often poorly manned by CPA representatives who rotated every 90 days, making it difficult for the coalition divisions to develop long-term relationships or strategies with them. Fortunately, the governorate teams were not the divisions' sole interface with local governments. Most division commanders interfaced directly with Iraqi provincial leadership through their established CMOCs or similar bodies to maintain active coalition involvement in building governance capacity. In Baghdad, for example, the 1st Armored Division helped organize Neighborhood Advisory Councils consisting of neighborhood leaders, or mukhtars, to identify the most urgent reconstruction and economic needs.⁶¹

One operation that leveraged cooperation between the governorate teams and the divisions was the exchange of the Iraqi dinar, the value of which had fluctuated wildly since the invasion because of counterfeited bills and the introduction of the U.S. dollar to local markets. The old Iraqi dinars also came only in two denominations (250 and 10,000) and had Saddam's face on the front. CPA economic analysts worried that absent a currency exchange, the dinar and Iraq's economy would collapse. Working with the CPA and the CJTF-7 division commanders, Wojdakowski developed a plan to collect the old dinars and replace them with the new bills, an operation that CJTF-7 intended to use as a rehearsal for introducing and collecting ballots at polling stations during Iraq's eventual national elections. On October 15, helicopters of the new currency began arriving in the provinces, and, along with the governorate teams, the divisions and some of the budding Iraqi security forces and local governments began overseeing the distribution of the country's new post-Saddam dinar.⁶²

Difficulties with Tribal Outreach

Frustrated by the rising Sunni resistance to the coalition, some senior CJTF-7 officers proposed outreach to Iraq's Sunni tribes as a means of blunting the growing insurgency, believing that absent opportunities to contribute constructively in post-Saddam Iraq, Sunni tribal leaders would pursue other options, including to work with anti-coalition resistance organizations and criminal groups, to safeguard the prosperity and security of their tribes. The Joint Staff, too, encouraged the CPA to consider engaging those tribes that appeared willing to cooperate with the coalition, a proposal on which Bremer was reluctant to act. The CPA's policy stance toward the tribes made outreach difficult. Throughout the summer of 2003, Bremer and one of his senior assistants, Meghan O'Sullivan, had viewed Iraq's tribes as an artifact of the past and were reluctant to incorporate tribal leaders into even advisory roles. In October, Bremer withdrew coalition support for a conference of southern Shi'a tribes arranged by Gfoeller, the regional coordinator for south-central Iraq, and endorsed by Iraq's Shi'a and the coalition at a time when Moqtada Sadr's militia was becoming a strategic problem.⁶³

Despite CPA's stance, in most areas, tribal outreach was already happening at the tactical level as a matter of course. By late summer 2003, most of CJTF-7's divisions had developed connections to important local sheikhs and religious leaders in order to facilitate reconstruction, economic development, and governance. Recognizing the value in

these relationships, CJTF-7 attempted to operationalize them at the corps level. On July 31, 2003, CJTF-7 notified the divisions that it intended to develop a comprehensive list of influential tribal leaders across Iraq that any unit could use to leverage in their stability operations, and also requested that divisions identify the tribal leaders in their areas who merited engagement at the national level. As part of its effort to develop a countrywide engagement plan, CJTF-7 collected information on tribes that was useful in securing critical infrastructure. The challenge for the divisions was in identifying the correct leaders and tribes. While coalition commanders acknowledged the importance of working with tribal leaders, they were often baffled by the complexity of Iraq's tribal dynamics. "Life in the Arabian Peninsula is an intricate tapestry," Dempsey commented, "and we have a very difficult time understanding that." Dempsey's troops complained that Iraqi tribal leaders constantly lied to them, not understanding that those leaders were often caught between their cultural requirement to protect and serve their tribes and what might be best for the country as a whole.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, these limited tribal engagement efforts eventually persuaded Bremer that the CPA should have some medium through which to address the mounting tribal grievances and encourage more Sunnis to join the political process instead of the resistance. In October, the CPA created the Office of Provincial Outreach, led by British diplomat David Richmond and State Department official Ronald L. Schlicher, to coordinate Sunni tribal outreach. However, limited in its authorities to listening to grievances and assessing reparations for damages caused by coalition operations, the new office was insufficient for initiating tribal engagements that could reverse the trend toward political conflict and insurgency.⁶⁵

Setbacks for the Internationalization Effort

As the CPA and CJTF-7 were branching into local governance in fall 2003, CENTCOM continued pursuing its dual main efforts of putting an Iraqi face on the campaign and internationalizing the U.S.-led military and reconstruction missions, matters that became increasingly difficult from the late summer onward. At the CENTCOM level, internationalization translated into engagements with regional and international players to donate more financial, humanitarian, and military resources to Iraq reconstruction. It also meant building capacity within the multinational forces already operating as part of Multi-National Division-Central South (MND-CS) in the mid-Euphrates region, Multi-National Division-South East (MND-SE) in southern Iraq, and the small South Korean army force in Kurdistan known as Multi-National Division-Northeast (MND-NE). With support from CENTCOM, the State Department asked other countries in the Middle East to contribute military and reconstruction resources to Iraq, and Bremer convinced the State Department and the Iraqi Governing Council to send Iraqi representatives to a donor conference in Madrid, Spain, on September 23 to ask for debt relief, donations, and other resources. In southern Iraq, CPA representative Sir Hilary Synnott successfully obtained 22 additional country donor contributions for the region by explaining "how much more pleasant it would be if their staff worked in the south rather than the dangerous Sunni Triangle."⁶⁶

Despite these accomplishments and some success obtaining international debt relief for Iraq, internationalization, on the whole, was unsuccessful. Many Iraqis were unenthusiastic about contributions from Arab countries and Turkey because they viewed the provision of aid from neighboring countries as a slight to Iraqi national pride. Coalition Military Assistance Training Team Commander Major General Paul D. Eaton noted, for example, that the Iraqi police trainees he sent to the Jordan International Police Training Center had difficulty adjusting to being trained in a neighbor state that Iraqis had long considered a weak satellite of Iraq. The Iraqi Governing Council, meanwhile, judged that a Turkish military presence in northern Iraq would upset the delicate balance between Kurds and Arabs in the region.⁶⁷

It was Zarqawi's activities, however, that truly derailed international participation and buy-in for rebuilding Iraq. On September 22, Zarqawi's organization bombed the remains of the headquarters of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in Baghdad they had destroyed the previous month. Although the attack caused far less physical damage than the August 19 truck bomb, it proved to be a significant setback to CENTCOM's internationalization campaign when UN Secretary General Kofi Annan announced further reductions in UNAMI personnel. The attack also heralded a conscious shift in UN perception of what its role should be in Iraq. Shortly after Ansar al-Islam detonated a car bomb outside the Turkish Embassy in Baghdad on October 14, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1511, authorizing the multinational force to continue operating in lieu of the UN-led mission in Iraq and requiring it to report on the progress being made.⁶⁸

Slow Start for the Iraqi Security Forces

After Zarqawi's activities imperiled internationalization efforts, the coalition moved its energies into the other priority Abizaid's advisers had predicted was necessary – Iraqization. A key component of Iraqization was the building of independent Iraqi security forces. Abizaid intended for these forces to serve as a buffer between the coalition military and the Iraqi populace and, in so doing, to downplay the coalition's role as an occupying force and mitigate the operational risk posed by shortfalls in U.S. and international troop numbers.⁶⁹ CENTCOM envisioned that the CPA, with assistance from CJTF-7, would build a security infrastructure consisting of 3 divisions of a new Iraqi Army, between 22,000 and 40,000 Iraq Civil Defense Corps troops (akin to a national guard), 75,000 provincial and national police, 50,000 facilities protection service members, and 7,000 border guards by the end of 2004. Ambitious as that timetable was, by late October 2003, DoD leaders considered increasing the overall size of the Iraqi security forces to 200,000 and accelerating the transition of the security mission to Iraqi control by September 2004. Rumsfeld acknowledged that, in order to create larger numbers of troops more quickly, CENTCOM would require some additional resources, and he agreed to commit more U.S. troops for that purpose, though it was unclear from where the additional Iraqi recruits and U.S. trainers would come. De-Ba'athification policies prevented much of Iraq's former military from participating, advising, or serving as leaders in the Iraqi security forces, and although CENTCOM proposed that the Army send teams from the training base at Fort Jackson, SC, to augment the contractors working for Eaton's CMATT, large numbers of qualified trainers never arrived.⁷⁰

Another factor inhibiting the development of the Iraqi security forces (ISF) was the lack of unity of command at all levels of security force development. At Bremer's direction, development of the new Iraqi Army and the Iraqi national police service was exclusively in the purview of the CPA with CJTF-7 effectively cut out of the process. Fortunately for Sanchez and his operational command, Eaton, whose monumental task was recruiting, vetting, and training 27 new Iraqi Army battalions in just over a year, made an effort to keep Sanchez apprised of his activities, and Sanchez, in turn, provided resources to the CMATT mission. Relations between CJTF-7 and the Civilian Police Assistance Training Team (CPATT), however, were not so cordial. When former New York Police Commissioner Bernard "Bernie" Kerik arrived in midsummer 2003 to take charge of CPATT and countrywide police development, one of his first actions was to prohibit CJTF-7 and its divisions from hiring any new police until the international police training center in Jordan became operational. This dismissed the fact that CJTF-7 units had already begun working with and training police recruits on their own.⁷¹

One of the outcomes of the dysfunction between Kerik and the coalition military units was that the Iraqi police, already suffering from corruption and questionable manning, became the most problematic of the Iraqi security services. The police forces suffered from disparate methods of training and equipping and nepotistic hiring practices, while the police rosters were filled with "ghost police," who were on payroll but did not actually show up for work. In September 2003, CJTF-7 reported that more than 60,000 of the planned Iraqi police force of 77,000 were working, but only around 30,000 of those were actually policing. The rest of the "ghost police" were receiving pay, and these invisible police were only one symptom of a much larger problem. On September 16, Bremer cautioned Abizaid and Rumsfeld that it would take at least a year to build a capable police force and advised those watching the numbers of police in briefings not to be fooled by those statistics.⁷² CENTCOM's own concerns about the Iraqi police grew along with the size of the police force. On November 18, Abizaid's advisers concluded that, with insufficient resources to support accelerating police development, the ineffectiveness of CPATT and its director, and CJTF-7's lack of logistics to support the program, "it is increasingly clear that the [Iraqi Police Service] is a potential point of failure in Iraq."⁷³ During a Thanksgiving visit to Iraq, Abizaid spoke with a battalion executive officer whose thoughts on the matter accorded with Abizaid's misgivings about the status of the Iraqi police and tactical problems with the Iraqi security forces writ large.

The Iraqi police are broken to an almost indescribable degree. For the first few weeks of 'joint patrols,' we literally had to chase them down in the streets to get them to walk with us. I had to coerce an IP to get him to complete a foot patrol with me. The situation is slowly improving, but the police still have no radios, limited uniforms, not enough weapons, and no windows or doors in any of their police stations. We still have a long way to go before they're ready to be partners in keeping the peace.⁷⁴

Beyond the police, the overall Iraqi security forces development mission was suffering from a lack of consistency in terms of composition, resources, and organization. The Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) was an initiative that originated with the 101st Airborne Division as a means of leveraging unemployed former Iraqi security personnel and tribal militias to support the scarce U.S. military footprint on the ground. As different divisions

adopted the ICDC concept, CJTF-7 attempted to support the endeavor, intending for the ICDC to assist the coalition military temporarily with internal security. The ICDC was meant to eventually be disbanded, integrated into the new Iraqi Army, or form the basis for an Iraqi reserve or national guard force. Because Sanchez was blocked from overt involvement with the security force development mission, he gave little guidance about how each division should develop their ICDC battalions.⁷⁵ As a result, unit approaches to ICDC and police development were mixed. CJTF-7 reported in December that the ICDC was “widely recognized by the Iraqi people” as a capable and effective force, but in actuality, coalition units struggled to get weapons, uniforms, and vehicles for their ICDC battalions and police. Training and equipping across those forces was far from standardized.⁷⁶ Some commanders diverted their increasingly scarce Commanders’ Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds to the Iraqi security forces instead of to reconstruction projects, while others did not, leading to impressive police and ICDC training academies in a few regions that could not be duplicated across the country. Iraqi security leaders tended to give conflicting accounts of the types of equipment they “needed” for their forces—pistols in particular—but those requests, too, were only met for isolated units and not for the entire Iraqi forces.⁷⁷ The training and equipping of the CJTF-7-led Iraqi security forces missions continued in a disparate fashion until the Iraqi forces generally failed in the large-scale violence that would come in spring 2004.

The recruiting mechanisms that CJTF-7 units used for the ICDC, Iraqi police, and some of the other security services created another problem. Coalition units often recruited tribes, militias, or families wholesale into specific units or branches of service, expecting that Iraqi nationalism would naturally tie them to the national interest. Unlike the new Iraqi Army, whose individual recruits came from all regions and sects of Iraq, CJTF-7 divisions recruited the ICDC, Iraqi police, facilities protection service, and border police members locally and trained them in their native towns. This is similar to the U.S. Army National Guard—a practice based on the premise that home-based forces would have the greatest stake in the security of their local areas.⁷⁸ The same was true for the local Iraqi police units created by the coalition divisions. Coalition officers eventually determined that many on the local police payroll were relatives of Iraqi Government officials and tribal leaders who used the police pay system as a means of providing incomes to their families and tribes. Over time, the tribal militias that the coalition divisions hired came to be absorbed into the border police and facilities protection services as part of the coalition’s objectives to transfer Iraq’s borders and critical infrastructure to the control of the national government. When combined with CJTF-7’s inability to organize security force development at the operational level, local recruiting efforts meant that a significant portion of the ICDC battalions, local police, border forces, and facilities protection services created by the divisions, though marginally capable, remained loyal to parochial rather than national interests.⁷⁹

The Coalition’s Tactical Adaptations

Although there was scant synchronization of offensive operations at CJTF-7, each division gradually developed what its leaders believed were effective methods to regain the initiative against enemy forces. In Baghdad, the 30,000 soldiers under Dempsey’s

command sought to maintain security in a city of 5.6 million people spread across 94 military zones through aggressive traffic control points. Judging that it was not feasible for the 1st Armored Division to sustain large numbers of presence patrols or traffic control points, Dempsey decided to shift from that defensive posture to precision operations against the Fedayeen, criminals, and extremist groups like Ansar al-Islam that he believed were disrupting the division's efforts to restore security. Dempsey also had his units closely monitor the city's mosques for harbingers of future unrest. Far to the west at the Syrian border, the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment experimented with techniques to interdict foreign fighter routes coming from Syria. Establishing a wide net to block ingress and egress routes at certain hours of darkness, the cavalrymen then conducted multiple cordon and search operations within that net, using the intelligence and documents acquired in those searches to build targeting packets for the next night's operations, a technique the 82d Airborne Division adopted in the remainder of Anbar Province.⁸⁰

The initial shortage of information about Iraqi society and locally based resistance groups, while problematic at the operational level, did not prevent the divisions from finding innovative methods of better understanding local adversaries. Although regulations of the time prohibited personnel untrained in human intelligence from being human intelligence collectors, most divisions acknowledged that "every soldier was a sensor" and began to incorporate information from tactical patrols and chance engagements with Iraq's citizens into their intelligence analysis. The divisions gradually expanded the use of smaller unmanned aerial vehicles and direction-finding platforms, resulting in more accurate targeting of hostile actors.⁸¹

The 1st Armored Division, 4th Infantry Division, and the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions each began incorporating external units and agencies working within their battle space into their operations and targeting processes. In Baghdad, Dempsey created a targeting board comprised of his own maneuver units, civil affairs, and information operations personnel along with other agency representatives to wage an undeclared "Battle of Baghdad" against former regime elements entering the city from rallying points in the Sunni Triangle.⁸² Farther north in the 4th Infantry Division sector, Odierno established a functional relationship with special operations and other national agencies to share intelligence and prepare joint operations against the high-value targets listed on CENTCOM's Deck of Cards.⁸³ The close collaboration between the 4th Infantry Division and special operations forces allowed each to capitalize on the other's strengths.⁸⁴ In Anbar, Swannack likewise organized weekly meetings between his commanders and the special operations forces working in the province to determine joint targets and develop operations against them.⁸⁵ In Ninawa in September 2003, Petraeus formed a Joint Inter-Agency Task Force (JIATF) to synchronize intelligence assets and deconflict disparate conventional and unconventional operations against hostile forces in the 101st Airborne Division's area. The JIATF included representatives from CPA's governorate teams, special operations forces, and interagency officials who were working in Mosul, including the Iraq Survey Group, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the intelligence community. JIATF-North's (JIATF-N) work led to synchronized raids against a large number of targets, including some of the organizers of Mohammed Yunis al-Ahmad's Hizb al-Awda.⁸⁶

Rarely, however, did CJTF-7 synchronize the operations of these tactical, joint, and interagency organizations with its own offensive operations or synthesize the associated

tactical information and intelligence across the division battle spaces. As a result, while the tactical units could judge that they were achieving some success in their respective areas, seams along the division boundaries remained to offer opportunities for Sunni resistance organizations to organize large-scale attacks across the theater.⁸⁷

As the 1st Armored Division would later describe in its after action review for its 2003–2004 deployment, U.S. divisions found themselves conducting offensive and stability operations simultaneously, forcing them to adapt and integrate lethal and nonlethal effects into their targeting processes. Personnel and expertise shortages also forced division commanders to employ significant portions of their forces in nontraditional operations. In Baghdad, Dempsey found that he had to send maneuver Soldiers to support civil affairs missions and make maneuver commanders responsible for distributing CERP funds for reconstruction projects. A shortage of infantry Soldiers for patrolling and civil affairs Soldiers for reconstruction also led the 4th Infantry Division and the 82d Airborne Division to retrain their artillerymen and other Soldiers to conduct patrols and civil affairs operations. They also decentralized military police, intelligence, and other division support units across their maneuver brigades, which became a widespread practice.⁸⁸

Although commanders in the 4th Infantry Division maintained separate targeting processes for lethal and nonlethal operations to avoid confusion, some units began integrating the two into the same process to improve their understanding of complex environments and deconflict the fine line between hostile and helpful behavior. In the 101st Airborne Division, an Integrated Effects Working Group merged representatives of the lethally focused JIATF-N with experts working on governance, reconstruction, and economic development to determine the most useful ways of approaching problem areas in Ninawa and the Kurdish provinces. The 4th Infantry Division eventually moved to this same model and, by the end of their time in Iraq, had transitioned to a blend of operations that was 10 percent offensively focused and 90 percent focused on reconstruction. Another by-product of the blended targeting operations was that those working at CMOCs and other civil affairs-oriented units understood how to incorporate information provided by grateful and concerned local citizens at their centers into the targeting of hostile activity, while those troops focused on offensive operations could also identify local grievances that were best resolved by nonlethal means. The result was that many units moved to a targeting model that not only identified whom to watch or capture, but also which local leaders to engage, where and what type of reconstruction projects were most needed, and how best to distribute resources across an array of missions.⁸⁹

A common topic in these integrated targeting boards was the employment of the CERP, a tool that all the coalition divisions agreed was one of their most critical enablers in post-regime Iraq. CJTF-7 divisions all expanded the use of CERP funds beyond reconstruction projects to microbusiness loans, food, salaries, and equipment for the Iraqi security forces under their control, as well as compensatory payments for the families of citizens who were wrongly detained or harmed during offensive operations. The 1st Armored Division spent a considerable amount of its CERP funds reopening national hospitals and clinics, building or renovating local government buildings, and supporting the national judiciary and legal system. The 82d Airborne Division used CERP to refurbish mosques during Ramadan in an effort to curb anti-coalition sentiment among Anbar's population. The 101st Airborne Division used CERP to establish a Northern Iraq

Office of Judicial Operations and an anticorruption office as well as the Eagle Village of Hope, which provided low-cost housing and job- skills training to underprivileged Iraqi citizens. In Basrah, Major General Graeme Lamb in MND-SE was grateful to receive U.S. CERP support because the British Government did not provide sufficient funds to support his reconstruction efforts. Abizaid and Sanchez continued to press the CPA, which remained focused on large-scale reconstruction projects, to decentralize funding from the Iraqi ministries down to the provinces and get the additional CERP funds authorized in a new supplemental budget pushed down to the tactical level.⁹⁰

The Sadrism Challenge Continues

Although Moqtada Sadr's followers appeared more subdued after the unrest of August 2003, their resentment had simply been turned from a boil down to a simmer, and CPA's apparent endorsement of the Sadrists' main rivals, the Hakims and SCIRI, as part of the Iraqi Governing Council had only widened the rift between Sadr and the coalition. The Sadrists grew further incensed when SCIRI began using its influence with the coalition to extend the reach of the Badr Corps militia. SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim had lobbied CJTF-7 to use the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps as a vehicle to disband or absorb armed militias, including the Badr Corps, after Bremer declared all militias illegal. When Hakim offered that CJTF-7 could transform the Badr Corps battalions into ICDC battalions in Najaf, Bremer countered in September with a proposal to integrate Badr Corps members into the ICDC as individuals—an offer Hakim accepted. For Iraqi observers, it appeared that Hakim had the ability to influence both the Iraqi Governing Council and the coalition leadership and that it might not be long before he could use the Badr Corps to attack Shi'a rivals as well as Sunni militants.⁹¹

Since the minor Sadrism uprising in Baghdad in August, Dempsey's troops had observed Sadr's men taking over administrative buildings and mosques responsible for overseeing the financial management of the holy Shi'a shrines. This convinced Dempsey that Sadr's activities in Sadr City, Kadhimiyah, Karbala, and elsewhere were "less aimed at gaining political and religious influence and more at gaining financial influence" that would enable Sadr to grow his militia and expand his future power.⁹² Dempsey's concerns were realized sooner than he anticipated. Shortly after denouncing the Iraqi Governing Council, Sadr announced that he would work with other similarly disgruntled parties to form an alternative governing council based in Sadr City. He then strengthened his position by sending Jaysh al-Mahdi militia to "guard" the Najaf hawza in early October, effectively putting the Shi'a religious leadership under his physical control and prompting Deputy SECDEF Paul Wolfowitz to again press for military options for detaining or killing Moqtada Sadr. On October 11, Abizaid briefed Wolfowitz that the coalition could seize Sadr within 3 to 4 days. It was a step Bremer strongly endorsed, but that Abizaid and Sanchez both opposed for the same reasons they had raised in August. The generals were ultimately successful in convincing first Wolfowitz and then Rumsfeld that cracking down on members of Sadr's militia was more effective and less disruptive than capturing Sadr himself. A few days later, troops from the 1st Armored Division joined forces with the Polish division in MND-CS to forcibly expel the Sadrists from the shrine in Karbala, after which CJTF-7 installed handpicked replacements for the Sadrists on the

council in Sadr City. After this confrontation, coalition officials observed that the Friday prayers led by the Sadrist firebrand cleric Abdul Hadi al-Daraji at the al-Ahrar Mosque in Sadr City drew significantly fewer listeners than before the raids, from which the coalition concluded that Sadr and his Mahdi Army lacked the power to counter the coalition. Dempsey and CJTF-7 judged that they had neutralized the Sadrist threat by showing the militia members that there was no sanctuary in the sacred shrines.⁹³

By the end of October 2003, the British also seemed to have the situation in Basrah in hand, though their relative isolation from the rest of CJTF-7 prevented them from seeing the province's connection to the greater Shi'a challenge. Nor did their American partners to the north keep them fully informed. Like the other multinational forces, the British initially could not access the secure internet the U.S. military used to distribute orders and reports, and CJTF-7 did not begin converting to an international network until late 2003. In the meantime, governance coordinator Synnott observed in November that MND-SE was not a British fiefdom, isolated from the forces at work in the rest of Iraq. In his estimation, the Sadrist "infection" was spreading into the British sector from MND-CS, and he was unable to convince nervous clerics in Nasiriyah to speak out against Sadr. This was among the first indicators that the Sadrists were far from contained and, though temporarily off balance in Najaf, Karbala, and Baghdad, were quietly extending their grasp to Iraq's largest southern population centers.⁹⁴

* * *

Faced with shortages, increased hostility from Sunni resistance groups, terrorist attacks against the international presence, and an organizational energy drain because of supporting the understaffed CPA, CJTF-7 provided only scant operational guidance, leaving its divisions to operate independently, with few linkages across their division areas of operations. Disparate approaches to operations meant that some unit areas flourished while others bore the brunt of the rising insurgency. Zarqawi and other insurgents took advantage of CJTF-7's lack of synchronization, exploiting unit boundaries and blind spots to organize increasingly lethal attacks against the coalition military and its partners. Far from being neutralized as CJTF-7 believed, Sadr and his militia had sustained only temporary setbacks, employing an operational pause to regroup in support of Sadr's longer-term ambitions.⁹⁵

As CENTCOM and coalition commanders were beginning to discover, the truly decisive operation in Iraq was not the combat phase, but the stability phase that almost no one had prepared for and that neither senior civilian leaders nor senior U.S. commanders were prepared to allocate sufficient time or resources to complete properly.⁹⁶ An increasingly unstable, dangerous environment began draining international support for the Iraq effort, and, when combined with pressure from the Pentagon to redeploy the invasion force quickly, the ambitious timelines proposed in new campaign plans from CPA, CENTCOM, and CJTF-7 to transfer responsibility to the Iraqi Government began to move from difficult to impossible.

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CHAPTER 9

DOWN THE SPIDER HOLE, OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2003

During the fall of 2003, the coalition found itself in a precarious situation whose dangers it was slow to acknowledge. The haphazard security operations of that summer and fall generated thousands of Sunni prisoners the coalition had not been prepared to hold, leading to startling revelations about the state of detention operations. The Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF-7) began to realize that the former regime insurgency and the growing foreign insurgent elements were much stronger than coalition leaders had initially thought. Though tactical operations from October to December ultimately would lead to the capture of Saddam Hussein, they also would show that the insurgency was far more than just a rebellion intended to return Saddam and the former regime to power.

ABU GHRAIB AND THE EMERGING DETENTION PROBLEM

As the number of detainees in coalition custody approached 10,000 in the fall of 2003, CJTF-7 and its divisions struggled to manage this growing detainee population.¹ Coalition units had few reliable means to track detainees or an accurate way to determine their names and identities. Iraqis, including tribal sheikhs and Iraqi Governing Council members, complained of the difficulties in obtaining information on the whereabouts of their constituents' relatives in the coalition's custody. This situation bred resentment and undermined General John P. Abizaid's August 2003 pledge to Iraqi leaders to "free innocent detainees with help from the local leaders."²

The coalition's detention facilities proved unfit. The looting of the former regime's internment facilities had left the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and CJTF-7 with an Iraqi prison infrastructure that was inadequate for the numbers and types of detainees captured by the coalition divisions. Both Ambassador L. Paul Bremer and Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez were reluctant to reopen the vacated Abu Ghraib prison, given its notorious role as a torture site under the former regime, but they had few options. A CPA report in the summer of 2003 concluded that Abu Ghraib was the only prison facility in condition for quick restoration to house maximum security inmates.³

Sanchez put the 800th Military Police Brigade, a U.S. Army Reserve unit commanded by Brigadier General Janis L. Karpinski, in charge of detention operations at Abu Ghraib, with Colonel Thomas M. Pappas and his 205th Military Intelligence Brigade responsible for leading interrogations and obtaining intelligence from the prisoners. However, the two brigades lacked personnel trained in detention and interrogation. The problem, immediately apparent, greatly slowed the vetting of detainees and the separation of those high in intelligence value from those whose information lost value over time. The military intelligence brigade had to stretch its small contingent of interrogators and interpreters to support Abu Ghraib while it continued with its primary task of providing intelligence to the corps headquarters.⁴

After 6 weeks as commander, Sanchez visited Abu Ghraib in August 2003 to get a better understanding of the burgeoning insurgency from the detainee population. What he saw alarmed him. Located in the middle of a former Republican Guard area with



Source: U.S. Army photo (Released).

**Brigadier General Janis L. Karpinski,
Commanding General, 800th Military
Police Brigade.⁷**

there, by approximately a 75:1 ratio, compared to the 1:1 ratio used at the Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, detention facility. To fill their personnel shortfalls, both brigades turned to contractors who often lacked training in military interrogation techniques, policy, and doctrine, a measure that had serious consequences.⁸

The Status of the Detainees

These detention problems were compounded by the coalition's internal confusion about the legal disposition of those in CJTF-7 custody and how they should be handled in detention and interrogation. It was unclear, for instance, whether the Fedayeen and those detained after major combat operations ended were enemy prisoners of war (EPW) who, by law, should be treated under the provisions of the third Geneva Convention; civilian internees or detainees treated under the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention; or "unlawful enemy combatants," a category that U.S. officials in Washington had ruled were not entitled to the protections guaranteed to EPWs under the Geneva Conventions.⁹ Options for trying the detainees included courts martial, military commissions, and the Iraqi courts, each with its advantages and disadvantages. Courts martial generally were appropriate only for U.S. military personnel under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Military tribunals could result in a death penalty sentence—an outcome opposed by the United Kingdom and the international community. The Iraqi courts, in their infancy, proved inconsistent in 2003. Ultimately, it was determined that the prisoners CJTF-7 had in custody did not meet the criteria of enemy prisoners of war and that they should

a pro-Saddam population, the Abu Ghraib facility experienced almost daily mortar and rocket attacks. The military policemen, who also lacked combat experience or training, were ill-prepared to secure the facility on their own. Sanchez attributed the military police brigade's ineffectiveness to a lack of training and to Karpinski's failed leadership. Although he decided not to relieve Karpinski in the absence of a replacement, Sanchez placed Pappas formally in charge of Abu Ghraib.⁵ His concerns also led him to try to consolidate detention operations in a series of fragmentary orders in late summer 2003. Sanchez requested outside assistance to advise him and his units on how to manage detainee operations.⁶ In the meantime, the situation at Abu Ghraib worsened as the detainee population grew. By October, the 7,000-man detainee population at Abu Ghraib outnumbered the 92 military police on duty

instead be treated as civilian internees covered under the statutes of the fourth Geneva Convention. At the same time, it was decided that relatively few met the criteria for “unlawful combatants,” a category that President George W. Bush outlined in a February 7, 2002, memorandum that instructed the U.S. military how to treat the al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters on the battlefield in Afghanistan.¹⁰ The decision to categorize CJTF-7 prisoners as civilian internees gave those captured considerable legal protections, including a requirement for semi-annual reviews of their detention status. Like many decisions made in the first few months after the end of major combat operations, it became an unchanged precedent that had a profound impact on the conduct of the war.

The Abu Ghraib Abuses

The nebulous legal status of detainees created fertile ground for abuse and misconduct. After September 11, 2001 (9/11), and the invasion of Afghanistan, the President approved a set of methods labeled “enhanced interrogation techniques” for use against “unlawful enemy combatants” that many believed were prohibited by the Geneva Conventions.¹¹ This decision opened the door for those interrogating “unlawful enemy combatants” to use a host of methods not listed in the Army’s field manual for intelligence interrogations, Field Manual 34-52. Confusing and inconsistent unit policies on interrogation techniques resulted in methods involving “mild physical contact” that were outside the Geneva Conventions guidelines but used in order to obtain time-sensitive intelligence on terrorist activities. At an American detention facility in Bagram, Afghanistan, two Afghan detainees died in U.S. custody in a November 2002 incident that did not result in any changes until after the scandal at Abu Ghraib became public in 2004. Sanchez later would assert that the Army’s reluctance to acknowledge the Bagram abuses committed by Soldiers of the XVIII Airborne Corps prevented it and U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) from rectifying the greater problems of legal interrogation procedures.¹² In the absence of specific guidance from the Army, CENTCOM, or CJTF-7, interrogators in Iraq during 2003 relied on Army FM 34-52 and on unauthorized techniques that had migrated from loosely supervised interrogations in Afghanistan. Elements of the 519th Military Intelligence Battalion, which had just come from Afghanistan, became responsible for managing interrogation operations at Abu Ghraib in late July 2003. It prepared draft interrogation guidelines that closely resembled the standard operating procedures used by special operations forces in Afghanistan in 2003. Many of those techniques did not conform to the Geneva Conventions.¹³

At the CJTF-7 level, however, Sanchez and other senior leaders apparently were unaware of the Afghanistan connection and the Bagram incident. They only knew that their Soldiers struggled to manage interrogations of suspected Iraqi insurgents and foreign terrorists. In Mosul, the 101st Airborne Division reported it was investigating alleged detainee abuse by Soldiers from one of its intelligence companies, a development that revealed not just Soldier wrongdoing but also the greater problem of inadequate experienced personnel and infrastructure to support detention and interrogation operations. In the 4th Infantry Division’s area, Major General Raymond Odierno observed similar problems and, recognizing that he was unlikely to receive the resources needed to manage his large detainee population properly, began sending increasing numbers

of his division's prisoners to Abu Ghraib, a facility the 4th Infantry Division presumed was more professionally run than the division's local detention centers. Odierno and his division had little idea that the theater detention center in Baghdad was as fraught with problems as those run by the divisions.¹⁴

Sanchez's request for outside assistance on detention operations was fulfilled when Major General Geoffrey D. Miller arrived on August 31 with a team from the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to evaluate the strategic interrogation of detainees in Iraq. Miller's team identified many problems with the detention facility at Abu Ghraib and received Sanchez's approval to make on-the-spot adjustments to military police and military intelligence operations at the facility and to detainee segregation methods.¹⁵ But Miller's primary focus concerned the effectiveness of interrogation operations. On September 9, he advised that CJTF-7 should train a dedicated guard force that was "actively engaged in setting the conditions for successful exploitation of internees." In other words, he recommended that military police at Abu Ghraib should create an environment in support of military intelligence interrogations.¹⁶ After conferring with CENTCOM on October 12, Sanchez issued a new CJTF-7 policy, authorizing methods "only slightly stronger than those in FM 34-52."¹⁷ However, different units interpreted the new policy differently. Pappas later stated that the policy was explained to his military intelligence brigade as "the things you can and can't do with interrogations." The 800th Military Police Brigade was not briefed on Sanchez's new policy because it was not responsible for interrogations. This created additional confusion between the two commands at Abu Ghraib.¹⁸

Miller's was not the only detention-related assistance CJTF-7 received. On October 13, Army provost marshal Major General Donald J. Ryder arrived in Iraq with a second team to inspect CJTF-7 internment practices. Ryder and his people found that deficiencies in manpower and training in the detention system in Iraq created the potential for human rights abuses, although he noted that "no military police units purposely [applied] inappropriate confinement practices."¹⁹ On November 6, Ryder discussed his findings with Sanchez, including Ryder's reservations about Karpinski's ability to command and his proposals for new procedures for in-processing and managing detainees.²⁰ Ryder also made recommendations about overall corrections systems management, legal processing for detainees, and plans to transition the theater detention facilities to an Iraqi-run corrections system, all recommendations that CJTF-7 planned to adopt.²¹

Unfortunately, Ryder's recommendations and Sanchez's policy changes came too late. Between October 25 and November 6, 2003, at precisely the time the Ryder team was inspecting CJTF-7 detention facilities, Abu Ghraib became a site of prisoner abuse and maltreatment. Soldiers from the 372d Military Police Company, a reserve unit from Maryland, arrived at Abu Ghraib on October 13 and were assigned guard duty in the section housing Tier 1 detainees, those considered most dangerous. On October 25, just 12 days into its deployment, the untrained and poorly supervised Soldiers dragged a prisoner around the cellblock on a cargo-strap leash while taking photos of the detainee and Private First Class Lynndie England.²² This behavior degenerated further when, on November 3, an Army Criminal Investigation Division (CID) interrogator brought to the Tier 1 section a new prisoner suspected of involvement in the killing of five Americans and instructed 372d Military Police Company Sergeant Charles Graner to subject

the detainee to stressful treatment in order to soften his resistance to questioning. Graner shouted at the man while forcing him to stand hooded on an empty box for hours at a time.²³ Joined by fellow military policemen, Sergeant Ivan “Chip” Frederick and Specialist Michael Smith, Graner attached the detainee to some loose electrical wires hanging from a wall, telling him that if he moved he would be electrocuted.²⁴ Other detainees were sodomized, stacked naked in human pyramids, beaten, and raped. None of the Soldiers knew that the photos of their acts of abuse from that week would surface months later and cause a worldwide uproar.

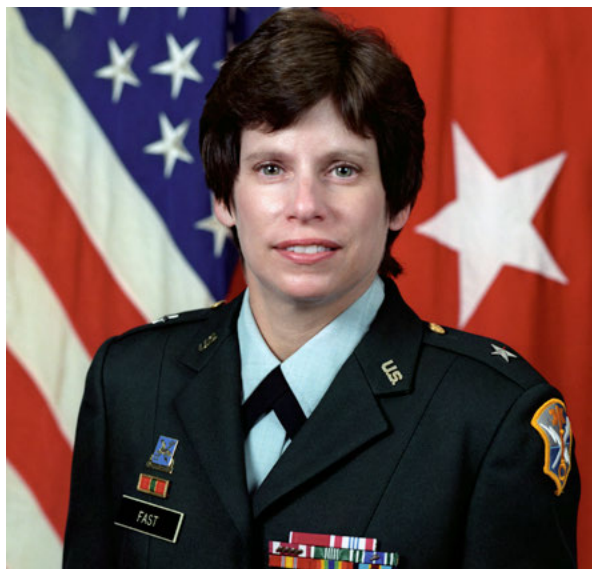
At the time, Sanchez, CJTF-7 intelligence chief Brigadier General Barbara Fast, Karpinski, and Pappas were unaware of these abuses, which would not come to light until early 2004. However, Sanchez’s concerns increased on November 5, when an Iraqi detainee died at Abu Ghraib while being questioned by non-Department of Defense (DoD) U.S. interrogators—just 2 days after Graner’s as-yet-unknown abuse incident. The man had died from blows to the head in an incident that a DoD autopsy ruled a homicide.²⁶ While Sanchez remained concerned about detention issues, he was convinced for the moment that other agencies were responsible for the worst abuses, not the soldiers under his command.

THE RAMADAN OFFENSIVE

The Insurgents Strike

During the fall of 2003, CJTF-7 leadership divided its attention among the seemingly disconnected though increasing incidents of violence around the country, the thorny problems of detention operations, and the planning required for the troop rotations and drawdowns scheduled for early 2004. These matters obscured indications of a concerted insurgent effort later dubbed the “Ramadan Offensive.”²⁷ In what was to become an annual phenomenon for the U.S.-led coalition, insurgent attacks spiked significantly during the holy month of Ramadan in Iraq, which began October 26, 2003.

In early October 2003, at least three Sunni resistance groups formulated plans to attack the coalition during the holy month of Ramadan. Jaysh Muhammad had grown considerably by filling its ranks with former Fedayeen members. It also developed a relationship with a National Islamic Resistance front led by a former Iraqi colonel and Saddam’s half-brother, Sabawi Ibrahim al-Tikriti, the latter based in Syria. Tikriti and the former colonel made an agreement with Syrian leaders whereby members of the group could



Source: U.S. Army photo by Scott Davis (Released).

**Brigadier General Barbara G. Fast,
CJTF-7 C-2 (2003-2004).²⁵**

purchase supplies inside Syria at reduced prices, transit the Iraq-Syria border with ease, and receive direct support from Syria through the Syrian branch of the Ba'ath Party.²⁸ Jaysh Muhammad also had well-established cells in the Sunni areas of the Rashid and Karada districts of Baghdad, as well as Ramadi, Fallujah, and Baqubah, and was well-positioned to attack a variety of coalition military targets.²⁹ The Ansar al-Islam offshoot, Ansar al-Sunna, also prepared for attacks against two of its historical enemies, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Turkish military presence in Iraq, as well as against some other international players.³⁰ Ansar al-Sunna acted quickly on its plans to attack Turkish interests, carrying out a suicide car bombing of the Turkish Embassy in Baghdad on October 14. This bombing caused no casualties other than the bomber.³¹ Finally, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi intended to use both foreigners and Iraqis to initiate his own offensive against the coalition, Iraqi security forces, and coalition partners.

These resistance groups marked the Ramadan holiday with a series of attacks targeting the coalition military and the fledgling Iraqi security forces. They also attacked the locations hosting Deputy Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Paul Wolfowitz, who was making a visit to Iraq as Ramadan began. Shortly after Wolfowitz visited Tikrit on October 25, rocket-propelled grenade fire downed a Black Hawk helicopter, wounding five Soldiers. On October 26, a mortar attack killed one Soldier at an Abu Ghraib police station, a gunman assassinated a deputy mayor of Baghdad, and rockets struck the Rashid Hotel in Baghdad where Wolfowitz was staying.³² Although the deputy secretary emerged unhurt, the attack killed an American colonel and wounded 16 others.³³ The next morning, a suicide bomber drove an explosives-laden ambulance into the headquarters of the International Red Crescent in Baghdad, killing 12. Five additional suicide car bombings against Iraqi police stations in Baghdad followed in the space of 45 minutes, killing 1 American Soldier, 26 Iraqi civilians, and 8 Iraqi police officers.³⁴ Police captured a sixth would-be suicide bomber, a Sudanese national.³⁵ After a bloody 2 days of fighting with 47 dead and 244 wounded, attack rates against the coalition and its supporters continued to rise for the rest of Ramadan, reaching a peak of 45 per day.³⁶

Ramadan also brought increased targeting of coalition aircraft. On November 2, Sunni militants shot down a CH-47 Chinook helicopter west of Baghdad, killing 16 Soldiers and making it the deadliest single day for American troops since March 23, the most costly day of the invasion.³⁷ The attack was most likely carried out by Abu Issa tribesmen retaliating against the coalition for arresting a senior Abu Issa leader, Sheikh Barakat, just days before. A few days later, insurgents shot down a Black Hawk helicopter near Tikrit, killing another six Soldiers. Shortly thereafter, a Black Hawk attempting to avoid enemy fire collided with another Black Hawk in Mosul, killing 17 Soldiers and bringing the number of American troops killed in the space of 2 weeks to more than 60.³⁸

The Ramadan attacks also targeted U.S. coalition partners. On November 12, a suicide car bomber dispatched by Zarqawi attacked the headquarters of the Italian military contingent in Nasiriyah, killing 19 Italian soldiers and 8 Iraqis. This attack was the deadliest against international troops since the beginning of the war and marked the Italian military's single worst loss of life since World War II.³⁹ During the rest of the month, insurgent attacks killed two Japanese diplomats near Tikrit, two Korean contractors, and one Colombian national. On November 29, Ansar al-Islam killed an additional seven Spanish intelligence agents in an ambush in Mahmudiyah.⁴⁰ These attacks brought the

total number of coalition dead and wounded during the month of Ramadan to at least 126 soldiers killed and more than 750 wounded, surpassing the death toll of the invasion and subsequent major combat operations to that date.⁴¹

In addition to causing hundreds of military casualties, the more than 1,000 insurgent attacks in November targeted Iraqi infrastructure, Iraqi security forces, and Iraqis believed to be cooperating with the coalition. Sanchez noted that, during the 32 days of Ramadan, insurgent attacks on Iraqis doubled, with a total of 74-recorded attacks against civilian or Iraqi Government officials and 84 attacks against the Iraqi security forces.⁴² Among the Iraqis killed was Muhan Jabr al-Shuwaili, a judge from Najaf in charge of a commission investigating former members of Saddam's regime. His death sparked protests by Iraqis demanding better security.⁴³

A final bloody confrontation in the 4th Infantry Division's area of operations marked the end of Ramadan. On November 30, more than 100 insurgents wearing Fedayeen Saddam uniforms ambushed 2 American convoys delivering new Iraqi currency to banks in Samarra. The 4th Infantry Division repelled the assaults, killing at least 54 of the attackers. But the message from the holy month of Ramadan was clear: Iraqi and foreign Sunni resistance groups were sufficiently resourced and organized for larger-scale operations against coalition targets, a far cry from the isolated "dead-enders" SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld and CJTF-7 had expected to eliminate.⁴⁴

Response to the Ramadan Attacks

In Baghdad, Bremer cast the increased insurgent activity as "no strategic threat" to the CPA-led reconstruction operations and emphasized that the United States would not "cut and run" from the country.⁴⁵ Outside Iraq, some analysts viewed the Ramadan offensive as analogous to the 1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam, meant to convince Americans, their coalition partners, and Iraqis that the coalition was involved in a losing cause.⁴⁶ In Washington, the administration responded to the deteriorating situation by announcing the CPA's mission would be sharply curtailed. On November 15, the United States announced that the transition of sovereignty to Iraqi control would occur at an accelerated pace—in just over 7 months rather than the originally planned 2 to 3 years. The new timeline called for the selection of a transitional assembly that would elect a provisional government in June 2004, when Iraq would be granted sovereignty, and the CPA would dissolve. Before national elections, a set of principles of government would become Iraq's basic laws and eventually lead to a new constitution.⁴⁷ In addition to the perception of success, the administration hoped that the accelerated transfer of authority, power, and sovereignty to Iraq would reduce support for the insurgency.⁴⁸

Beyond the United States, the late 2003 insurgent offensive had a significant impact on international involvement in the coalition campaign. The United Nations (UN) had already largely removed its footprint to Jordan. The November bombing of the Italian Carabinieri in Nasiriyah placed considerable pressure on Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, whose decision to contribute troops to Iraq was already controversial to the Italian public. Pressure mounted on other contingents, including the British, to avoid further casualties because of the political consequences.⁴⁹ The Ramadan attacks had begun the fraying of the coalition in Iraq, leaving the United States with the challenge of keeping it together.

As insurgent attacks mounted during Ramadan, coalition commanders launched counterattacks of their own. “We are going to get pretty tough,” Sanchez told reporters on November 11.⁵⁰ On the following day—the same day the Italian contingent in Nasiriyah was bombed—the 1st Armored Division launched a series of strikes to disrupt enemy operations in Baghdad. AC-130 Spectre gunships, artillery, and mortars targeted likely launch sites for insurgent mortar attacks, while 1st Armored Division units and Iraq Civil Defense Corps battalions set up additional checkpoints throughout Baghdad. To combat the increasing numbers of improvised explosive devices (IED), the division ordered Soldiers to shoot to kill anyone digging along roads after dark.⁵¹ The division also launched an operation to crack down on black marketeering and other criminal networks in Baghdad, activities Major General Martin Dempsey believed were contributing to the insurgency.⁵² The division’s military police also began detaining Iraqi police leaders with links to former regime organizations.⁵³

These operations extended beyond Baghdad. On December 10, after insurgents attacked Spanish troops traveling between Baghdad and Anbar, the 82d Airborne Division undertook a series of 18 raids targeting those thought to be responsible. Further west, just before Christmas, the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment raided insurgent training camps in Rawah, capturing 11 high-value targets and a significant amount of weaponry and electronics.⁵⁴ The 82d Airborne Division complemented these offensive operations with nonlethal activities, such as paying to refurbish almost half of Anbar’s 702 mosques during Ramadan.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, in northern Iraq in late November and early December, the 101st Airborne Division conducted a series of operations culminating in a December 10 raid against 34 simultaneous targets in Mosul, resulting in the detention of 54-suspected insurgents, including a former Fedayeen general.⁵⁶ The 4th Infantry Division hunted former regime loyalists in Tikrit, Baqubah, Kirkuk, and Balad, destroyed insurgent safe houses, and captured over 600 suspected insurgents. Sanchez credited these activities with reducing attacks against coalition troops in the division’s area of operations.⁵⁷ Because of the heightened insurgent activity during Ramadan, Odierno asked Sanchez for the use of the 3d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division, en route from Kuwait to relieve the 101st Airborne Division in Mosul. The brigade, the first Stryker-equipped unit employed in Iraq, conducted raids and patrols in Samarra and Balad, the suspected sources of the massive insurgent ambush that had occurred on November 30. Odierno used the Stryker brigade to launch another operation on December 17, targeting retired officers and prominent Ba’athists in Samarra. This sweep lasted nearly 2 weeks and resulted in the detention of 15 high-value targets and 111 other suspected insurgents, along with the discovery of 26 major weapons caches.⁵⁸

Although each coalition division believed its operations against hostile forces were precise and successful, it could only measure its effectiveness in terms of the numbers of people detained, and the number of weapons and ammunition seized. The divisions could not correlate their tactical operations to a reduction in violence and still lacked an accurate sense of the depth and nature of the various militant groups permeating their areas. Thus, their expansive clearing operations and raids were essentially movements to contact, symptomatic of units’ dearth of information about whom they were fighting, and they often equated to only temporary setbacks for the insurgent organizations.

The Coalition's Situational Awareness

The Ramadan attacks forced CENTCOM and CJTF-7 to reexamine their intelligence picture of enemy activity. Although Abizaid remained convinced that "unemployment was the primary source of strength for the insurgency," foreign-led terrorist organizations were clearly becoming problematic as well.⁵⁹ On October 28, 2 days into the Ramadan offensive, Abizaid briefed the Joint Chiefs on Iraq's "enemy" force, which he estimated consisted of approximately 4,000 former regime loyalists, 2,000 members of Ansar al-Islam, and an unknown number of foreign fighters, though he judged the number of foreign fighters cited elsewhere had been overstated.⁶⁰

At CJTF-7, Red Cell leader Colonel Derek Harvey and other senior officers believed Abizaid was underestimating the insurgency's strength. CJTF-7 units were reporting a higher level of enemy activity than Abizaid's 6,000-plus insurgents could carry out, and U.S. troops had already detained more than 10,000-suspected insurgents in Abu Ghraib.⁶¹ The insurgency's networks were more complex than previous estimates appreciated, CJTF-7's officers judged. There were extensive relationships among "the former denizens of Saddam's regime, the jihadists sneaking into the country, the tribes who were sympathetic to the brewing insurgency, and Zarqawi's [organization]," Harvey concluded.⁶² In a report entitled "Sunni Arab Resistance: Politics of the Gun," Harvey detailed how Iraq's highly militarized society, paramilitary organizations, and intelligence services established under Saddam's regime had provided the foundation for a well-trained and organized insurgency. After the fall of the regime, an estimated 65,000 to 95,000 Special Republican Guard officers, intelligence officers, Fedayeen Saddam forces, Ba'ath Party militias, and their ilk had faded into the population in and around Baghdad.⁶³ But even Harvey and his experts were unsure of who among these ready-made insurgents was running the insurgency's operations, and CJTF-7 continued to scramble to find enemy leaders and operatives ahead of planned attacks. This former regime threat was matched by a metastasis of Salafi militant organizations. At the same time that CJTF-7 senior analysts were coming to recognize the role of the former regime in the insurgency, the command began receiving reports that Ansar al-Islam had returned from Iran in August 2003 to set up operations in Mosul, Fallujah, and Ramadi, and to train in remote encampments in Anbar for future attacks on the coalition.⁶⁴ In November 2003, a new group calling itself the Jaysh Ansar al Sunna announced its presence in Iraq via a fax sent to the Arab newspaper *al-Quds al-Arabi*. The group was at least inspired (if not directly linked to) al-Qaeda at the time of its formation and would quickly grow to prominence as an Iraqi-dominated terrorist organization, later to compete with Zarqawi's Tawhid wal-Jihad to become the al-Qaeda franchise in Iraq.⁶⁵ Eventually, CJTF-7 correctly determined that Ansar al Sunna was a subset of and a successor organization to Ansar al-Islam and that it had been responsible for some of the Ramadan attacks.

The coalition had underestimated insurgent strength in part because CJTF-7 had undercounted the number of insurgent attacks, recording perhaps as little as one-third of all of the hostile activities in the theater, Harvey and others concluded. Because CJTF-7 and its units had no master system to incorporate reports from Iraqi forces, as well as civilian authorities, a number of insurgent attacks on Iraqi forces and even some terrorist strikes were omitted from the coalition's count because U.S. troops had not witnessed the

attacks.⁶⁶ IED events (roadside bombs, suicide bombs, and car bombs) especially were underreported, recorded in the coalition's significant activities (sigacts) database only when an IED damaged a vehicle or wounded or killed soldiers. Following the CJTF-7 reporting criteria, coalition troops were not recording those IEDs that were found before they detonated but caused no casualties. Upon realizing, a full 9 months into the war, that a large number of incidents had gone unreported, CJTF-7 instructed its units to report all incidents in which the coalition military or its Iraqi partners were attacked, even if the attacks resulted in no injuries or damage. CJTF-7 also standardized methods for reporting sigacts across the theater and established clearer criteria for what should be reported as significant.⁶⁷ Under the revamped reporting system, the Iraq theater would appear far more violent than coalition leaders had understood.

The Counter-IED Fight

The Ramadan period also convinced coalition military leaders to take steps against what had become the Iraqi insurgency's weapon of choice: the IED. CJTF-7 began counting IED incidents in July and, over the next 5 months, the number of recorded IEDs went from 8 per month to a high of 95 effective IED attacks during Ramadan in November.⁶⁸ By September 2003, IEDs already accounted for more U.S. combat deaths than direct-fire weapons and indirect fire combined.⁶⁹ To reduce IED-related casualties, unit commanders sought to improve the physical protection of their soldiers. U.S. forces in Iraq had few general-purpose vehicles with armor and even fewer vehicles equipped for counter-IED activities. Although DoD recognized that units needed more and better-armored vehicles, acquiring and delivering those vehicles into the country would take some time. In the interim, units in Iraq improvised by adding so-called hillbilly armor to their vehicles, using steel, plywood, and other available materials to harden their soft-skinned vehicles. In late 2003, CENTCOM requested additional armored vehicles and add-on armored survivability kits. By November, "up-armored" High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV) and add-on armor kits began pouring into theater.⁷⁰ Because many IEDs were radio-controlled, CJTF-7 also requested and received some new equipment and systems capable of jamming some of the frequencies on which insurgents detonated their IEDs.⁷¹

The scale of the IED problem led Abizaid to propose to Rumsfeld and Myers in October 2003 that DoD should initiate a "Manhattan Project-like effort" to confront this "number-one killer of American troops."⁷² In response, Army G-3 Lieutenant General Richard A. Cody created an IED task force under Brigadier General Joseph Votel that would eventually grow into the Joint IED Defeat Organization.⁷³ Institutional development of an IED task force, however, was bound to be a slow process. Concerned groups working explosive ordnance in Iraq began building their own local counter-IED task force. In Baghdad, special operations officers who had discovered disparate coalition units working on counter-IED measures succeeded in merging British, American, and Australian ordnance specialists and technicians into a Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell (CEXC [pronounced "sexy"]). Dubbed the "CSI of the Counter IED fight," the CEXC surveyed post-blast sites to collect fingerprints, gather forensic evidence to link devices to individual bomb makers, and examine unique aspects of the devices' deployment.⁷⁴

CEXC also became the first consolidated organization to diagnose the composition of IED systems as well as indirect-fire weapons and relay pertinent information to field commanders. Evidence gathered by CEXC technicians, for example, led to the eventual capture of the insurgent cell that had rocketed Wolfowitz's hotel in Baghdad on October 26.⁷⁵

Across Iraq, each division developed its own local responses to the IED threat. In Baghdad, the 1st Armored Division attempted to counter IED use by increasing patrols along frequently trafficked routes to deter insurgents from placing IEDs along them.⁷⁶ The 4th Infantry Division units gradually built a sophisticated set of techniques directed at the networks that constructed IEDs, reasoning that "wherever there was an IED, there was a bomber, a bomb maker, a cache, and someone funding the operation."⁷⁷ Tactical commanders also began discussing counter-IED initiatives with each other, including information about different types of IEDs, techniques for emplacing them, and ways to defeat the devices. By December 2003, CJTF-7 had consolidated this input with information from CEXC to create counter-IED smart cards showing pictures of IEDs along with the different firing mechanisms and recommended methods to defeat or bypass the devices.⁷⁸ CJTF-7 also established an IED training cell and sent Center for Army Lessons Learned representatives to each division to assist with the counter-IED learning process.⁷⁹

THE CAPTURE OF SADDAM HUSSEIN

Operation RED DAWN

The months-long manhunt for Iraq's former Ba'athist leadership paid off at the beginning of December with the capture of Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri's private secretary in the town of Hawijah. Although Douri himself was not captured, commanders in the 4th Infantry Division sector believed the raid indicated they had made steady progress toward finding their most valuable target, whose capture, coalition leaders believed, could potentially break the insurgency: Saddam Hussein.⁸⁰

The eventual capture of the former Iraqi President was the culmination of 6 months of intelligence-driven raids. Throughout the summer and fall of 2003, Soldiers of the 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, had formed an increasingly close partnership with the special operations forces (SOF) working in northern Iraq to bring their complementary capabilities together. Rumors about the former Iraqi dictator's whereabouts multiplied to the point they were dubbed "Elvis sightings." But Odierno and his 1st Brigade commander, Colonel James Hickey, both agreed Saddam hid somewhere in Salahadin Province.⁸¹

After months of fruitlessly trying to find Saddam by tracking down figures in the former regime's formal structure, 4th Infantry Division leaders and their SOF partners realized they were hunting the wrong network. The key to sifting through the many possible leads was not in the Ba'athist regime's formal apparatus, but, rather, in identifying the unofficial security apparatus protecting Saddam, which consisted of less powerful figures who had long-standing tribal and family ties to Saddam. Beginning in July 2003, the 4th Infantry Division and its special operations partners began building a network link diagram focused on Saddam's family and clan. Analyzing this informal network led to the capture of Brigadier General Daham Mahmedi, a man in indirect contact with

Saddam through couriers whom coalition analysts had pinpointed by examining archival news footage. When questioned, Mahmedi pointed coalition officials in the direction of Mohammed al-Muslit, a former bodyguard and relative of Saddam who was already in coalition custody but had been concealing his identity.⁸²

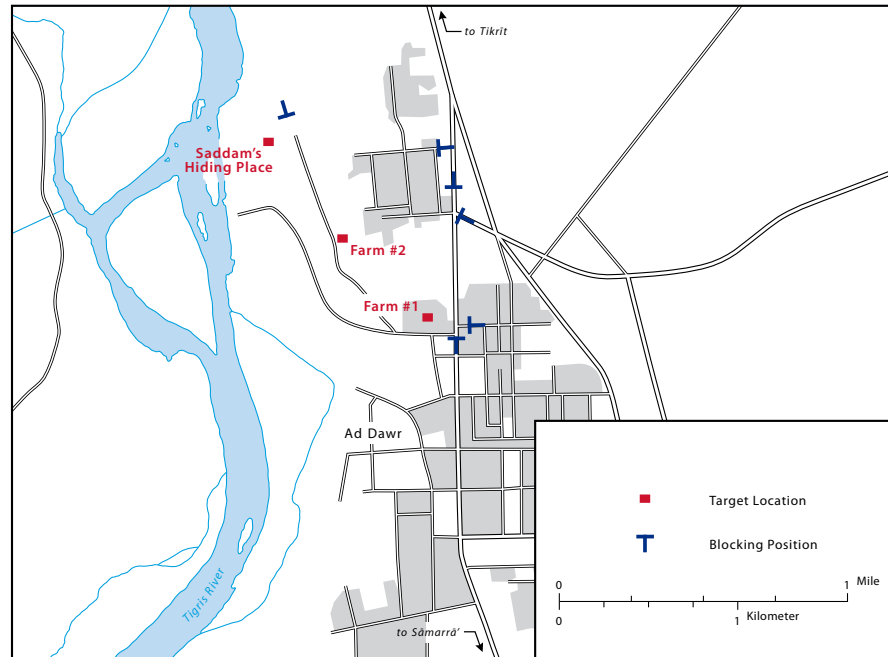
Based on information from Muslit, Hickey and special operations leaders identified two farms on the eastern bank of the Tigris River near Ad Dawr as possible locations for Saddam. The area around the farms, which was actually within view of the 4th Infantry Division base in Tikrit, was covered with dense vegetation. The farms themselves were located in a riverside orchard where Saddam famously had swum the Tigris to escape capture after his failed attempt to assassinate Iraqi leader Abdul Karim Qassem in 1959. The ease with which Saddam might be able to escape again meant that the Soldiers on any raid to capture him would need to establish a tight cordon around the target sites. Additionally, Hickey and his special operations partners estimated that Saddam might be guarded by 20- or 30-armed individuals, potentially making capturing him alive even more challenging.⁸³

The operation that Hickey and the special operations team leaders developed, code-named RED DAWN, involved two of Hickey's infantry battalions, the 299th Engineer Battalion, an aviation detachment, an artillery battalion, cavalry forces, and special operations teams (see Map 12). The plan called for the maneuver forces to provide an outer cordon on the eastern and western banks of the Tigris River while Apache helicopters covered them. A cavalry troop provided the inner cordon for the special operations teams, who, while supported by an armored car element, would assault the farms simultaneously.⁸⁴

At 7:50 p.m. on December 13, the first assault team reported no enemy forces at the first farm. At the second farm, the arrival of U.S. Soldiers surprised two of Saddam's assistants, who ran north hoping to draw the Soldiers away from the small, three-room farmhouse in which they resided. During their initial search of the farmhouse and surrounding palm groves, the Soldiers found two AK47s and \$750,000 in cash. A more thorough search of the area with the assistance of Muslit led the Soldiers to a Styrofoam hatch that turned out to be the opening to a small subterranean chamber that coalition troops would later refer to as a "spider hole."

Inside, the U.S. Soldiers found an angry-looking, unkempt man who, according to one of the battalion commanders on the scene, Lieutenant Colonel Steven D. Russell, "looked remarkably similar to John Brown of Civil War days."⁸⁵ "Who are you?" the Soldiers asked through an interpreter. The man responded, "I am Saddam Hussein, the duly elected President of Iraq. I am willing to negotiate."⁸⁶

Although it would take several hours to confirm Saddam's identity scientifically, the 4th Infantry Division leaders were elated by the capture, as were Sanchez and then-President George W. Bush. On December 14, Bremer opened a briefing of the coalition's leadership in Iraq to the press by announcing, "Ladies and gentlemen. We got him!"⁸⁷



Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 12. Operation RED DAWN, December 13, 2003.

In the Wake of Saddam's Capture

Saddam's December 13 capture brought the coalition a sense of euphoria and an impression that events were beginning to move in a positive direction. By the week before Christmas, CJTF-7 had observed a 39 percent decrease in the number of IED attacks, indicating that the coalition might be making some headway in countering IEDs. In the violent upper Tigris region, Saddam's capture was followed by the first period of real calm in the 4th Infantry Division's area, leaving CPA and CJTF-7 with an optimistic outlook as 2003 drew to its close. With Saddam and a sizable amount of his money now in custody, CJTF-7 believed that the former regime elements that had threatened Iraq's stability were well on their way to being broken, though the Red Cell predicted that the impact only would be short term.⁸⁸ At the same time, CJTF-7 units began using information from documents and other materials captured with Saddam to pursue what they believed were the last vestiges of the former Ba'athist resistance. As they did so, one of the key lessons that SOF and conventional leaders and analysts began to apply from Saddam's capture was the importance of using information gained from detainee interrogations to help drive operations.

Despite the positive signs of the days following RED DAWN, Saddam's capture did not stop some operations whose planning had most likely already been in progress. Just 12 hours after Saddam's capture, a car bomb exploded outside the police station in Khalidiyah, and suicide bombers targeted Iraqi security forces again the following day in the northern outskirts of Baghdad. That same day, another car bomb destroyed the Ameriyah criminal investigations department. A second car bomb exploded shortly thereafter.⁸⁹

During a December 16 press briefing in Baghdad, Myers and Sanchez minimized these attacks and focused instead on the positive impact Saddam's capture likely would have on the insurgency. Sanchez explained that the recent car bombs were probably planned for some time. Myers noted that those left for the coalition to fight consisted mainly of terrorists and remnants of the former regime.⁹⁰

On December 19, the 1st Armored Division began Operation IRON GRIP, directed at some 14 enemy cells in Baghdad, leading to the detention of 2 leaders, 3 financiers, and 27 fighters. Maneuver units also went after suspected mortar and rocket sites used to attack the Green Zone. Because the enemy responded with only nine ineffective rocket-propelled grenade attacks on Christmas Day, Dempsey and Sanchez believed the operation had been a success, and that the former regime units in Baghdad, at least, had been neutralized.⁹¹

In contrast to the optimism of his fellow commanders, Abizaid explained to the National Security Council on December 19–20 that the former regime elements would continue to disrupt stability operations by attacking infrastructure and intimidating the vulnerable Iraqi police, and that the potential for ethno-sectarian conflict remained. Abizaid also mentioned that CJTF-7 divisions in the south continued to complain of Iranian influence, and one commander he met during his Thanksgiving trip to Iraq opined that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran was assisting the various Shi'a militias in that region of the country. Unemployment also remained a major problem and source of recruiting for the insurgency, the CENTCOM commander believed. To keep these prospective threats in check, Abizaid requested additional CERP funds and advised that CPA or another entity should resume oversight of Ba'athist reconciliation by injecting more Sunnis into the political process, while further decentralizing development and intelligence assets down to Iraq's provinces.⁹²

In the wake of Saddam's capture, the alliances of convenience between foreign terrorist organizations and foreign regime elements that Abizaid had feared also were coming to fruition. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's terrorist organization remained far from subdued. By mid-December, coalition officials noted that evidence was mounting that Zarqawi had been behind the major attacks against the UN, the Jordanian Embassy, and the Italian compound in Nasiriyah.⁹³ On December 27, Zarqawi launched four near-simultaneous attacks in the Shi'a holy city of Karbala.⁹⁴ Insurgents using car bombs, mortars, and machine guns targeted 2 coalition military bases located at the city's university, as well as the local police station and the mayor's office, leaving 13 dead and more than 170 wounded, with the death toll including 6 coalition soldiers from the Bulgarian and Thai contingents stationed there. Among the wounded were 37 coalition soldiers, including 5 Americans.⁹⁵ Alarmed, Dempsey ordered his soldiers in Baghdad and the Iraqi police to increase security in the capital by raising additional razor wire fences and establishing checkpoints in key areas of the city ahead of the New Year's holiday. "We will act appropriately to make sure that our soldiers and the Iraqi populace [are] protected against the potential attacks against us," General Dempsey told reporters.⁹⁶ Just hours later, a car bomb tore through Baghdad's popular Nabil Restaurant, a spot frequented by Westerners and upper-middle-class Iraqis, killing eight and wounding dozens more.⁹⁷ The blast was the worst in a series of bombings throughout the country that day, confirming the fears of some officials and military leaders that the real fighting in Iraq had only begun.

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CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION: FROM INVASION TO INSURGENCY, 2002-2003

Military operations during the March and April 2003 invasion of Iraq resulted in 172 coalition fatalities, almost 600 wounded, and nearly 5,000 Iraqi combatant deaths. The coalition military sustained an additional 408 killed and 2,000 wounded, detained over 10,000 suspected insurgents, and killed an additional 600 insurgents between the declared end of major combat operations on May 1, and the end of 2003. When combined with the scope and requirements of post-combat operations, the casualty numbers highlighted that Phase IV—and not Phase III—was the decisive phase of military operations in Iraq, but that the planning time, resources, and personnel allocated for Phase III far exceeded those for Phase IV. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and Combined Joint Task Force-7 (CJTF-7) were likewise poor substitutes for the capabilities of the collapsed Iraqi state. The resultant void in state power during the summer of 2003 was eventually occupied by Sunni resistance organizations, Islamic terrorists, Shi'a militias, the Iranian regime, and Kurdish factions, all vying for autonomy and rule in Iraq, circumstances that effectively ceded the initiative from the coalition military forces to Iraq's various insurgent groups for years to come.

As 2003 came to a close, the U.S. military found itself enmeshed in a long-term occupation of Iraq it had not expected, for a variety of reasons. Then-President George W. Bush's November 2001 order to plan military operations to forcibly remove Saddam Hussein from power and eliminate his weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program surprised military leaders who were accustomed to more limited objectives. The new plans that US Central Command (CENTCOM) and its subordinate units developed for Iraq were emblematic of 1990s-era military doctrine and practice. Throughout the 1990s, the combat training centers and simulations that Army units used to replicate and prepare for maneuver operations employed Cold War-era scenarios that pitted Army units against a peer or near-peer Soviet-style military formations and validated the use of deep aviation attacks as corps shaping operations. Those scenarios also taught maneuver units to avoid getting bogged down in Grozny-like urban combat and minimized the importance of any stability or peacekeeping activities that might take place at the conclusion of major combat.

The Army's institutional bias in favor of Phase III, its distaste for stability and support operations, and its expectations based on successful operations in Afghanistan led its leaders to focus on the maneuver operations that would depose the Iraq regime and to give little consideration to the aftermath. The war plan that the invasion force executed in March 2003 focused on defeating Iraq's Republican Guard, putting military pressure on Baghdad until the regime collapsed from within, and transitioning the administration of the country to the 2-months-old Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) and an expatriate-led Iraqi Interim Government. The plans largely discounted Saddam Hussein's extensive paramilitary apparatus, tribal patronage system, and intra-Iraqi dynamics, all of which would play crucial roles in the ensuing instability and insurgency.

The military intelligence community's similar emphasis on adversaries' conventional military forces resulted in an over-focus on Iraq's Republican Guard and regular army and a discounting of the paramilitary forces that became the Ba'athist regime's de facto main effort by the time of the invasion. U.S. intelligence also only touched the surface of Iraq's complex social dynamics, resulting in flawed assessments about Iraqi military capabilities and inaccurate assumptions about how the Iraqi communities, tribes, and security apparatus would respond to the removal of the Ba'ath regime. The coalition's analytical bias toward a familiar, hierarchical, Soviet-style enemy persisted well into the months following the Iraqi regime's collapse, inhibiting a more fundamental understanding of Iraq's politics and human terrain. At the same time, CENTCOM, Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), and V Corps, consumed by the requirements of planning for the invasion and working under the assumption that the Iraqi Army would be available to help secure and stabilize post-regime Iraq, did not prepare realistic plans for securing the country with their comparatively small ground force footprint.

Because of these factors, the invasion itself was an operational success but not a strategic one. The presence of the Fedayeen and other paramilitary forces in southern Iraq surprised the coalition military, who had expected to fight conventional Iraqi forces as they advanced on Baghdad. After some tactical setbacks negating the use of deep aviation attacks as corps shaping operations and highlighting the need to secure the coalition's vulnerable lines of communications, CFLCC pressed forward. On April 9—just under 3 weeks from the beginning of the invasion—CFLCC determined that any organized resistance in Baghdad had disappeared along with Saddam and his regime. The war, however, was far from over. Much of the country—including Anbar and Iraq's northern provinces—remained unsecured, because the special operations forces who had made territorial advances in those areas lacked the capacity to hold that territory alone. Furthermore, since the regime had collapsed far sooner than any of the military plans had envisioned, organizations designated to manage the transition between major combat operations and Phase IV were still in the process of organizing themselves and formulating their plans. Even the effort to locate the Iraqi regime's WMD, the very *casus belli* for the U.S.-led coalition, was treated almost as an afterthought, tasked to a U.S. Army organization that was unequipped to accomplish the mission and had to be replaced by the hastily formed, ad hoc Iraq Survey Group.

What the coalition had intended to be a surgical regime change quickly deteriorated into the general collapse of the Iraqi state, creating a power vacuum and a breakdown of law and order. In the absence of any authority that could govern or maintain order, Iraqis looted the public infrastructure and carried out reprisal attacks against their former Ba'athist masters. CFLCC ground units did not anticipate these developments and spent weeks reacting to contact instead of preparing an orderly changeover to a transitional civil authority. Although the coalition military eventually regained some measure of control in many urban areas, the damage was done. Iraqis who had expected the United States to reestablish order quickly and improve standards of life became disillusioned as the essentials of the Iraqi state evaporated, and Iraq's social order began to break down.

In the midst of this turmoil, Lieutenant Generals David McKiernan and William Wallace hewed out unit boundaries that made operational sense but were often misaligned with Iraq's physical and human terrain. The new unit boundaries crossed mountain

ranges, rivers, tribal lines, and smuggling routes, creating seams that later would be exploited by the Sunni resistance organizations and Shi'a militias that emerged in the summer of 2003. When it became apparent that the invasion forces would not have Iraqi military and police forces at their disposal to restore order, McKiernan and Wallace made a deliberate decision to make Anbar and Iraq's southern provinces – which appeared comparatively peaceful in the turbulent weeks following regime collapse – economy of force missions. After the Marines and the 3d Infantry Division redeployed from Iraq in the summer of 2003, these two critical regions were left to a small U.S. Army contingent and a polyglot multinational force respectively, neither of which had sufficient combat power to secure the territory and contain the unrest there.

In addition to the departure of the 3d Infantry Division and I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), the summer of 2003 also saw the replacement of some of the more seasoned forces in Iraq with people who had far less experience with the country. At the policy level, Lieutenant General (Ret.) Jay Garner's ORHA was summarily replaced by the even less resourced CPA under Ambassador L. Paul Bremer. At Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld's insistence, the CFLCC that had conducted the invasion returned to Kuwait, leaving the tactical V Corps headquarters to transform overnight into a theater command responsible for the entire country and led by the Army's most junior lieutenant general. At the same time, institutionally driven changes of command and mandatory military moves left some units like the 1st Armored Division with entirely new leadership. When superimposed on the hastily assembled new Iraqi Governing Council, this turnover of key personnel and organizations effectively put a combination of novices and opportunists in charge of Iraq, with neither the expertise nor the resources needed to replace the collapsed Iraqi state.

Meanwhile, the CPA, CENTCOM, and CJTF-7 began moving forward with a new campaign to internationalize the Iraq effort and stand up new Iraqi security forces, with the goal of allowing the United States to reduce its footprint in Iraq dramatically to fewer than 30,000 troops by the end of 2004. This ambitious plan was thwarted by a number of factors. While it was clear that CJTF-7 needed more boots on the ground to accomplish all of its missions, Rumsfeld and the institutional Army were reluctant to provide them, given their perception that the war in Iraq was effectively over as of May 1, 2003. Much of the institutional Army also failed to recognize the urgency of the situation in Iraq and was eager for its units to redeploy, continue with the Army's transformation program, and be available for other contingency operations. Sources of additional personnel, too, were scarce as U.S. Army Reserve tours came to a close and the time constraints associated with Reserve and National Guard tour lengths began to take their toll on the total force.

The coalition's failure to understand the environment in Iraq had far-reaching consequences that likewise held CENTCOM's ambitious stabilization campaign goals in check. CPA Orders 1 and 2 thwarted stabilization plans by effectively removing the Iraqi civil servants and military personnel that CENTCOM had intended to use for stabilization and reconstruction operations. The Sunni backlash to CPA Orders 1 and 2 was exacerbated by the seating of a new Shi'a-majority Iraqi Governing Council comprised largely of expatriates who were competitors for power against nonexpatriate factions. The foreign terrorist and former regime element organizations that had only tenuous

footholds in Iraq in April 2003 gradually gained traction as the coalition military forces failed to protect the population from crime, assassinations, and reprisal attacks; alienated Sunni parties and tribes; and appeared to enable the Kurdish parties to seize territories beyond the Green Line permanently. While CJTF-7 battled a mounting number of Sunni militant groups, intra-Shi'a rivalries exacerbated by Iranian-backed political parties and militias began to flare into violence. Principal among these intra-Shi'a battles was the power struggle between Abdul Aziz al-Hakim's SCIRI and Badr militia on one side, and Moqtada Sadr and his Jaysh al-Mahdi on the other, with the latter becoming increasingly problematic for the coalition as the conflict intensified. CENTCOM and CJTF-7, however, were slow to respond to the Sadrist danger, and, in their anxiousness to avoid opening a second front against Iraq's seemingly placid Shi'a population, decided to contain Sadr rather than confront him and his militia head on, a decision that has had far-reaching consequences for the United States ever since.

CJTF-7's relatively hands-off approach to division operations, combined with varying force composition and the unique environments and human terrain in each division's area of operations, led to a diverse application of both offensive and stability operations across the country. Divisions had great leeway to operate as they saw fit in their respective areas, with mixed results. Some were able to manage their diverse regions relatively effectively, while others essentially were left conducting continual movements to contact against unknown enemies on complex terrain. Some divisions were successful in organizing joint and interagency targeting mechanisms with special operations forces and humanitarian organizations that led to more precise operations against insurgents and more focused reconstruction efforts. Others benefited from the expanded use of the Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds to rebuild local security forces, infrastructure, and governance structures and to find innovative ways to keep reconcilable former Ba'athists on the payroll and out of the insurgency.

The variation in the application of CJTF-7's rules of engagement, however, was not so helpful, as some of the coalition's more heavy-handed tactics began creating collateral damage and political fallout detrimental to the stabilization campaign. Considering the rules for engagement for Iraq sufficient, General John Abizaid did not change them. He and Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez instead provided verbal guidance about avoiding mass sweeps of villages and treating those in their custody respectfully, but units' interpretation of that guidance varied nearly as much as the physical and human geography of each area of operations. Meanwhile, the number of detainees in coalition custody continued to mount, and the Iraqi prisoner population—categorized deliberately as enemy combatants rather than prisoners of war—became a fertile recruiting ground for all insurgent groups in Iraq. The volume of detainees, combined with a lack of adequately trained interrogators and prison guards, contributed to a dysfunctional detention system countrywide and the criminal abuses and deaths of Iraqi prisoners at the Abu Ghraib theater internment facility, particularly in the fall of 2003. The revelations about the Abu Ghraib abuses would fuel the Iraqi insurgency for the remainder of the coalition military's time in Iraq and beyond.

In retrospect, these worsening problems of insecurity, insurgency, and political instability were symptoms of two larger problems: state collapse and civil war. A great many of the issues that the coalition had to face in the second half of 2003 were the relatively

predictable consequences of the collapse of the Iraqi state, which unfolded in patterns similar to other cases of state collapse such as those the United States and its allies had previously encountered in Somalia, the Balkans, Haiti, and even Afghanistan. The behavior of the Iraqi population in 2003 reflected the unsettling disappearance of a centralized state that for 4 decades had become the dominant force in almost all aspects of Iraqi life, atomizing most other institutions and leaving no civil society buffer between the individual and the state. When the Ba'ath collapsed, and chaos ensued, nearly 30 million Iraqis began to revert to long-dormant sectarian, tribal, or ethnic identities in a quest for survival.

Above all, however, the developments of 2003 indicated that, in invading Iraq, collapsing the Iraqi state, and leaving a power vacuum, the U.S.-led coalition had unleashed a civil war among the many Iraqi factions and created a maelstrom in which the regional powers were compelled to intervene in order to promote their proxies and expand or secure their interests. In hindsight, many of the steps that CJTF-7 and the CPA took to try to snuff out the budding insurgency and terrorist groups were doomed to failure, or even counterproductive, in the absence of a larger program of political stabilization. Aggressive security operations to stop insurgents and terrorist groups against the backdrop of a vast power struggle in the country served in many cases only to drive the population toward extremist groups between both the Sunni and Shi'a communities. To some extent, these security operations were a red herring, distracting the coalition from the larger problems of a security vacuum for the population and a failure of governance, neither of which became the coalition's main focus until 2007. At the same time, the U.S. decision in late 2003 to move quickly toward Iraqi self-governance and an accelerated election timeline in the name of political stabilization would actually have the opposite effect. This only heightened the stakes in the violent struggle for power, inflamed divisions, and created a political process that only could be destabilizing in the midst of civil and regional war. These facts, however, would wait for years for the coalition to recognize and act on them. In the meantime, Iraqis and coalition together would descend into large-scale insurgency and pass through the fire of a brutal sectarian civil war.

**PART II:
FROM INSURGENCY TO
CIVIL WAR, 2004-2006**

CHAPTER 11

THE GATHERING STORM

For the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq, the dramatic capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003 brought a short-lived euphoria and sense that the campaign to stabilize the country had moved into its endgame. For the first 3 months of 2004, the mood within Combined Joint Task Force-7 (CJTF-7) was cautiously optimistic, as many coalition officials assumed that without Saddam, the former regime's "dead-enders" would see their cause of restoring Ba'athist power evaporate. Though Anbar remained restive and an insurgency still simmered in Sunni areas, senior coalition leaders believed that the overall security situation was improving enough that it might be possible to withdraw forces to a caretaker level within a year. To that end, CJTF-7 drew up plans that blended offensive operations with stability and support operations and aimed to improve training for the Iraqi security forces. Because they believed their mission had likely turned a corner, coalition leaders instructed their units to begin to pull back from the Iraqi population centers to concentrate on large operating bases and begin to turn over security and political responsibility to the Iraqis.

Unfortunately, CJTF-7's focus and positive mood did not match the actual situation. Despite Saddam's capture, the Sunni insurgency, which mostly had not looked to him for operational leadership, had reached a state of maturity in which disparate groups could communicate, plan, and execute operations both geographically and across time as part of a greater strategy. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Tawhid wal-Jihad, though not the strongest component in the vast Sunni insurgency, was gaining strength and formulating a campaign plan of its own that aimed to incite civil war. At the same time, the coalition cast about for options to address the increasingly troublesome Moqtada Sadr and his burgeoning militant following.

TURBULENCE WITHIN THE COALITION

Planning for the Handover in 2004

Zarqawi and Sadr were among numerous emerging threats whose severity most coalition leaders did not sufficiently appreciate. As insurgents across the country grew in strength in the first weeks of 2004, the coalition continued with its planned replacement of nearly every brigade and division in the country by follow-on forces, some of which would arrive with expectations of a Balkans-style stabilization mission. With this view in mind, CJTF-7's undermanned staff developed a draft campaign plan that melded continued offensive operations with stability and support operations, responsibility for which would be transferred in the not-too-distant future to the Iraqis or another competent force. The command's draft mission statement, which in the course of events was never approved or published, reflected this bifurcated objective:

CJTF-7 conducts offensive operations to defeat remaining non-compliant forces and neutralize the destabilizing influences in the area of operations to create a secure environment in direct

support of the office of coalition provisional authority. Concurrently support the establishment of government and economic development to set the conditions for a transfer of operations to a designated follow-on military or civilian authorities.¹

For CJTF-7 Commander Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the mission at the outset of 2004 was a continuation of the destruction of Saddam's regime, and CJTF-7 officers still considered their units in Phase III operations. "[We had] shattered the enemy, changed the regime," recalled CJTF-7's lead planner, "[a]nd now what we needed to do was continue offensive operations, i.e., pursuit operations, of the remnants of the Iraqi army and the Saddam Fedayeen to complete their destruction and allow us to move forward."² At the same time, in areas where the destruction of these forces had been mostly accomplished, CJTF-7 considered that its units should be conducting stability and support operations and carrying out reconstruction efforts similar to those the Army had done in the Balkans.

The command's focus on transitioning its mission to someone else included a process of withdrawing from areas of contact with the Iraqi population and turning over tactical security missions to Iraqi forces. "[T]he plan . . . is to work very aggressively to build Iraqi capacity by February or March, to turn over control and to pull out to base camps," Sanchez told Iraqi politician Sharif Ali bin Hussein on December 28, 2003, adding that after the move "Quick Reaction Forces would be positioned to respond as necessary."³ As early as January 4, 2004, CJTF-7 was working out procedures for coalition units to hand over the responsibility for security to the Iraqis and turn over regional or local political control as well. Initial assessments held that the Iraqi police, considered the linchpin of relinquishing coalition responsibility, would not be ready until October 2004, but the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) could be ready sooner – potentially as early as March or April. On the ground, Sanchez's guidance to withdraw from areas of contact translated into a decreasing coalition footprint and a shrinking number of forward operating bases. The 1st Armored Division in Multi-National Division-Baghdad (MND-B) was emblematic of this effort. Having occupied 46 temporary forward operating bases as of May 2003, the division had reduced to just 26 in January 2004, of which its replacement, the 1st Cavalry Division, would occupy only 8.⁴

On February 10, Sanchez briefed visiting Ambassador Robert D. Blackwill, deputy assistant to the President and head of the Iraq Stabilization Group at the National Security Council (NSC), on CJTF-7's plans for coalition withdrawal from the cities. The CJTF-7 commander revealed that "in Baghdad we are shutting down and pulling our forces out of the city. By the time that 1st Cavalry Division arrives, we will have pulled all of our forces to the perimeter, except 2 BCT which provides security for the Green Zone."⁵ After the withdrawal, Sanchez explained, U.S. units would be concentrated on the southern outskirts of Baghdad, and any further need for them in the city would be worked out by coalition and Iraqi officials at Joint Coordination Centers.⁶

Sanchez's plans to pull back from Iraqi population centers soon were copied at lower unit levels. While each coalition unit created a mission statement that blended its commander's priorities with guidance from higher headquarters, many CJTF-7 units wrote their missions to mirror closely Sanchez's own. For example, the plan for the newly arrived 3d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division, a Stryker Brigade Combat Team, encompassed

all of the key aspects of CJTF-7's campaign plan, including to capture or kill remaining noncompliant forces, assist in the development of Iraqi forces, and transition responsibility for maintaining civil order to Iraqi security and police forces.⁷

The Decision for a Four-Star Headquarters

Despite CJTF-7 leaders' confidence that they had begun to get their arms around the problem of stabilizing the country, the command's difficulties in fall 2003 had convinced senior Department of Defense (DoD) leaders that CJTF-7 needed to be replaced by a larger, more capable headquarters with a four-star commander. Meeting with Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in December 2003, General John Abizaid and Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) Commander Lieutenant General David McKiernan explained in detail that the single three-star headquarters of CJTF-7 was not sufficient to manage both the day-to-day requirements of the operational fight and the heavy load of strategic and diplomatic responsibilities. Acknowledging the force of McKiernan's arguments, Rumsfeld approved the change in principle, but had quietly instructed Chief of Staff of the Army General Peter J. Schoomaker after the meeting that, whatever new command the military devised for Iraq, McKiernan was not to be allowed to command it himself.⁸ Ignorant of Rumsfeld's guidance, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and McKiernan's Third Army first explored a course of action that entailed reactivating the Third Army as the CFLCC for Iraq and moving it to Baghdad to become the strategic-level headquarters. This plan progressed far enough, in fact, that some of McKiernan's staff deployed to Kuwait for a 2-week conference in January 2004 to finalize their plans for reassuming the Iraq mission. During the exercise, however, Rumsfeld's December guidance caught up to the planning process, and CENTCOM instead decided that the already deployed V Corps headquarters that had formed the core of CJTF-7 would also form the core of the new four-star theater headquarters, initially to be named the "Coalition Forces Command." Under this plan, Abizaid intended that Sanchez would be nominated for a fourth star and stay on as the strategic commander, with his headquarters to be filled in using individual augmentees for its initial and follow-on rotations. When this new strategic headquarters stood up in May 2004, operational-level responsibilities would devolve to the newly deployed III Corps headquarters, commanded by Lieutenant General Thomas F. Metz, which had arrived in January. However, awkwardly in the interim, III Corps would merge with the CJTF-7 headquarters to replace individuals who were redeploying and to fill out more fully the skeleton CJTF-7 staff, which at that point still had not climbed above 60 percent of its planned strength. As Sanchez became theater commander, Metz, who had commanded infantry units at all levels, would assume the role of Sanchez's deputy for operations, running the day-to-day battle rhythm of the headquarters, allowing Sanchez to focus on working with the CPA, CENTCOM, and U.S. officials in Washington.⁹

Not even a year into the mission, it had become clear that saddling an augmented corps headquarters with both the operational and strategic levels of command had been a mistake. The V Corps that had formed the basis of CJTF-7 was a single service Army organization accustomed in practice and doctrine to managing high tactical and operational levels of war. Though Army corps headquarters with joint augmentation had been used



Source: DoD photo by Lance Corporal Jordan F. Sherwood, USMC (Released).

**Lieutenant General Thomas F. Metz,
Commanding General,
III Corps/MNC-I (2004-2005).¹⁰**

Central (MND-NC), covering Salahadin, Kirkuk, and Diyala provinces, Major General John Batiste and the 1st Infantry Division replaced Major General Raymond T. Odierno and the 4th Infantry Division in March. In MND-B, Major General Peter W. Chiarelli and the 1st Cavalry Division replaced Major General Martin E. Dempsey and the 1st Armored Division in March and April. Unlike later transitions, the units that arrived in early 2004 tended to come as organic sets, bringing their assigned subordinate units with them. The 1st Cavalry Division, for example, arrived with its three maneuver brigades and organic support resources from Fort Hood, TX, each with its own assigned subordinate battalions.

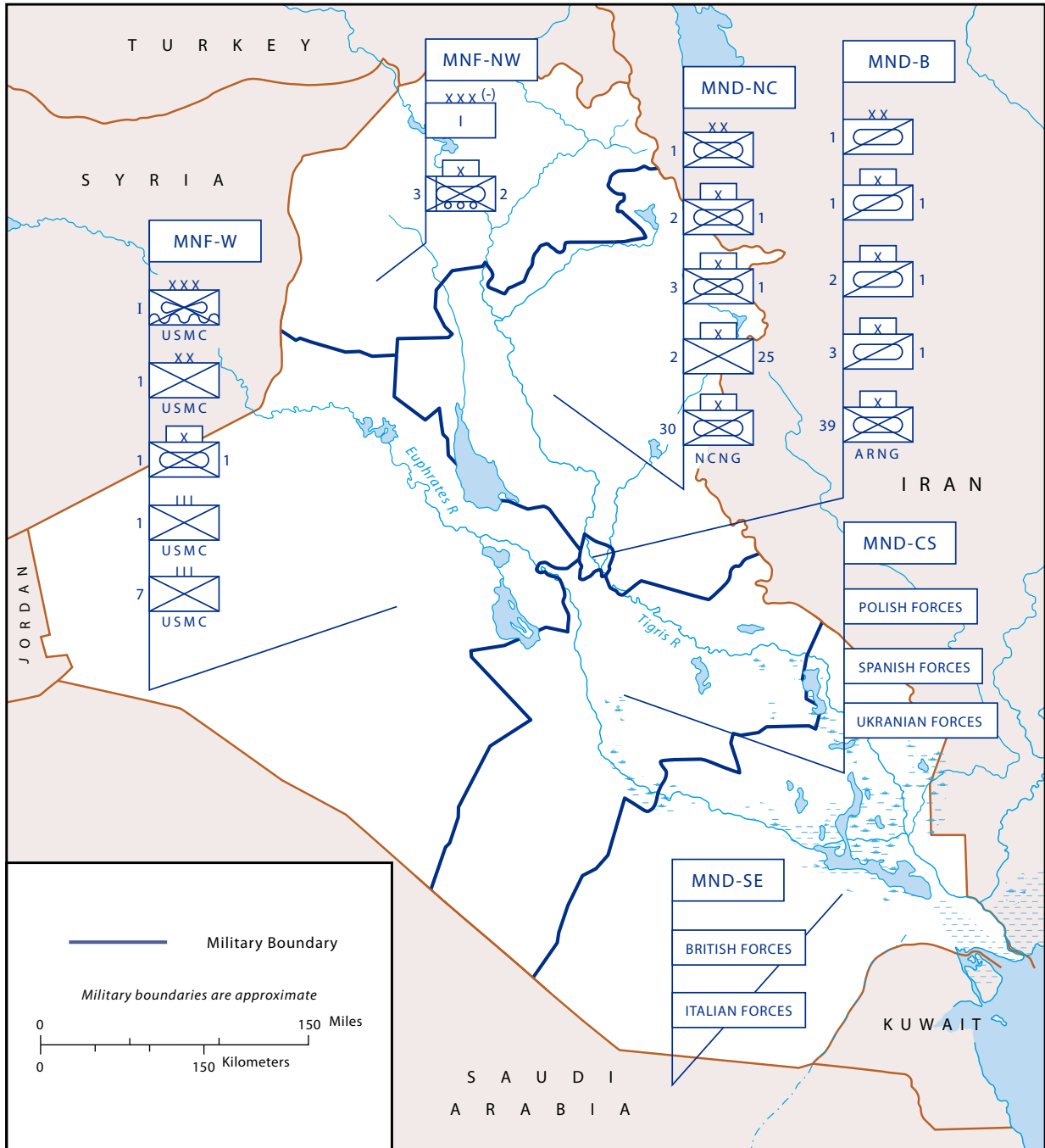
In most cases, the arriving commanders and units had worked together as teams prior to deployment, a factor that facilitated the concept known as “mission command,” allowing leaders to better assign missions in the heat of battle because senior leaders would know their subordinates’ strengths and weaknesses. The handover of Anbar Province was less smooth.

as short-term joint task force headquarters for less complex and smaller operations in the past—such as Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama and Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY in Haiti—the scope and complexity of the Iraq mission had proved to be too much for this model. Compared to previous operations, V Corps had been assigned more subordinate elements, a more complex mission, and more personnel, by roughly a five to tenfold order of magnitude.

A Cascade of Transitions

During the first 3 months of 2004, at the same time that DoD leaders planned for a change at the top of the coalition structure, nearly all of the coalition’s combat power was scheduled to rotate out of country, creating massive requirements for personnel (see Map 13). As CJTF-7 worked with the institutional Army to fill those requirements, Army leaders rejected the idea of using the year-long individual rotation policy, a model that many of the Army’s senior leaders had judged to be a contributing factor in the Army’s failure in Vietnam.¹¹

As a result, in most areas of operations, divisions replaced divisions and brigades replaced brigades in a one-for-one unit swap. In Multi-National Division-North



Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 13. Operation IRAQI FREEDOM: Planned 2004 Transitions, January-March 2004.

The coalition presence there had been turbulent in the year since the invasion, with responsibility for the province passing from Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-West (CJSOTF-W) to the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment and then to a headquarters element from 82d Airborne Division with two subordinate brigades (3d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, and 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division) in the space of 10 months.

In February and March, the ad hoc division organization in MNF-W gave way to I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), commanded by Lieutenant General James T. Conway. Deviating from standard procedure, the Marine element in Anbar had a three-star commander but also maintained the two-star 1st Marine Division as an intermediate headquarters, with the 1st and 7th Marine Regimental Combat Teams as subordinate elements for the division. Marine leaders had also explored the advantages and disadvantages of various rotational policies and decided that combat units and squadrons would rotate as organizations every 6 to 7 months, in contrast to the Army's year-long rotations. Higher headquarters such as the I MEF and 1st Marine Division would deploy for a year but would rotate individual personnel every 6 or 7 months. Explaining the decision, Marine Corps Commandant General Michael W. Hagee stated that the 6 to 7-month rotation would "permit much more flexibility in meeting global requirements while maintaining unit cohesion." Such a schedule would almost mirror the Marine Corps Unit Deployment Program, a rotational schedule established after the Vietnam war in which each unit followed a pattern that included a 6-month forward deployment followed by a year-long period at its home station.¹²

With three U.S. divisions assigned to Baghdad, Anbar, and the north-center region centered on Tikrit, respectively, CJTF-7 was left without enough incoming units in early 2004 to replace the 101st Airborne Division with another division-sized unit. Believing that Mosul and the surrounding region had been rendered fundamentally more stable than the rest of central and northern Iraq by the year-long efforts of Major General David H. Petraeus and the 101st Airborne Division, CJTF-7 leaders decided Multi-National Division-Northwest (MND-NW) could be made an economy of force mission within the coalition. Accordingly, in February the 25,000 troops of the 101st Airborne Division were replaced by the ad hoc Task Force Olympia commanded by Brigadier General Carter F. Ham, with a reinforced Stryker brigade beneath him, making a total of 10,000 troops in the renamed Multi-National Brigade-Northwest (MNB-NW). When the changeover occurred, the significantly smaller Task Force Olympia took responsibility for a huge geographic area that included the provinces of Ninawa, Dahuk, and Erbil, even though almost all of their combat power resided in Ninawa Province. Sulaymaniyah Province, which had previously been part of the 101st Airborne Division's area of responsibility, was handed off to MND-NC, in recognition of Task Force Olympia's reduced combat power. Ham's ad hoc headquarters had a total of just 80 people drawn from the Army's I Corps, meaning it lacked many of the critical capabilities and depth that Petraeus's division had possessed. The new task force also lacked a military intelligence battalion with its internal analysis element and had only three colonels across the entire organization, including the Stryker brigade commander.¹³

In addition to being smaller, the second rotation of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM units reflected a sharp increase in the reserve component's contribution, which constituted 32 percent of total U.S. forces (37,209 of 118,043 troops), a higher percentage than during

the invasion. These reserve units generally provided combat support and combat service support and only in rare cases, such as that of the 39th Infantry Brigade of the Arkansas National Guard in MND-B and the 30th Infantry Brigade from the North Carolina National Guard in MND-NC, were reserve units responsible for their own area of operations or battle space.¹⁴

By mid-March, with the majority of transitions complete except for in Baghdad, the number of troops in Iraq had dwindled to 95,000 Americans and 25,000 from various coalition countries – a total of 12 U.S. brigades and 2 loosely defined coalition divisions. Supporting these forces, on paper at least, would be 40,000 Iraqi soldiers in the ICDC, 4 battalions of the new Iraqi Army, and 60,000 Iraqi police.¹⁵

Equipping the Second Rotation

In addition to a reduced overall troop level, the U.S. units arriving for the second rotation of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM were bringing with them less combat equipment than the invasion forces they were replacing. Sharing CJTF-7's assumptions about an improving security situation, U.S. Army Forces Command and the Army writ large discouraged the second rotation of divisions from deploying with their full complement of combat vehicles and weapons systems, which Army planners assumed was of marginal use in stability operations. In the most notable case, Chiarelli and the 1st Cavalry Division were initially prohibited from bringing their tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles into Iraq. Only after adamantly protesting to McKiernan and obtaining his support for a full complement of armored vehicles, was Chiarelli able to secure permission to bring about a third of his division's tanks and Bradleys to Baghdad. Other units found themselves forced to leave their artillery tubes behind, with their gunners dragooned into provisional motorized infantrymen.¹⁶

Chiarelli's difficulties reflected the fact that the Army's centralized equipping plans had not caught up to the growing dangers on the ground. The need for protection against rising numbers of improvised explosive devices (IED) reflected this disconnect as well: in order to meet CJTF-7's skyrocketing requirements for armored-wheeled vehicles, Army leaders decided to fund a mix of tested add-on armor kits and up-armored High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV). Because the existing production lines were nowhere near capable of producing sufficient numbers of up-armored vehicles, a majority of the program to increase protection for coalition forces involved add-on armor kits. By January 2004, the Army had developed a plan to provide add-on armor protection for 8,400 HMMWVs, 2,700 Medium Tactical Vehicles, and 1,080 Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Trucks, an enormous amount compared to the mere 354 vehicles with add-on armor and 829 M1114 up-armored HMMWVs already on the ground in Iraq.¹⁷

The Special Operations Rotations

By late 2003, the special operations community recognized that the mission in Iraq was going to last far longer than originally anticipated – and create a severe resourcing problem. With the 5th and 10th Special Forces Groups rotating headquarters every 7 months, nearly 40 percent of the Army's Special Forces assets were already in Iraq. The 5th Special Forces Group had deployed near-continuously since the September 11, 2001

(9/11) attacks, having taken part in the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The 10th Special Forces Group, meanwhile, was committed outside of its normal European Command operating area, which had required the cancelation of several European security cooperation deployments and partnership exercises.¹⁸

This over-commitment led to discussion among special operations forces leaders about what a sustainable Army Special Forces rotational cycle should look like. An initial plan in fall 2003 had judged that a single Special Forces company was sufficient for the Iraq mission, but the worsening security situation obviated that plan, and instead, one composite battalion comprised of companies from both groups served as the Army Special Forces footprint until January 2004. The still-deteriorating security situation and the near-insatiable need for local information that Special Forces provided soon made even that level of force insufficient, forcing a reevaluation of the long-term footprint. After the initial turbulence, the CJSOTF's makeup was eventually settled at two Special Forces battalions and a Navy SEAL (sea, air, and land) Special Warfare Task Unit—a force nearly nine times as large as the fall 2003 assessment deemed appropriate. That force level would remain the special operations forces commitment for most of the remainder of the war. After considerable debate and a proposal to stand up a provisional group headquarters based in Iraq, the institutional Special Forces headquarters determined that the CJSOTF headquarters would be provided in turn by the 5th and 10th Special Forces Groups every 6 or 7 months. The new single headquarters was named CJSOTF-Arabian Peninsula (CJSOTF-AP).¹⁹

THE MATURATION OF THE ENEMY

For many coalition leaders, the capture of Saddam on December 13, 2003, brought a sense that perhaps, finally, the Iraqi resistance would see the futility of its struggle to restore the old political order and choose to lay down its arms. However, this hope was illusory. By the beginning of 2004, the Sunni resistance was maturing into a traditional insurgency, with various organizations employing classic guerrilla strategies. The prolific Sunni resistance was comprised of disparate groups: former regime elements, xenophobic nationalists, members of the global jihadist network, and criminal opportunists. For most of these groups, the Syrian regime provided safe haven and external support by harboring former regime elements and facilitating the flow of foreign fighters, for whom Iraq had become a cause célèbre, attracting jihadists from across the Muslim world.

While the capture of Saddam did not create the much-hoped-for collapse of the resistance, to a degree, it did spark an internal conflict among the Sunni resistance groups over whom would succeed Saddam as the leading symbol of opposition to the occupation. This internal conflict occurred principally between what coalition analysts would call “former regime loyalists” who had wanted to restore Saddam’s regime to power and “former regime elements” who sought the broader goal of restoring Sunni primacy but were not committed to restoring Saddamist rule. After Saddam’s capture, the former regime elements clearly began to supersede the former regime loyalists, but more importantly, as Saddam’s capture dispelled the cult of personality surrounding him, many members of the Sunni resistance began to migrate from groups loyal to the old regime into religious extremist groups. Salafi militant groups, in particular, benefited

from the leadership vacuum left by Saddam's capture. By early 2004, the influx of local Iraqi recruits to Salafi organizations had converted Tawhid wal-Jihad, for example, from a predominantly foreign terrorist organization to a group in which Iraqis constituted a majority of the rank and file.

Meanwhile, in Anbar Province, coalition officials judged that a plurality of the province's 57 insurgent groups had adopted Islamic rhetoric and policies.²⁰ In addition to this shift from Ba'athism to Islamism within the insurgency, the eclipse of the old regime in late 2003 created tensions between foreign insurgent leaders and local Iraqi insurgent leaders. In the view of many Iraqi insurgent commanders, the foreign fighters in Iraq should subordinate themselves to native resistance leaders, as the Arab mujahideen had done in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan. Zarqawi in particular had discarded this Afghan model in Iraq. Though Zarqawi reportedly assured Iraqi insurgents in June 2003 that he merely wished to "assist his Iraqi brothers [to] win the fight against the occupation," by late 2003, the Jordanian was staking his claim to leadership of the entire insurgency.²¹ Senior Iraqi insurgent leader Mahmud Janabi later recounted that, in mid-November 2003, Iraqi insurgents in Fallujah had rejected Zarqawi's demand that they should fall under his command, leading Zarqawi's Jordanian lieutenant Abu Anas al-Shami to warn the Iraqis that "We [Tawhid wal-Jihad] will leave Iraq to some other land as long as you do not agree to form an armed group under the leadership of Zarqawi."²²

Nevertheless, this internal fracturing of the Sunni insurgency led to few outright acts of violence between the disparate groups in this early phase of the war, and the intra-insurgency tensions were more properly characterized as a competition for the moral and financial support that would accompany being perceived as the strongest resistance group. Despite their internal struggle, the groups generally worked toward the common goal of expelling the coalition. There was also considerable consensus among the groups about how to achieve this objective: blocking reconstruction efforts, isolating coalition forces from the population, separating pro-coalition Iraqi leaders from the population, reducing public confidence in the nascent Iraqi Government, and fracturing the multinational coalition.

Coalition assessments in early 2004 tended to characterize the insurgency as disconnected, locally supported organizations without operational-level planning or objectives. These assessments missed the degree to which many of the former regime elements retained the military-style organization and planning they had possessed before the fall of Saddam. They also missed the degree to which jihadist networks nested their operational-level activities under the ideological and strategic umbrella of al-Qaeda. In fact, during November 2003, Osama Bin Laden had recognized the value of the Iraq conflict for his broader strategy and had begun providing \$1.5 million a month to support the Iraqi insurgency. In order to determine which groups should be rewarded with this support, Bin Laden dispatched several al-Qaeda senior leaders, including Hassan Ghul and Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi, to Iraq to assess the various insurgent factions and identify a commander who could serve as Amir, or leader, of an Iraqi al-Qaeda franchise. As part of this process, the al-Qaeda men asked each insurgent leader to provide a war plan or strategy document explaining how they would conduct operations in Iraq. Among the first candidates that al-Qaeda's corporate recruiters vetted was Zarqawi, who was hiding in Fallujah.²³

Though the Sunni insurgency of early 2004 lacked a formal hierarchical structure or single operational-level “brain” that could issue orders to its subordinate elements, there was a surprising level of coordination among the various war councils that comprised what some coalition officials described as the Sunni Arab resistance, or Sunni Arab rejectionists.²⁴ One of the most notable examples of these councils with operational reach beyond its local area was the Ramadi Shura Council headed by Mohammed Mahmoud Latif, a Sufi cleric whose objectives were to restore Sunnis to power in Iraq and increase Islamic religious influence in government. Some of the militant groups represented in the Ramadi Shura Council received financial support from family members of former regime leaders hiding in Syria and Jordan, such as Saddam’s daughter, Rana Saddam Hussein, and Sa’ad Tariq Aziz, the son of former Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz. This cash flow enabled the insurgency in Ramadi to become more sophisticated and better coordinated than in other locations.²⁵ In addition, the Kharbit family, well known throughout Iraq for the fortune it had amassed as industrial-scale smugglers under Saddam, provided considerable funding for a variety of Ramadi-based insurgent organizations.²⁶

One notable effect of the insurgency’s operations was the thwarting of the coalition’s hopes for quick reconstruction of the Iraqi state and economy. With its exposed electrical grid and oil pipelines that stretched hundreds of miles, Iraq’s vulnerable critical infrastructure was among the first targets against which the Sunni resistance acted in a coordinated fashion. By the end of 2003, infrastructure attacks were so frequent that the Kellogg, Brown, & Root “Restore Iraqi Oil Project” was having difficulty keeping employees on the job due to the dangers. During the month of November 2003 alone, 5 Kellogg, Brown, & Root employees were killed and 26 wounded in 18 separate attacks. Interrupting the flow of oil or electricity damaged the population’s trust in its new government and reduced the oil revenues the government had to fund development projects.²⁷ Infrastructure attacks were also powerful signals of coalition ineffectiveness and lack of control. When Iraqis in Baghdad suffered random electricity brownouts, they tended to blame the coalition rather than their own increased energy consumption or insurgent attacks on the electrical grid.

Like the attacks against infrastructure, IEDs began to have a significant impact on coalition operations, as they became the weapon of choice among insurgents. Early IEDs were predominantly command-detonated explosives, controlled by a trigger connected by wire, radio link, or cell phone to the weapon. This method permitted insurgents to target their objectives selectively and allowed less tactically skilled insurgents to conduct attacks. As coalition casualties from IEDs rose, coalition leaders promulgated new force protection rules: only armored vehicles were allowed to leave forward operating bases, and personnel had to travel in larger convoys. To minimize their exposure to IEDs or ambushes, coalition convoys tended to travel at high speeds using extreme offensive driving techniques, a practice that riled Iraqi drivers and further reduced contact between coalition troops and the Iraqi population. As weapons, IEDs were asymmetric in every sense of the word: they turned the American and coalition strength of greater combat power into a liability and created a wedge between the coalition and the people.²⁸

The insurgent tactic of hiding among the population made separating friendly Iraqis from enemy combatants challenging. IEDs also frustrated many soldiers and leaders because the devices allowed insurgents to kill or maim coalition personnel nearly

anonymously and made the capture of the perpetrators difficult. A few soldiers and leaders took out this frustration on Iraqis, as in the January 3, 2004, incident in which Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 8th Infantry, an element of the 4th Infantry Division stationed in Samarra, ordered two Iraqi civilians to jump into the Tigris River as punishment for being out after curfew. After one of the two Iraqi men drowned, the Soldiers' ethical failure was compounded when the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Nathan Sassaman, told the troops involved to lie about the incident to Army investigators. Frustrated by his unit's casualties and disillusioned with how the war was being prosecuted, Sassaman had clashed with his brigade commander, Colonel Frederick S. Rudesheim, accusing him of appeasing Sunni insurgents. Sassaman had grown impatient with the challenge of differentiating between "good" and "bad" Iraqis and adopted punitive measures such as employing white phosphorous artillery shells to burn farmland used as insurgent firing positions and utilizing anti-tank missiles to destroy houses owned by suspected insurgents and smugglers. Punishing curfew violators by throwing them in a river and then crushing their truck under the treads of a Bradley fighting vehicle were in keeping with Sassaman's view of how the war should be fought. Ultimately, Sassaman's leadership failure was discovered, and he was reprimanded for impeding an investigation. The two Soldiers most directly involved in the January 3 drowning were convicted by a court martial and sentenced to short prison terms of 6 months and 45 days, respectively.²⁹

The Sunni Insurgency Fractures the Coalition

In the first months of 2004, the Sunni Arab rejectionists continued their strategy of targeting what they perceived to be weaker coalition members in order to force them to withdraw from Iraq. The insurgents appeared to focus first on inflicting casualties on countries whose elected political leaders supported military operations in Iraq but whose populations opposed the war. Driving these coalition members out would not only reduce the coalition's combat power but also spread the remaining forces more



Source: U.S. Army photo courtesy 256th Brigade Combat Team, Louisiana Army National Guard (Released).

Improvised Explosive Devices.³⁰

thinly across the country. It would also reduce the number of countries in the coalition, a political bellwether that would affect the degree of international support for the mission. The aftermath of the November 12, 2003, attack against the Italian headquarters in Nasiriyah seemed to validate the insurgents' approach, as the strike prompted the Italian Government to restrict its forces' activities significantly. Major General Andrew Stewart, the British commander of Multi-National Division-South East (MND-SE) to whom the Italian contingent reported, observed that the Nasiriyah attack placed the Italian contingent in a difficult political position. "I was told that the commander of the Italian brigade . . . in Nasiriyah received two telephone calls a week personally from [Prime Minister Silvio] Berlusconi," Stewart wrote later. "Whether or not he did, he was under considerable political pressure not to lose another soldier because if he did Berlusconi's premiership would be under severe threat."³¹ The attack contributed to the Italian Government's eventual decision in March 2005 to withdraw its 3,000 troops, the fourth largest allied contingent in Iraq.³²

Next to be targeted was Spain. On March 11, 2004, terrorists affiliated with al-Qaeda bombed the Atocha Train Station in Madrid, killing nearly 200 civilians. The group responsible billed the attack as a response to so-called Western injustices in Iraq and Afghanistan and promised more bloodshed if the injustices did not stop. The bombing had an immediate impact on the coalition, as it was at least partly responsible for the Spanish Government's defeat in the country's general election just 3 days later, as the terrorists clearly intended. The new antiwar Spanish Government hastily withdrew its 1,300 personnel by the end of April 2004, just 7 weeks after the attacks, and Honduras and the Dominican Republic quickly followed suit with their nearly 700 combined personnel.

The sudden departure of the Spaniards and their partners created a brigade-sized gap in Multi-National Division-Central South (MND-CS). With MND-CS losing about a fifth of its personnel and one-third of its brigade combat teams, and its total strength dropping to about 6,000 troops, CJTF-7 had to fill the shortfall on a stopgap basis, first by the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment and later by 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division. Searching for a long-term solution, CJTF-7 leaders tried to convince their British counterparts to expand the boundaries of MND-SE and assume control of the rump MND-CS as well as all nine of the southern Shi'a provinces. U.S. military leaders also asked the United Kingdom to deploy the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps under a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) flag to assume command and control of the expanded effort, a request that Prime Minister Tony Blair and his government mulled over for several months before rejecting it in summer 2004.³³

In May, Sunni insurgents would try the same strategy again, this time targeting South Korea as that country prepared to deploy more than 3,000 additional troops to assist in security and reconstruction activities in the Kurdistan region. Insurgents believed to be from Zarqawi's Tawhid wal-Jihad captured a South Korean contractor and threatened to murder him if South Korea did not withdraw all its forces. Unlike the Spanish case, the South Korean Government continued its troop deployment, and Zarqawi's men beheaded the Korean captive in late June.³⁴

Despite their failure with the Koreans, the Sunni insurgents were clearly aiming to defeat a key component of the original American plan: that the United States would be able to internationalize the Iraqi mission and turn over a significant share of the security

responsibilities and reconstruction efforts to coalition partners, nongovernmental organizations, or international organizations like the United Nations (UN). Indeed, as of early 2004, many V Corps staffers continued to work under the assumption that a NATO force would be arriving, perhaps even in 2004, to take charge of the entire mission from CJTF-7. The spate of insurgent attacks against these allies, as well as assaults against the UN and the Red Cross, ended all hope of such a handover and severely hampered reconstruction efforts across the country. By early 2004, Sunni insurgents were targeting international aid and reconstruction organizations, kidnapping aid workers and contractors, often brutally killing them in videotaped beheadings designed to scare away the engineers, technicians, and development experts who had volunteered to assist in Iraq's rebuilding. While this campaign of intimidation spanned all of 2004 and beyond, during the month of April, insurgents carried out several high-profile kidnappings of Americans who were later brutally beheaded, including the contractor Nicholas Berg.³⁵

Zarqawi Aims for Civil War

Within the broader Sunni insurgency that focused on thwarting and expelling the U.S.-led occupation force, a smaller insurgent strain was driven by an additional dark motive. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi believed the Shi'a majority was the most dangerous threat to Sunni interests in Iraq and the surrounding region, even more dangerous than the American occupation. In order to prevent what he expected to be a sectarian liquidation of Sunnis by Iraq's majority Shi'a, Zarqawi had decided he should provoke the Shi'a into a sectarian war, thereby forcing the mobilization of Iraq's Sunni population as well as, more importantly, the global Sunni population.

In the third week of January 2004, Kurdish forces captured Hassan Ghul as he was returning to al-Qaeda senior leaders in Pakistan with a letter containing Zarqawi's proposed strategy calling for attacks on the Iraqi Shi'a to create a civil war. In his letter, Zarqawi identified the Shi'a as the true enemy of Salafi jihadists, representing a greater danger than coalition forces. "The unhurried observer and inquiring onlooker will realize that Shi'ism is the looming danger and the true challenge," he wrote. As Zarqawi saw it, the Shi'a were "the insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, the crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom. They are the enemy. Beware of them. Fight them."³⁶ Stoking fears deeply held by many Sunnis, some of which would later be matched by reality, Zarqawi argued that "the Badr Brigade, which is the military wing of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution, has shed its Shi'a garb and put on the garb of the police and the army in its place."³⁷ The Shi'a in the Iraqi security forces would soon start to "liquidate the Sunnis under the pretext that they are the saboteurs, remnants of the Ba'ath, and terrorists spreading evil in the land," Zarqawi predicted. The only way for the Sunnis to avoid being exterminated, Zarqawi argued, was to strike at the Shi'a as their main objective, before the coalition and Americans. As the Shi'a responded to this sectarian war, it would "awaken the inattentive Sunnis as they feel imminent danger and annihilating death," after which the global Sunni community would rise up and come to the Iraqi Sunnis' aid.³⁸



Source: Still photo taken from courtesy video of American Forces Network Iraq (Released).

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.³⁹

Beyond his claims to be protecting the Sunni community, Zarqawi himself was driven by ideology and pure hatred of Shi'ism. Zarqawi preached that the Shi'a were religious idolaters who performed ceremonies and held beliefs that were heretical to his extremist version of Islam. In Zarqawi's view, drawn from that of the medieval Sunni extremist philosopher Ibn Taymiyyah, the Shi'a were worse than Jews and Christians because they had seen the light of "true" Islam and had chosen instead to stray off what he believed was the straight path. For that "sin," Zarqawi described the Shi'a as atheists several times in his letter.⁴⁰ This extreme antipathy toward the Shi'a was put into practice and made clear in early 2004. In March, Zarqawi's attempts to foment sectarian violence focused on the Shi'a religious day of Ashura, when a series of complex attacks in Karbala and Baghdad killed nearly 200 Shi'a pilgrims and wounded another 500. While the Ashura attacks were the most spectacular among Zarqawi's early efforts to inspire a civil war, a steady drumbeat of smaller sectarian killings and bombings would continue throughout 2004, building momentum toward the civil war that Zarqawi intended to start.

Prophetically, the CJTF-7 Red Cell, which acted as an independent think tank for General Sanchez, identified the danger that Zarqawi posed, noting in a February assessment:

The assassination of Grand Ayatollah [Ali Husayni] Sistani or the destruction of a revered mosque, such as the Imam Ali mosque in Najaf, would send reverberations throughout the Shi'a world and direct Shi'a anger both at Sunni Arabs and the coalition. This could spark wide-scale Shi'a on Sunni violence in Iraq, particularly in areas where both communities are mixed such as Baghdad or Basrah, which could, in turn, lead to countryside ethno-religious violence, causing Iraqi society to factionalize and shattering hope of national unity.⁴¹

While the coalition used the captured Zarqawi letter as a part of an information operations campaign to try to discredit the Sunni insurgency, the January 2004 revelation that Tawhid wal-Jihad and its leader intended to plunge the country into a Sunni-Shi'a war had little impact on the coalition's operational planning, even though the letter's contents were well understood and its significance acknowledged by a number of senior coalition officials. The only coalition elements to recognize and act upon the scale of the danger were special operations forces, which, in February, made Zarqawi their primary focus. Even so, the evolution in their targeting would occur slowly, and 50 percent of their operations until July 2004 were prosecuted against targets unrelated to Zarqawi and his organization.

The coalition had been handed, by providence, the war strategy of one of its most dangerous opponents, but coalition operational commanders did not make preventing civil war a central part of their campaign plans. In retrospect, it was a strategically significant missed opportunity – akin to Union General George McClellan's failure to act on captured Confederate plans ahead of the Battle of Antietam.

Iranian Moves

As Zarqawi set in motion his strategy to provoke a civil war to restore Sunni ascendancy in Iraq, the Iranian regime was making its own moves to solidify Shi'a control and ensure its long-term influence. Iraq's borders with Iran were almost completely unsecured, and at a coalition meeting to address the problem on February 7, 2004, Ambassador L. Paul Bremer noted that "we have no [border] policy; no capacity to enforce it even if we had a policy; [and] no Iraqi diplomatic system to support issuing visas."⁴² The Iranian regime was exploiting this policy and enforcement vacuum, sending agents and businessmen into southern Iraq to garner influence and lay the groundwork for larger elements and capabilities to arrive. Some Iranian agents were detained, but these were likely only a small portion of those that had been sent. One indication of the scope of the problem came in the December 2003 release of 41 Iranian detainees from the Camp Bucca detention facility, including the CENTCOM-authorized release of 4 IRGC members captured in the late spring.⁴³

The Iranian regime was using additional means to exert influence as well, including flooding southern Iraq with Iranian immigrants, some of whom were buying up so much Iraqi property that their actions created a housing bubble that drove up property values significantly.⁴⁴ Some coalition officials, such as Karbala Governorate Coordinator Ambassador John Berry, judged that the Iranians' actions constituted the early phases of an insurgency. Iranian operatives had allegedly attempted to assassinate Iraqi political and security leaders, including the Karbala police chief, and were attempting to co-opt Iraqi interpreters working for the coalition. A January 2004 CJTF-7 report assessed that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Qods Force was directing the Badr Corps to assassinate former regime members across southern Iraq, amounting to a violent de-Ba'athification campaign that had killed at least 43.

The effort was so advanced that Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) had begun collaborating with the Da'wa Party in its search for Ba'athists, even establishing a council that proposed and approved targets. The Iranians had also tried to

stack the Najaf provincial council with pro-Iranian SCIRI members through intimidation and threats. Finally, some coalition officials believed they detected an Iranian hand in the bombing of the Coalition Provisional Authority facility in Karbala in December 2003.⁴⁵

The Iranian regime's strategic purpose for these actions was debated extensively among CJTF-7, the CPA, and U.S. officials in Washington. Some argued the Iranian regime was simply acting in self-interest by injecting reconstruction funds and capital as a means of stabilizing southern Iraq and preventing the violence from spilling over the border. Others judged the Iranians were trying to gain control over southern Iraq without firing a shot via population transfers, financial support, civic aid projects, and propaganda. Still others perceived a malignant nature in Iranian actions. From Karbala, Berry reported to the CPA his assessment that:

all of the recent moves in recent weeks . . . are part and parcel of a master plan directed by Iran to create a sphere of influence in the Shi'ite heartland, starting with the two holy cities. . . . Iran is eager to split Iraq into three semi-autonomous zones, and wants to extend Iranian control in the south, which in addition to emasculating its old enemy (Iraq), would guarantee its dominion over the two holy cities (Najaf and Karbala), the income they derive from pilgrims (estimated between 1.5 [and] 3 million people a year), and the prestige of having them back in the same orbit as Qom.⁴⁶

Recommendations for how to respond to the Iranian regime's actions were as disparate as the assessments of Iranian motives. Deputy SECDEF Paul Wolfowitz had long recommended that only the worst Iranian regime proxies, such as Moqtada Sadr and his militias, should be engaged by force, and that the coalition should co-opt other Iranian-associated groups, especially SCIRI. Others, such as CPA Najaf Governorate Coordinator Richard G. Olson, argued that the situation in Najaf was "fundamentally unstable" and that the coalition should establish a monopoly of the legitimate use of force by both disarming the Badr Corps and eliminating the threat from Moqtada Sadr.⁴⁷

Continued Escalations with Moqtada Sadr

The first 3 months of 2004 were marked by gradually mounting tensions between the coalition and Moqtada Sadr. In January, several incidents instigated by Sadr nearly escalated into combat. On January 11, an Iraqi policeman was kidnapped by members of Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi wearing masks and Iraqi police uniforms. He was taken to a shadow court and prison in Najaf where the Sadrists were torturing political opponents.⁴⁸ Incensed by the discovery of the extrajudicial prison and courts, Bremer wrote to Olson that "we cannot let this 'court' and 'prison' continue in operation," and signaled his intent to eliminate them.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, both the prison and court were located in close proximity to the Imam Ali shrine, which complicated the situation enough to preclude launching an immediate security operation.

As the CPA considered its options, Sadr accused the police responsible for the security of the Imam Ali shrine of corruption and sent members of his militia to occupy part of the shrine. A crisis ensued, as Grand Ayatollah Sistani demanded that Sadr's men immediately withdraw but refused to allow coalition forces to enter the shrine to help eject them. The situation spiraled rapidly up to the CPA and CJTF-7 level as both local police and the allied forces in MND-CS declined to act against Sadr's fighters, and it was

defused only after difficult negotiations between SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and Sadr that allowed the Badr Corps to take responsibility for the shrine's security.⁵⁰

Because of these and similar provocations by Moqtada Sadr and his forces, coalition leaders had vigorously debated the various actions that could be taken against Sadr and his organization. Among the issues driving the debate was the strong evidence linking Sadr and his men to the April 2003 murder of Ayatollah Abdul Majid al-Khoei. Sadrists' inflammatory public statements also threatened to undermine the democratic direction the CPA hoped Iraq would follow. CPA Regional Coordinator for South Central Iraq Michael Gfoeller advised CPA officials in Baghdad on January 7 that "my recommendation is unchanged from before with regard to Moqtada Sadr and his henchmen. I strongly recommend that they should be arrested under the extant warrants issued last summer . . . for the murder of Abdul Majid al-Khoei."⁵¹

Gfoeller itemized a long list of the Sadrists' crimes and destabilizing incidents, concluding that failure to act was undermining the coalition and causing serious fear among Sunnis of a future Shi'a theocracy running Iraq. With regard to the second and third order effects of an operation against Sadr, Gfoeller argued that:

should we finally take the necessary action, I would predict several days at most of unrest in Kufa, Najaf, Karbala, and Amarah. Other southern cities might be affected as well in addition to Sadr City of course. I nevertheless believe, given Sadr's great unpopularity, that the unrest would involve a small percentage of the population and then [wind] down rather quickly.⁵²

Bremer echoed this assessment in a January 18 message to Rumsfeld, noting, "Now is the time to take action in conjunction with Iraqi authorities to hold Sadr accountable. . . . Although Sadr's arrest may provoke clashes with his supporters in the short run, we believe it will have an almost immediate, salutary impact on politics in southern Iraq."⁵³ A counterargument by those who were opposed to taking such action was that Sadr was not part of the Shi'a mainstream and that conducting operations against him would only likely empower him and raise his credibility.

These debates were not limited to coalition officials in Iraq, as key decision makers in Washington took up the question as well. David Gompert, the senior adviser for national security and defense in the CPA, proposed to Wolfowitz during the deputy secretary's January visit to Iraq that the coalition should ally with the Badr Corps and ask them to arrest Sadr and eliminate his organization.⁵⁴ Wolfowitz supported the proposal and introduced it at the national level, noting in a January 21 memo that, "while there is definitely some conflict between our goals and SCIRI's, I think it is a mistake to overestimate the degree of conflict and in particular I think it's a mistake to think that they are stalking horses for the Iranians."⁵⁵

The recommendation touched off a debate that included Abizaid and Sanchez and the CPA, with Sanchez the least supportive of the plan. Meanwhile, in a January letter to the SECDEF, DoD policy officials argued that Sadr was the weakest of the Shi'a opposition to the coalition and should be arrested by Iraq's police to send a signal to other recalcitrants. As CJTF-7 reviewed its options in light of the policy proposal, Sanchez's political adviser, Catherine Dale, reported that "Bremer's guidance is to clarify that the coalition is not reluctant per se (to arrest Sadr); but note that the Iraqi police simply cannot carry out the

action.” She further noted that “we already have a ‘decision,’ (with regard to Sadr) to be prepared to execute, and we are looking for an opportunity.”⁵⁶

For his part, Abizaid was deeply reluctant to act against Sadr and his movement, concerned about the potential consequences of entering a fight against Iraqi Shi’a militants. In Abizaid’s view, it was important to maintain focus on al-Qaeda and its allies across the region, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. To go to war against the Shi’a, either generally or in the form of the Sadristes was, in Abizaid’s judgment, a senseless strategic distraction because al-Qaeda, the main U.S. enemy in the Global War on Terrorism, was a Salafi Sunni organization whose leaders hated the Shi’a even more intensely than they hated America. Concerned about the momentum building to take action against Sadr, Abizaid wrote Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers on January 23, 2004, arguing:

We cannot afford to divert military and intelligence capacity against threats such as the PKK, MEK and types such as Sadr at this time. We must stay focused on what kills us. I remain perplexed at the constant concern, from Washington, as conveyed by the Joint Staff, on problems that are peripheral to success in Iraq.⁵⁷

Clearly concerned, too, about the nature of the instructions he was receiving about killing or capturing Sadr, Abizaid added in his January 23 letter to Myers that “it would be best to communicate our orders in writing through you to avoid any misunderstandings on the desired way ahead. To the best of my knowledge no written orders have ever been received on this subject.”⁵⁸ Myers replied with a formal cable 2 days later that resulted in CJTF-7 ordering the CJSOTF to draw up plans to capture Sadr and his senior lieutenants, naming the mission Operation STUART.⁵⁹

THE STRUGGLE TO FORMULATE A LONG-TERM STRATEGY

In contrast to the insurgents’ and Zarqawi’s nihilistic but consistent strategies, and Iran’s calculated actions, the coalition in early 2004 had trouble formulating a coherent, countrywide strategy. Within CJTF-7 and the CPA, commanders and staffs struggled to formulate long-term plans given conflicting political guidance from Washington and an uncertain future for both organizations. At the same time, the CPA and CJTF-7 wrestled with the challenges created by being under-resourced organizations conducting missions and activities they had not expected to perform.

Seeking guidance from Wolfowitz, who was visiting Baghdad on February 1, Sanchez noted that “right now there is no Iraqi national security strategy. We need a long-term vision that will facilitate Iraq’s independence, and we need to communicate that vision to Iraqis.” A nonplussed Wolfowitz responded that “part of that vision is winning the damn war first. Writing nice papers while VBIEDS [vehicle-borne IEDs] are still going off is like Alice in Wonderland. . . . [T]here is a disconnect and, until we are further down the road, what we need most is short-term thinking.”⁶⁰

Separate but related to the campaign plan were ongoing discussions on what to do with the Iraqi security forces. For Abizaid, Sanchez, and Rumsfeld, establishing capable security forces seemed to provide the clearest U.S. exit strategy. Rumsfeld, concerned by a lack of progress in regenerating the Iraqi security forces, ordered Major General Karl W.

Eikenberry to Iraq in January 2004 to report on ways to speed up the Iraqis' development. Having just headed a similar training mission in Afghanistan, Eikenberry found that the CPA's efforts were not effective for either the Iraqi Army or the police, and that progress in the police force, deemed critical for success in fighting the insurgency, was lagging far behind progress in the army. Eikenberry recommended that the new Iraqi Army be reduced in size as a cost-saving measure and, because in his view, "the planned rapid buildup puts at risk quality control."⁶¹ Eikenberry also concluded that training should be standardized for the ICDC, which to that point had been decentralized and driven by the various multinational divisions because CJTF-7 and CENTCOM considered the ICDC as a reserve or National Guard-type force that was temporarily mobilized for the ongoing national emergency. The report also recommended that all security force training be transferred from CPA's control to CENTCOM and CJTF-7 to create unity of command. At the strategic level, Eikenberry endorsed CENTCOM's plan to focus its main effort on the creation of Iraqi security forces, to which the coalition would gradually transition responsibility as a way to reduce coalition force presence. As Iraqi forces became more capable than they originally were, coalition forces would hand over local control and then regional and provincial control, theoretically receding into the background to provide strategic overwatch by July 2006.⁶²

Rumsfeld seized on Eikenberry's report, seeing it as a roadmap to restart the founder-ing Iraqi security forces training mission under a new model. To highlight the importance of the training mission, Rumsfeld ordered CJTF-7 to "give the highest priority to standing up capable Iraqi security forces and transitioning responsibilities to them as soon as possible," and directed Sanchez to change his command's mission statement to reflect the heightened priority. The resulting updated CJTF-7 mission statement included the requirement to "organize, train, and equip credible and capable Iraqi security forces in order to accelerate the transition of security from coalition forces to Iraqi forces."⁶³ While Rumsfeld rejected Eikenberry's suggestion to reduce the size of the new Iraqi Army, almost all of the general's other recommendations were implemented. The Coalition Military Assistance Training Team (CMATT) was wrested from the CPA and moved under CJTF-7, and a new sister organization, the Civilian Police Assistance Training Team (CPATT), was created under CJTF-7, thereby aligning resources with responsibilities. A new military headquarters, the Office of Security Cooperation, would be created under CJTF-7 to oversee the military and police training teams and supervise the security force assistance effort. Because Eikenberry had noted that the police were equipped primarily with pistols and outgunned by the insurgents, CJTF-7 started to make changes to police training and equipping that would effectively militarize much of the country's police force.

The holding of elections and writing of a new Iraqi constitution were also critical topics that prompted debate among U.S. officials. Initially, officials in Washington and the CPA had preferred to have caucuses, selected by coalition authorities, choose Iraqi representatives to write a new Iraqi constitution. This option would give the coalition the maximum ability to steer the new Iraqi political process. In June 2003, however, Grand Ayatollah Sistani had issued a fatwa declaring that the new constitution should be written by a constituent assembly directly elected by Iraqis. In December and January, Sistani had insisted that elections should be held quickly and that the new government

that would accept sovereignty in 2004 should be elected as well. As U.S. leaders in Iraq and Washington searched for ways to preserve significant control over the process, SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim countered by requesting that the UN intercede, after which the veteran UN diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi arrived in Iraq to mediate. Brahimi formulated a compromise under which an Iraqi Interim Government would be selected by the Iraqi Governing Council and serve until nationwide elections in January 2005 for an Iraqi Parliament that would form a transitional government. The transitional government would then draft a constitution, thereby meeting Sistani's requirements. Hakim and Sistani's efforts were both intended to reshape the Iraqi political landscape. For decades, the Shi'a Islamist factions had been blocked from participation in Iraqi politics and the spoils that came from it, and they were not about to pass up the opportunity to finally take the majority share of power.⁶⁴



Source: UN photo by Mark Garten (Released).

UN Special Envoy to Iraq Lakhdar Brahimi.⁶⁵

Abu Ghraib: The Failure of Detention Policies

On January 14, 2004, the problems of the struggling detention program finally became clear when Sanchez was informed of the illegal acts and violations of the Geneva Conventions that U.S. guards had committed against Iraqi detainees at the Abu Ghraib complex in October 2003. Sanchez was told that there were "pictures of naked prisoners, some of which are pornographic in nature. Others show the use of unmuzzled dogs and there are even pictures of [military police] posing with a dead body."⁶⁶ On January 19, 2004, Sanchez requested that CENTCOM appoint a general officer to conduct an Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 investigation.⁶⁷ Major General Antonio M. Taguba, the CFLCC deputy commander for support, was appointed on January 31 and provided findings and recommendations in a written report on March 9.

Taguba's investigation revealed systemic problems and abuses worse than Sanchez had imagined. In gross disregard of the laws of land warfare, a group of Soldiers from the 800th Military Police Brigade, an Army Reserve unit, had carried out numerous sadistic and perverse acts on detainees, including sodomizing them, stacking them naked, threatening them with dogs and weapons, beating them, and depriving them of sleep. Among

his many findings, Taguba recommended the appointment of a single commander for all detainee operations in the theater and additional training for all those working with detainees. Taguba's report also recommended that Brigadier General Janis Karpinski, commander of the 800th Military Police Brigade, should be relieved and reprimanded, along with a battalion commander and other leaders who had responsibility for Iraqi detainees.⁶⁸ Colonel Thomas M. Pappas, commander of the 205th Military Intelligence Brigade, who had been given overall responsibility for the prison by Sanchez in fall 2003, was also deemed responsible for the debacle and recommended for reprimand. Eleven Soldiers from the 800th Military Police Brigade were eventually convicted of crimes committed at Abu Ghraib.

Within CJTF-7, Sanchez and his headquarters had done everything by the book once the activities at Abu Ghraib had been discovered in late 2003. However, no matter how thorough the investigation they ordered, and no matter how severely they punished those responsible, the fallout from the scandal would ultimately prove impossible to contain.

As March 2004 came to a close, the coalition's struggle to find its way in terms of both strategy and countrywide plans was compounded by considerable turbulence among the coalition's key leaders and units, most of which were transitioning into or out of the country. Despite these challenges, coalition leaders remained unrealistically hopeful that the entire effort could soon be made stable enough to be transferred to an external multinational actor such as the UN or NATO. Conversely, the forces opposing the coalition were developing long-term plans and beginning to execute them. Iran was well on its way to establishing a foothold in the Shi'a heartland, Zarqawi was initiating his plan to start a civil war, and the broader Sunni insurgency was coordinating well-planned operations. As the first anniversary of the invasion passed, Iraq was primed for an explosion. The pent-up frustrations of Iraqis—some caused by unfulfilled hopes of what the invasion would bring, some by coalition actions, and some by a simple hope for a return to normal—had begun to act upon Iraqi politics and security like a virtual pressure cooker. In April 2004, nearly all of the challenges the coalition was facing would explode simultaneously.

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CHAPTER 12

THINGS FALL APART, APRIL 2004

As the transition month of March 2004 came to a close and the new units that had arrived for the second rotation of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM began to settle into their areas of operations, coalition leaders in Iraq viewed the situation with cautious optimism. Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez and Combined Joint Task Force-7 (CJTF-7) believed daily affairs had settled into a type of normality in which the coalition was progressing toward its campaign goals, albeit at a slower pace than Sanchez would have preferred. Insurgent groups continued to mount harassing attacks against coalition forces, especially in the northern and western provinces, but the fighting was usually brief and localized.

This relative tranquility was shattered in April 2004, when Iraq exploded with mass uprisings throughout the country, forcing CJTF-7 to fight a two-front war against broad Sunni and Shi'a insurgencies. With Sunni and Shi'a guerrilla leaders coordinating their rebellions in an effort to drive the coalition from Iraq, only the timely intervention of a departing U.S. division rescued the coalition from a strategic defeat. The uprising permanently changed the character of the conflict and set in motion political dynamics that broadened the war far beyond coalition leaders' expectations.

AN UNEXPECTED TWO-FRONT WAR

Outbreak in Fallujah

The trouble began in Fallujah, which by early 2004 had become an insurgent stronghold and the most dangerous city in Iraq. Even before the invasion of Iraq, Fallujah was religiously conservative. Known as "The City of a Hundred Mosques," it was home to both Sheikh Abdullah Janabi, leader of the insurgent Mujahideen Shura Council, and Harith al-Dhari, chairman of the pro-insurgent Association of Muslim Scholars.¹ In the months after Saddam Hussein's fall, the lack of border security allowed thousands of foreign fighters to enter Anbar from Syria and Jordan and make their way east through the Euphrates River Valley. The situation had not been helped by the haphazard rotation of coalition units through the city in the months after the invasion, which resulted in no fewer than six different units having responsibility for the town during the first year of the war.²

Ominous signs appeared just after the New Year. On January 2, 2005, insurgents shot down an OH-58 Kiowa helicopter over the city.³ Later the same day, 1st Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), with special operations support, discovered 17-armed improvised explosive devices (IED) and 4 dump trucks worth of explosives and weapons in a Fallujah market.⁴ Shortly after the raid, insurgent fire brought down a UH-60 Black Hawk medevac, killing nine U.S. Soldiers.⁵ Two other helicopters were downed in quick succession. On February 12, during a visit by the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) commander, insurgents engaged General John Abizaid and Major General Charles Swannack's convoy with rocket-propelled grenades (RPG) and small-arms fire

as it approached the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) building in the city.⁶ Two days later, militants conducted bold, simultaneous daylight assaults on 3 Iraqi police stations, the ICDC base, and the mayor's office, freeing 20 insurgent prisoners while killing 17 lightly armed police officers.⁷ Two of the dead attackers were Lebanese, highlighting the presence of foreign fighters in the city.⁸ During the March handover of Fallujah from the 82d Airborne Division to I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF), a mortar attack on the mayor's office during a city council meeting killed 2 Iraqi civilians while wounding at least 19 Soldiers and Marines.⁹

On March 31, Sunni militants ambushed a Blackwater supply convoy that took a wrong turn into a Fallujah neighborhood, killing all four of the convoy's Blackwater contractor guards. The militants mutilated the corpses, dragged them through the streets, and hung their burning remains from Fallujah's iconic iron bridge over the Euphrates River. Captured on video, the grisly scene was viewed worldwide.

From Baghdad, Sanchez viewed the Blackwater incident as a tactical issue for the Marines in Multi-National Force-West (MNF-W) to handle, as CJTF-7 was focused on what he considered the more significant threat from Moqtada Sadr, a view with which MNF-W leaders agreed. One Marine assessment held that the contractors had been killed by Abu Issa tribesmen, the same tribe reportedly responsible for shooting down a coalition helicopter after its sheikh's arrest the previous September.¹¹ Lieutenant General James Conway, the I MEF commander, and Major General James Mattis, the 1st Marine Division commander, both recommended against a large-scale operational response to the Fallujah incident. The 1st Marine Division had taken over from the 82d Airborne Division just 2 weeks earlier, and the Marine commanders wanted time to develop a better understanding of Fallujah's urban terrain before launching operations. In any case, Conway and Mattis recommended a targeted approach using improved intelligence to find the perpetrators of the 31 March killings, rather than an offensive against the entire city.

After hurried conferences with the Marine leadership, Sanchez and Abizaid supported the tactical commanders' counsel against immediate action and brought those recommendations to Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld and the National Security Council principals.¹² In meetings in Washington on April 1, Abizaid argued, "The reality in Fallujah is that the incident is militarily insignificant," but acknowledged that "Repeated play on the media has made the insurgents appear strong and the U.S.



Source: DoD photo by R. D. Ward
(Released).

**Lieutenant General
James T. Conway,
Commanding General, I MEF
(2002-2006).¹⁰**



Source: U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) photo by Sergeant Kevin R. Reed, USMC (Released).

**Major General James N. Mattis,
Commanding General,
1st Marine Division.¹⁷**

city, Conway repositioned two battalions from western Anbar to join in an assault on the city that would begin 3 days later on April 6.¹⁹ As events transpired, these would be the only coalition forces sent to assist in Fallujah as the country was about to explode in a general insurrection.

The Sadrists Uprising

As Sanchez had indicated to his chain of command, CJTF-7's principal concern entering the spring of 2004 was Moqtada Sadr and his militant followers. This judgment was shared by most U.S. leaders in Washington, who regarded the Sadrists as the most significant threat to the planned transfer of sovereignty to an interim Iraqi Government in June. Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi militia was well entrenched in the Shi'a-majority south by the spring of 2004, having infiltrated local police and government, established Sharia courts, and formed smuggling and kidnapping rings.

Sanchez believed himself under pressure from senior U.S. leaders to ensure the timely transfer of sovereignty in order to give the U.S. administration a political success ahead of the November 2004 presidential election.²⁰ As a result, CJTF-7 had made plans to destroy Sadr's organization but awaited solid intelligence and the right opportunity to do so. In view of the high risk of moving against Sadr, Rumsfeld had reserved for himself the authority to order the plan's execution.²¹

weak."¹³ Abizaid quickly realized that U.S. leaders wanted a stronger response than Abizaid and Sanchez had recommended. The prevailing mood in Washington was, "This ain't Mogadishu. We're not walking away," Abizaid observed.¹⁴ Reflecting that mood, Rumsfeld made clear in separate meetings with CJTF-7 that "we must do more than get the perpetrators. . . . This is a good opportunity to push the Sunnis on the Iraqi Governing Council to step forward and condemn this attack. We will remember those who do not. It is time to choose—you are with us or against us."¹⁵ With U.S. leaders having disapproved the recommendations of their tactical commanders, on April 3, Sanchez ordered MNF-W to begin Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE to eliminate the insurgent safe haven in Fallujah and capture those responsible for the Blackwater killings.¹⁶ When informed of the decision, a frustrated Mattis asked Conway to provide the order in writing and to do everything possible to prevent the operation from being halted before the city had been cleared.¹⁸ With just 2 Marine battalions in the Fallujah area, MNF-W needed additional forces to clear the city of 250,000 people. While Mattis ordered his units already near Fallujah to form a cordon around the

The opportunity to move against the Sadrists seemed to present itself in late March, when Sadr's newspaper, *Al Hawza*, published an article comparing the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and Ambassador L. Paul Bremer to Saddam.²² In response, Bremer ordered CPA officials to close the newspaper, which had been inciting violence against the coalition effectively for several months. On March 28, coalition troops chained shut the newspaper's office doors, prompting a protest by nearly 20,000 angry Sadrists who marched on the Green Zone in the days immediately following the closure. A small contingent of U.S. Soldiers guarding the Green Zone perimeter, intimidated by the size of the protest and threatened by thrown rocks and other objects, opened fire and killed two Iraqis, further inflaming tensions.²³

Rather than attempt to de-escalate the situation with Sadr, Bremer and the coalition took steps that inadvertently led to the opening of a second front. In a predawn raid on April 3, the same day Sanchez ordered MNF-W to launch its operation against Fallujah, Navy SEALs from the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) arrested Mustafa al-Yacoubi, one of Sadr's deputies and a suspect in the murder of Aya-tollah Abdul Majid al-Khoei.²⁴ As with all other operations against Sadr's inner circle, the raid required an execution order from Rumsfeld.²⁵ While the coalition treated Yacoubi as any other detainee, televised images of Yacoubi in an orange prison outfit matching the detainee uniforms at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, incensed many Sadr supporters, who perceived the arrest as a direct challenge to their power in southern Iraq.²⁶

Bremer and his staff had assumed the mission could be conducted without an impact on the upcoming battle in Fallujah. But the arrest of Yacoubi, coupled with the closing of *Al Hawza* and the shooting of Sadrist protesters, all on the eve of the Shi'a religious pilgrimage and commemoration of Arba'een, prompted a violent response from Sadr's forces. The day after Yacoubi's arrest, April 4, Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi launched a coordinated offensive against coalition troops across central and southern Iraq. The first blow fell in Baghdad, where Major General Peter Chiarelli's 1st Cavalry Division was in the process of relieving Major General Martin Dempsey's 1st Armored Division. Sadr City, with more than two million Shi'a residents, was an overcrowded maze of slums in an area of just 13 kilometers, making it one of the most densely populated areas of the world. By comparison, Sadr City's population exceeded that of Manhattan but was crammed into a third of the space.

The 1st Cavalry Division was ill-equipped for the Sadrist offensive in this dense urban terrain. Forced to leave much of its armored forces home at Fort Hood despite Chiarelli's protests, the 1st Cavalry Division had dragooned most of its tank, mechanized infantry, engineer, and artillery units into motorized infantry equipped with armored High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV) to conduct daily operations and patrols.²⁷ Chiarelli and the 1st Cavalry Division had come to Iraq prepared to carry out stability operations that would focus on basic services and living conditions for the Iraqi population as the best way to improve security conditions, the same approach U.S. units had employed in Haiti. To explain his strategy as simply as possible, Chiarelli used the acronym "SWET," which stood for sewer, water, electricity, and trash, the sectors of the Iraqi infrastructure that were the principal focus of this effort. It was for this reason that a platoon of the 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, was escorting contracted sewage vacuum trucks through Sadr City on April 4, 2004, when it was ambushed and nearly overrun

by scores of Jaysh al-Mahdi fighters. Barricading the streets with stoves, air conditioners, and other debris, the Sadrist fighters trapped the patrol's wheeled vehicles inside Sadr City, requiring tank-led reinforcements to crash through the obstacles and escort the beleaguered troops to safety.²⁸

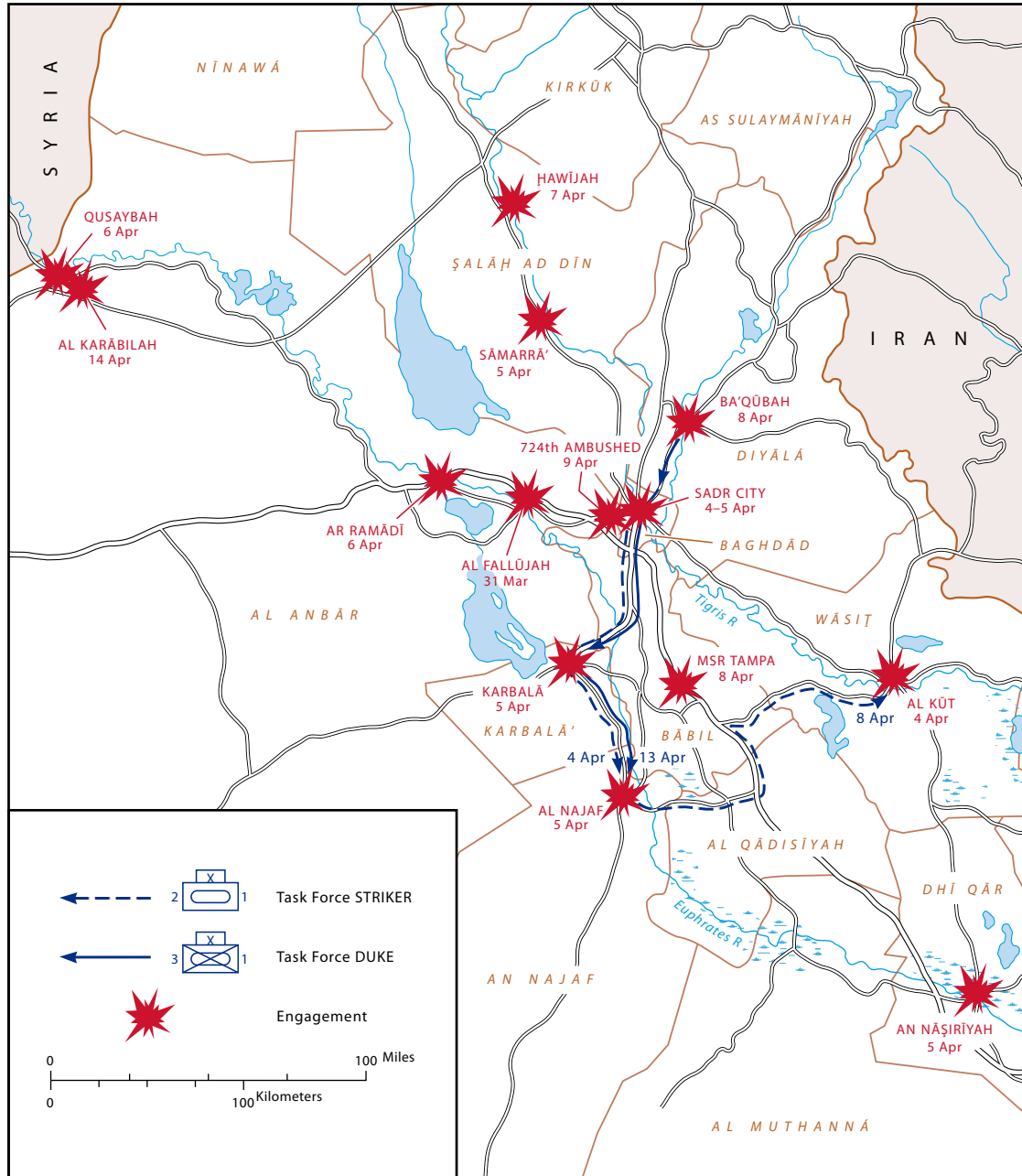
The change in the operating environment that occurred on April 4 was dramatic. The previous unit in Sadr City, the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, had lost just one Soldier during its 9-month tenure there.²⁹ On April 4, eight Soldiers from 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division were killed or wounded from a single ambushed patrol, after which the brigade fought intense battles against Jaysh al-Mahdi for 80 consecutive days. The fighting became so fierce that, by the morning of April 6, the 1st Armored Division already had reported killing 136 Sadrist militiamen in Baghdad.³⁰ By April 12, that number had reached 247, nearly double the number of insurgents reported killed in all of MNF-W.³¹

The situation changed beyond Baghdad as well. Sadrist uprisings quickly spread through the southern cities, including Basrah, Amarah, Kut, and Karbala, where angry protests on April 4 in front of coalition government buildings turned violent overnight. Within hours of the Sadr City outbreak, Multi-National Division Baghdad (MND-B), Multinational Division Central-South (MND-CS), and Multinational Division Southeast (MND-SE) all faced an unexpected crisis forcing them to defend virtually every coalition outpost in the south against Sadrist attackers (see Map 14).

The Assault on Fallujah

As the multinational divisions in Baghdad and the south scrambled to repel the Sadrist attacks, Multi-National Force-West (MNF-W) began its attack on Fallujah. The Marines spent 48 hours preparing to assault Fallujah by establishing a series of checkpoints in a loose cordon around the city.³² The shortage of forces in the Marine cordon allowed some senior insurgents to escape the city and flee to Hadithah, which proved to be a favored insurgent staging area due to its proximity to Lake Tharthar and its central location within Anbar.³³ Given the hastiness of the operation, only two battalions from Regimental Combat Team 1 (2d Battalion, 1st Marines, and 1st Battalion, 5th Marines) were available for the actual assault, and they moved into positions near the city while the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion screened to the south. On April 6, I MEF commenced Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE. The Marine battalions began moving into Fallujah's neighborhoods, where they quickly became engaged in bitter house-to-house fighting. They did so without significant armor support. Because of the haste to launch the operation and the lack of other available forces, only 10 M1 Abrams tanks were present in the attacking forces.³⁴

Opposing the Marines were 500–1,000 insurgent fighters from disparate groups that could be grouped roughly into three categories: former regime elements and Hizb al-Awda, local Islamist groups allied with foreign fighters, and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Tawhid wal-Jihad.³⁵ While no single individual controlled the various Fallujah resistance groups, Sheikh Abdullah Janabi was able to coordinate most of their efforts.³⁶ During the battle, mosques served as insurgent command and control centers, with the al-Hadra Mosque serving as the principal headquarters for Janabi and his allies.³⁷



Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 14. Uprisings in Iraq, March 31-April 14, 2004.



Source: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Corporal Matthew J. Apprendi (Released).

Marines Take Cover in Front of a HMMWV During the Battle of Fallujah.³⁸

The 2d Battalion, 1st Marines paired with the Iraqi 36th Commando Battalion and its special operations advisers moved into the northwest part of the city, while the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, attacked from the west in an attempted pincer movement.³⁹ Empty vehicles blocked intersections and alleyways, making it difficult for coalition armor to support the infantry forces.⁴⁰ But as Marine units from elsewhere in MNF-W began concentrating on Fallujah, the balance of combat power shifted, and the Marines began to make headway. On the second day of the attack, Colonel John Toolan, the RCT 1 commander, received a third infantry battalion. A fourth infantry battalion arrived 2 days later.⁴¹

As the operation proceeded, most of the Iraqi soldiers sent to participate in the attack refused to fight. Many of the troops, only having received a few weeks of rudimentary training, simply were not ready for the rigors of combat. Others, having joined the New Iraqi Army or ICDC to protect Iraq against external attack, felt they had been misled when they were ordered to Fallujah. In a scenario replayed across the country in April, many refused orders or just deserted rather than fight fellow Iraqis. In a few cases, they defected to the insurgents.

Mattis told his superiors, "Reporting and experience has indicated that all Iraqi civil security organizations, police, Iraqi Civil Defense Corps and Iraqi Border Force are generally riddled with corruption, a lack of will, and are widely infiltrated by anti-coalition forces," adding that "in one case we have reporting [sic] that an entire unit located in Fallujah has deserted and gone over to the insurgent side."⁴² The major exception to the collapse of Iraqi security forces at Fallujah was the 36th Commando Battalion, which had been trained and equipped by the CJSOTF. Paired with embedded Special Forces advisers, the 36th Commando Battalion became the sole Iraqi unit to fight effectively in Fallujah, where it was rushed from one engagement to another throughout the city, despite the death of its battalion commander as he led an assault.⁴³

The Conflagration Spreads

As MNF-W repositioned its forces to support operations in Fallujah, insurgents elsewhere in Anbar took the opportunity to go on the offensive, most likely to reduce pressure from Fallujah and tie down potential coalition reinforcements. (See Map 14.) On April 6, Ramadi exploded in fighting and fell to Sunni insurgents, while across Anbar, insurgent ambushes tied up Marine units and disrupted their movement. In Ramadi, the thinly stretched 2d Battalion, 4th Marines lost 12 Marines on the first day of fighting and resorted to putting uniforms on cardboard cutouts in guard posts to conceal their shortage of combat power.⁴⁴ On the same day, the Qusaybah police force defected en masse to the insurgency and began fighting coalition forces that previously had been helping organize and train them.⁴⁵ Pitched battles in the town were marked by massed attacks of more than 100 insurgents.

The situation in Ramadi and Qusaybah was being replicated everywhere as the coalition suffered what III Corps Commander Lieutenant General Thomas Metz labeled a "strategic surprise" throughout Iraq.⁴⁶ The trapped platoon in Sadr City was only one of hundreds of engagements fought on April 4–5. Allied units that had come to Iraq expecting to contribute to a stability and support operation similar to a United Nations (UN) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) mission in the Balkans were unprepared to face the insurgent onslaught. In Najaf, Iraqi security forces virtually disappeared overnight as Jaysh al-Mahdi fighters besieged the CPA compound in the city. In Nasiriyah, the Italian CPA representative attempted to strike deals with Sadrist leaders to avoid fighting, but by April 5, Sadrist fighters ignored the agreements and seized territory and buildings. The Italian contingent in Nasiriyah partially withdrew under heavy fire until MND-SE British commander Major General Andrew Stewart pressed the Italian commander to retake the city lest Stewart send a British brigade to do the job himself.⁴⁷ The city of Kut fell wholesale, with Jaysh al-Mahdi members overrunning the television and radio stations, Iraqi Government buildings, and police stations as the Ukrainian military commander garrisoned his vehicles and refused to participate in the fighting.⁴⁸ On the night of April 5, a U.S. AC-130 Spectre gunship narrowly repelled a Sadrist assault on the CPA office in Kut, but the CPA abandoned the office the following day when the Ukrainian contingent assigned to defend it withdrew to Camp Delta outside the city.⁴⁹ Without the stiff defense provided by military contractors from a company named Triple Canopy, the CPA compound likely would have been overrun.

While some allied forces fought fiercely, most were overwhelmed by the unexpected spasm of violence. Constrained by each country's national caveats and limitations on their operations, many allied military commanders on the ground in MND-CS refused to act against the uprising, revealing a significant flaw in the coalition's disposition of forces: the territory where the Sadrism insurgency metastasized had been assigned to the coalition forces least-equipped and least-willing to deal with the problem. The carving out of the MND-CS area of responsibility thus had created an operational-level seam for the Shi'a insurgency to exploit.

Meanwhile, as the fighting raged in Sadr City, the south, and Fallujah, other parts of the country erupted in rebellion in what increasingly appeared to be a coordinated insurgent offensive. In the northern city of Samarra, a former Saddamist stronghold with a Sunni population of 200,000 and a major Shi'a shrine, Sunni insurgents overran the town as local Iraqi security units collapsed. The U.S. battalion responsible for the city had arrived just weeks earlier when Major General John Batiste's 1st Infantry Division took over Multi-National Division-North Central (MND-NC) from Major General Raymond Odierno's 4th Infantry Division in March. As the Iraqi forces melted away, the battalion lost awareness of what was going on in Samarra, a fact compounded by the placement of its garrison on the major highway 8 kilometers outside the city.⁵⁰ The base "was a good location to monitor the [main supply route] but a poor location to monitor Samarra," one officer recalled, and it forced the battalion to "commute" into the city with "only one way in and one way out of town."⁵¹ In Samarra at least, the CJTF-7 policy of moving units out of Iraqi cities ultimately had ceded territory to the enemy. It would take a week for coalition troops to fight their way back into the city, retaking it on April 11.

On April 7, the fighting spread farther north to the normally quiet Sunni city of Hawijah, a Saddamist stronghold of 70,000 people 64 kilometers southwest of Kirkuk. Hawijah was the responsibility of a light infantry battalion from 2d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, and as in Samarra, the coalition troops were based outside the city in keeping with CJTF-7 strategy. Beset by hundreds of gunmen, the U.S. battalion repelled multiple assaults, eventually killing 35 attackers and capturing another 58. When the fighting was over, the coalition troops discovered the insurgents had planned to seize government buildings and Iraqi security forces bases and use their capture for propaganda.⁵²

Meanwhile, on April 8, the insurrection spilled into Diyala Province northeast of Baghdad, where major fighting broke out in the provincial capital of Baqubah, as well as in Muqdadiah and Khalis. Baqubah fell to insurgents, requiring a U.S. tank battalion, engineer battalion, and artillery battalion all pressed into service as infantry to retake the city.⁵³

Guidance from Washington

In Washington, U.S. leaders considered how to manage the expanding crisis. Gathering on April 7, the National Security Council principals were nearly unanimous in their determination to respond aggressively against the Sadrists, even as the attack against Fallujah continued. As Secretary of State Colin Powell saw it, it was time to "smash somebody's ass quickly."⁵⁴ Then-President George W. Bush concurred, judging that the Shi'a uprising was a "manhood test" for Moqtada Sadr in which the coalition could not afford

to let the young Shi'a leader gain the upper hand.⁵⁵ The National Security Council's conclusion was clear: an urgent counterattack against the Sadrist movement was needed. On the same day the National Security Council met, coalition officials in Baghdad declared Jaysh al-Mahdi "a hostile force," a legal designation that allowed coalition forces to use deadly force against members of the organization even if they were not carrying out a hostile act or exhibiting hostile intent against coalition forces. Such a declaration, used previously against Saddam's military before it disintegrated, contrasted significantly with the rules of engagement that applied to the remainder of the country: it meant that JAM fighters could be killed under nearly any condition other than surrendering. Meanwhile, U.S. leaders approved a plan to turn around the homeward bound 1st Armored Division and task it with preparing a division-level attack against the Sadrists.

Cutting off the Coalition Supply Routes

With coalition units fully engaged in fighting throughout central and southern Iraq, both Shi'a and Sunni rebels appeared to realize they had seized the initiative, and they next sought to isolate the coalition units scrambling to mount a counterattack. On April 8, insurgents attacked the main coalition supply routes running south from Baghdad, threatening to cut off the coalition divisions from their main logistics hub in Kuwait. Before April, the numerous coalition supply convoys had been harassed only sporadically, and most often by attackers using a single IED. In April, by contrast, Sunni and Shi'a insurgents mounted numerous complex attacks in which groups of 50-100 fighters attacked convoys with direct fire, IEDs, and RPGs. Insurgents with apparent military skills placed obstacles and mines on main supply routes to "canalize" convoys into more constricted areas where militants waited to ambush them.

Even more damaging were insurgent attacks against vital bridges. Insurgents destroyed 11 bridges during April, and along Highway 1, the main north-south highway that coalition troops knew as "Main Supply Route Tampa," insurgents downed 5 bridges in 1 day. Because only a limited number of bridges could support the passage of heavy armored vehicles over the twisting Tigris River, these attacks forced coalition units to take circuitous detours, often along dangerous canalized routes. The attackers also destroyed highway overpasses, which blocked wheeled vehicle patrols and logistics convoys, halting them in ambush kill zones. Insurgents hit the coalition's logistics convoys hard: in a 10-day period along Route Tampa, attackers destroyed 88 trucks, killing 33 U.S. Soldiers and capturing one.⁵⁶

When the 1st Cavalry Division's normal southern route was cut, a U.S. convoy bringing sorely needed fuel tankers and supply trucks from Balad to the division's bases in Baghdad met with disaster on April 9 on the outskirts of Baghdad. Unfamiliar with the route and equipped with unarmored vehicles, the convoy and its escort, the 724th Transportation Company, were ambushed near Abu Ghraib by what were most likely former Iraqi soldiers who had joined Jaysh al-Islami. The insurgents destroyed 18 of the convoy's 26 vehicles and almost all of its fuel and supplies.⁵⁷ Lacking proper communications equipment, the 724th Transportation Company was unable to call for help, and the first inkling nearby friendly units had of the convoy's plight was multiple columns of black smoke on the horizon. Casualties stood at 7 killed, 12 wounded, and 4 missing, with

Specialist Keith Maupin and contractor Keith Hamill taken hostage. Hamill later escaped, but Maupin's captors killed him, and his remains were found in 2008.

The attacks compounded CJTF-7's already fragile just-in-time logistics practices in which units inside Iraq maintained few parts and supplies—relying instead upon on-demand deliveries from the central supply hub in Kuwait, a cost-savings method the Army had adopted during the drawdown of the 1990s. In Iraq, the insurgent offensive of April 2004 proved fatal to a just-in-time system that was already vulnerable to transportation disruptions, an austere communication network, and the frequent turbulence of unit moves and task-organization changes.⁵⁸

Locked in exhausting battles with both Shi'a and Sunni insurgents, the coalition was using fuel and ammunition at an unprecedented rate. This, coupled with disruptive attacks on convoys and supply routes, nearly resulted in a theater-wide logistics meltdown. On several bases, including the CPA headquarters in Baghdad, food supplies began to run out, and MNC-I Commander Metz watched his entire corps go "amber and black on fuel and ammunition."⁵⁹ Instead of seeing supplies arriving just in time, units often found they had to do without. After the battles of April, many units created their own bootleg supply stockages to guard against future crises.

The attacks against the coalition lines of communications were a clear sign that the Iraqi insurgent groups were coordinating among themselves at an operational level. They were doing so in support of two larger objectives: to block the coalition from reinforcing the southern provinces where the Sadrist uprising was in full swing, and to starve the coalition logistically during a period of an extremely high operational tempo. The insurgent attacks were not carried out randomly, but rather were precise and coordinated. Most of the bridges targeted were those capable of carrying high-tonnage armored vehicles, and destroying them required reconnaissance and demolition experience. These operational-level activities were not the work of a single, hierarchical insurgent command center, but reflected operational-level collaboration among various insurgent groups that could quickly share lessons learned and information on the routes coalition forces used. In other cases, opportunistic insurgent groups realized what was happening nationwide and took local advantage. In either case, the result was the same: the loosely defined insurgency had reacted to coalition action with decisive, operational-level effects.

The Fallujah Cease-Fire

Back in Fallujah, Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE was colliding with regional politics. Within days of the Marines' attack, high levels of collateral damage were seized upon by Arab media outlets, which sensationalized civilian casualties and in some cases misidentified fallen insurgents as civilians. Arabic media often used incendiary language designed to influence opinions in the Arab world, comparing coalition "occupiers" to the Israeli troops in Palestinian territories and describing Blackwater security contractors as "mercenaries." Cable television channel Al Jazeera claimed 600 civilians had been killed and filled its broadcasts with images of dead children at the Fallujah hospital and other locations within the city.⁶⁰ Al Jazeera's broadcasts so stung U.S. national leaders that they considered withdrawing all U.S. forces—including CENTCOM's forward headquarters—from Qatar if its government did not do more to "bring Al Jazeera under control."⁶¹

With little time to prepare for the mission, MNF-W had not embedded Western journalists with I MEF forces, so that the critical ground of information operations was effectively ceded to an insurgency that could distribute a one-sided message.⁶² Worse, the haste with which the operation was executed precluded the opportunity to evacuate the city of civilians properly, essentially ensuring that the insurgency had the opportunity to exploit footage of civilian casualties.

The ensuing situation created severe pressure on the already-fragile Iraqi and international support for the coalition. With some of its members threatening resignation, the Iraqi Governing Council demanded that CJTF-7 terminate the Fallujah operation. UN representative Lakhdar Brahimi also threatened to quit if the coalition did not halt the operation.

The concern that coalition actions in Fallujah could potentially disintegrate the Iraqi Governing Council permeated discussions between the CPA and CJTF-7; and, worries mounted about the catastrophic effect the battle could have on the planned transfer of sovereignty timeline. The possibility of such a disintegration was made more real by Iraqi Interior Minister Nuri Badran's sudden resignation and Sunni politician Mohsen Abdul Hamid's suspension of participation in the governing council. During a meeting the evening of April 8, Bremer worried that "the fragile governing framework of Iraq may be in some jeopardy . . . [if] several major 'jump ships' follow Badran's exit today, [it] could launch a veritable avalanche of resignations."⁶³ By the next morning, April 9, Bremer had come to support an Iraqi Governing Council proposal for a cease-fire and called Sanchez to discuss options of how one could be implemented. A senior CJTF-7 aide noted in a memo to Sanchez that, for Bremer, "holding together the IGC . . . is critically important. The follow-on, interim government plans depend on expanding the IGC, which you cannot do if you have no IGC left."⁶⁴

Having touched off a political firestorm and suffering a strategic communications defeat, the CPA and CJTF-7 announced a unilateral cease-fire in Fallujah later that day; just 3 days after combat operations had begun. The decision infuriated Mattis, commander of the 1st Marine Division, which was conducting Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE in Fallujah. When informed of the decision, he responded that it was "not time to get weak in the knees" and that "if you set out to take Vienna, you take Vienna."⁶⁵ Despite Mattis's protests, MNF-W had no choice but to withdraw its units to the city's edge keeping Fallujah in a state of siege while the Iraqi factions began negotiations to defuse the crisis. By the time fighting subsided, 18 Marines had been killed and another 96 wounded. I MEF estimated that 600–700 insurgents had been killed in the intense fighting, which included more than 150 air strikes.⁶⁶

Expansion of the Fighting and Shi'a-Sunni Collaboration

Despite the Fallujah cease-fire, the fighting in the first week of the uprising seemed to intensify and expand to new areas each day. On April 9, insurgents ambushed a convoy carrying Brigadier General John Kelly, assistant commander of the 1st Marine Division, from Taqqadum Airfield to Iskandariyah to coordinate with Army units. After an intense battle, Kelly and his small detachment fought their way out of the assault with the assistance of a quick reaction force from 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry, bolstered by close air

support.⁶⁷ On April 11, during efforts to rescue a trapped resupply convoy in Babil Province south of Baghdad, Soldiers from the 2d Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment leveled three houses with a 2,000-pound bomb, tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided (TOW) missiles, and mortars, all without question or request for a storyboard beforehand from any higher headquarters. This incident stood in marked contrast to the situation just days before when leaders considered the country stable enough that using small-arms fire often had prompted investigations of whether rules of engagement and proper escalation of force procedures had been followed.⁶⁸

In eastern Anbar, the coalition had lost control of the area from Ameriyah to the MND-B boundary. When combat operations were halted in Fallujah, MNF-W leaders reapportioned their overstretched forces to clear this eastern enclave of insurgents, an operation that lasted until early May and eventually allowed for the reopening of supply routes in the province. Elsewhere, western Anbar also witnessed mass uprisings as battles raged from Al Qa'im to Qusaybah and other cities along the Syrian border and Euphrates River. In one engagement on April 14 in the border town of Karabilah, Marine Corporal Jason Dunham led a squad responding to an ambush of his battalion commander's convoy. The action devolved to hand-to-hand combat in which one insurgent released a grenade while wrestling with Dunham, who immediately warned his Marines and placed his helmet over the grenade. Dunham, killed by the blast, received the Medal of Honor for his sacrifice.⁶⁹

As the fighting spread across the Iraqi provinces, coalition leaders were alarmed to discover Sunni and Shi'a militants operating in tandem against coalition units. While the battle raged in Fallujah, Shi'a volunteers from Baghdad and the south made their way to the city to support the Sunni resistance fighters, and vice versa. Fallujah insurgents reportedly delivered weapons such as the shoulder-fired SA-7B surface-to-air missile to Sadrists in Baghdad.⁷⁰ Insurgent propaganda highlighted this brotherhood of resistance against the coalition, such as an April 6 statement by the Sunni insurgent group Jihad Brigades to the Al Jazeera news channel that urged Sadr's followers to continue resisting coalition forces.⁷¹ Sunni and Shi'a insurgent groups sometimes wrote joint statements, including one in which Jaysh al-Mahdi and Ansar al Fallujah Army warned Iraqi civilians to avoid roads used by coalition supply convoys.

Both Forces have decided to make the road of Al Usufiya, al Rashid District, Abu Dasher, Hora Rigab as a war zone against Jewish and Zionist forces. We will attack all the infidel vehicles that would use this road and these districts . . . we urge our patient people through this statement, to stay away from this area.⁷²

Another declaration called for shopkeepers in Baghdad to close their shops from April 15–23 because “your resistance brothers al Mujahideen from Ramadi, Khaledia, and Fallujah will move the resistance fire to Baghdad and will support our brothers Mujahideen from Al Mahdi Army.”⁷³ In the words of one coalition planner, “We had at that point managed the nearly impossible task of uniting the Sunnis and Shiites . . . against us.”⁷⁴

The joint Sunni-Shi'a declarations showed that, for at least a short time, the Iraqi insurgency had gelled into a national resistance. In April 2004, the Sunni resistance in Anbar was led primarily by former regime elements alongside which Zarqawi's Tawhid wal-Jihad had played a relatively minor role. With Zarqawi not yet the dominant Sunni insurgent leader, Shi'a insurgents could rationalize working with Iraqi Sunni groups and Sunnis with Shi'as because they shared the common objective of expelling a foreign occupying force. Moqtada Sadr, in particular, temporarily embraced this collaboration with Sunni insurgents because it helped him stand out from other more traditional Shi'a leaders by emphasizing his nationalistic credentials.

But this cross-sectarian allegiance did not last long. Zarqawi soon exploited the violence in Fallujah in the media far more effectively than the former regime elements could, and the Sunni-Shi'a collaboration soon gave way to sectarian civil war.

THE COALITION COUNTERATTACK

The 1st Armored Division's U-Turn

With the situation spiraling out of control in southern Iraq, Sanchez and CJTF-7 put in motion a plan to regain the initiative. As U.S. leaders had authorized him to do, Sanchez halted the redeployment of Dempsey's 1st Armored Division, portions of which already had left Iraq to return to their home base. To address the burgeoning crisis, the division was also extended 90 days, resulting in a 15-month-long deployment.

| Brigade | In Iraq | In Kuwait | Redeployed | Percent Redeployed |
|---------|---------|-----------|------------|--------------------|
| 1st BCT | 2,960 | 9 | 53 | 2 |
| 2d BCT | 2,964 | 174 | 205 | 7 |
| 4th BCT | 1,501 | 41 | 167 | 11 |

Source: Briefing, CJTF-7, 1st AD Extension Initial MA Brief to CG, April 6, 2004.

Table 1. 1st Armored Division Personnel as of April 6, 2004.

The 1st Armored Division's consequent U-turn was an extraordinary logistical feat. Almost 10 percent of the Soldiers in the division's three brigades either already had returned to Germany or awaited flights home from Kuwait. Over half of the division's combat vehicles had left Iraq, and the division's helicopter fleet sat disassembled and shrink-wrapped for ocean transit home.⁷⁵ Most division units had turned over their ammunition to their 1st Cavalry Division replacements. For the return to Iraq, they drew new stocks from a rapidly depleting theater reserve in Kuwait and at Logistics Support Area Anaconda in Balad. With their former headquarters and barracks occupied by new units, the division reverted to invasion mode, sleeping in vehicles and temporary shelters.

| Type | Iraq | Kuwait | Redeployed |
|---------------------|------|--------|------------|
| M1 Tank | 131 | 49 | 41 |
| M2 BFV | 108 | 30 | 38 |
| M109A6 | 0 | 18 | 18 |
| OH-58 | 0 | 36 | 3 |
| AH-64 | 0 | 18 | 0 |
| UH-60 | 0 | 15 | 3 |
| Up-armored HMMWV | 153 | 0 | 0 |

Source: Briefing, CJTF-7, 1st AD Extension Initial MA Brief to CG, April 6, 2004.

Table 2. Location of 1st Armored Division Equipment as of April 6, 2004.

Some of the division's units in Kuwait conducted forced road marches back to Baghdad, exceeding the distance covered by much of the original invasion force. However, other 1st Armored Division units that had not begun their redeployment were available nearly immediately. In Baghdad, the division's 2d Brigade, renamed Task Force Striker, pushed to Najaf on April 4, with only hours to prepare. Ordered to move next to Kut, where the CPA compound had fallen, and the situation was considered to be more precarious, Striker quickly changed tack and began hasty planning and logistical refitting. On April 8, preparations were complete, and Task Force Striker with 112 combat vehicles made the 277-kilometer road march from Najaf to Kut in 6 hours, fighting 3 times en route.⁷⁶ As they approached Kut, they paired with AH-64 Apache helicopters and AC-130 gunships in an attack that destroyed the Sadr bureau headquarters and recaptured the CPA compound and Iraqi municipal buildings.

As Dempsey rallied his units, CJTF-7 also created a composite unit around Colonel Dana Pittard's 3d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, comprised of elements of three different divisions including a light infantry battalion that just had been assigned to the short-handed Task Force Olympia in Ninawa Province.⁷⁷ Disengaging from the fighting in Diyala Province, Pittard and his polyglot Task Force Duke embarked on a 40-hour, 400-kilometers road march to Najaf, fighting through blown bridges and Sunni and Shi'a insurgent attacks en route.⁷⁸ When the task force arrived on April 13, CJTF-7 directed it to establish a cordon around the city rather than begin clearing operations out of concern the Imam Ali Mosque, considered by some the holiest shrine in the Shi'a world, could be damaged in the fighting. Task Force Duke kept watch for several days, buying time for the 1st Armored Division to reassemble and complete its ongoing relief in place with the 1st Cavalry Division.

By April 20, Dempsey's 1st Armored Division had reassembled its brigades and taken responsibility for the area of Sadrist uprisings, allowing Task Force Duke and other units to return to their original areas of responsibility in MND-NC and MNF-W. Serving as the CJTF-7 reserve, Colonel Peter Mansoor's 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, was directed to Najaf to prepare for an assault against Moqtada Sadr and his militia followers there as well as in the other major shrine city of Karbala. With an additional division's worth

of U.S. combat power in the southern provinces, the balance began to shift back to the coalition.

Fighting and Negotiations with Sadr

As Dempsey's brigades advanced on Sadr's southern strongholds, the coalition also reached out politically to try to negotiate an end to the fighting. By mid-April, parallel efforts were underway to de-escalate the situation and to persuade Sadr to withdraw his fighters from Najaf. In Baghdad, Ambassador Robert Blackwill led an officially sanctioned effort to negotiate with Sadr, but Iranian diplomats, Da'wa Party leaders, and southern tribal sheikhs all negotiated on their own with the Sadristes as well, muddling the picture. Even Sadr's mother became involved, holding meetings to plead for mercy tearfully from the coalition and beg her son to end the confrontation.⁷⁹ These negotiations made little progress. Fighting continued through May, and the Sadristes took heavy casualties, including many mid-level leaders. Mansoor's 1st Brigade retook most of Karbala by the second week of May, except for the Old City, where Jaysh al-Mahdi dug in and prepared for a Fallujah-like urban battle.⁸⁰ With the noose tightening around Sadr and a coalition defeat or disruption of the planned transfer of sovereignty averted, Bremer ordered Sanchez to cease offensive operations and avoid a final confrontation with Moqtada Sadr himself.⁸¹ For his part, Sanchez believed the 1st Armored Division had sufficient intelligence to finish off Sadr and his militia and should be allowed to do so, but he halted the division's impending attack on Karbala's old city to alleviate coalition fears that the shrine of Imam Hussein, one of Shi'ism's two holiest sites, might be damaged.⁸² Unaware of these internal coalition directives, and seeing his fortunes shift from near victory to near defeat, Sadr decided to sue for peace. On June 16, he agreed to a cease-fire that finally brought the uprising to an end.

Many coalition leaders believed they had dealt Sadr a lasting defeat, but the decision to stop short of destroying his militia and killing or capturing Sadr himself had negative consequences. Sadr remained free, in defiance of the Iraqi arrest warrant for his alleged involvement in the Khoei murder the year before. His militia, which had teetered on the edge of disintegration by the end of the fighting, began to regroup and recruit replacements for the heavy casualties his organization sustained. More broadly, many Iraqis who were used to Saddam's brutality saw the American forces as weak-willed. Befuddlement reached the highest levels of secular and religious Iraqi leaders, including Grand Ayatollah Ali Husayni Sistani. In letters carried to U.S. authorities by governing council member Mowaffaq Rubaie during the uprising, Sistani expressed his confusion and frustration over coalition policies, writing:

We do not know the reason for, or the utility of, negotiating with [Moqtada Sadr]. First, he does not want to dissolve the Mahdi Army. Second, he does not want to come before the judicial authorities. Third, these negotiations will make a hero out of him, inflate his importance, and prolong the tragedy that the holy cities are living. . . . We do not know exactly what you want. Over and over, we have seen the American forces advance and the Mahdi Army withdraw and even flee. But you do not complete your work. You withdraw before you complete or finish purging the cities of them. . . . It appears that there is a clear intention to keep the situation in abeyance as it is despite the continued suffering of the people, the paralysis of business, and the paralysis of the schools and universities. Keeping the situation as it is will turn the people against

you. . . . We are for ending this issue and bringing peace in the holy cities. . . . These negotiations are grave and fruitless and will increase the suffering of the people.⁸³

In a second letter, Sistani continued to signal his frustration, adding:

We want to state clearly that we are not against a peaceful settlement or negotiations that end the shedding of innocent people's blood. . . . We are unable to tell you what to do because we cannot understand what you are doing or what you want to achieve. We do not understand how Moqtada is able to go from Najaf to Kufa under these conditions of combat and under your eyes and ears. . . . We are sure that Moqtada does not hold his word, that he will not dissolve the Mahdi Army, and that he will not turn himself over [to justice]. . . . We do not understand why Moqtada was left to grow and became what he is now. We said repeatedly, when he was kidnapping people into the Shari'a court and torturing them, that he must be stopped at that limit. This was eight months ago. Look at what he has now become.⁸⁵



Source: Photo by *Wikimedia* contributor, IsaKazimi.

Grand Ayatollah Ali Husayni Sistani.⁸⁴

Sistani's position reflected deep fissures within the Shi'a community that the coalition's strategy had not considered. CJTF-7 had halted combat against Moqtada Sadr's militia out of concern that the fighting might turn the broader Shi'a community against the coalition—the same fear that Abizaid raised with U.S. leaders before April. Actually, CJTF-7's decision not to finish off the Sadrists angered and confused mainstream Shi'a leaders who viewed Sadr as a menace. The April crisis had been a missed opportunity for the coalition to leverage these intra-Shi'a differences and solve the Sadr problem for the long term.

The Fallujah Brigade

The fight against the Sadrists was not the only incomplete action against the Iraqi insurgents of spring 2004. Around Fallujah, Conway and Mattis had been able to consolidate additional Marine battalions, as insurgent pressure in eastern Anbar had been relieved somewhat by the arrival of 1st Armored Division units in Babil and Karbala Provinces.⁸⁶ That change, coupled with a nearly universal insurgent rejection of coalition demands issued after the April 9 cease-fire, led Sanchez and Abizaid to petition Rumsfeld and the President to resume offensive operations in Fallujah.⁸⁷ In a principals committee meeting on April 21, Abizaid and Rumsfeld pushed to restart operations, with Abizaid noting that if the United States failed to stamp out the insurgency in Fallujah, "various opposition forces would see our inaction and become increasingly aggressive in Mosul, Baqubah, and other cities."⁸⁸ By contrast, Bremer advocated for "continuing the political approach, whittling down the element of resistance, and restricting them geographically within the city," as well as bringing back Iraqi security forces.⁸⁹ Bremer added that taking

coalition military action “could potentially scuttle the whole political process,” a very real possibility given the Iraqi Governing Council’s and Brahimi’s ultimatums earlier in the month.⁹⁰ Faced with these possibilities, President George W. Bush decided not to resume hostilities.

With the decision to terminate offensive operations, at least for the near term, cemented, the coalition opted to hand the city’s security over to a locally raised force, a course of action that resulted from cease-fire negotiations between the Iraqi Governing Council and local Fallujah leaders. On April 25, MNF-W withdrew from Fallujah, leaving behind the hastily organized Fallujah Brigade under Major General Jassim Mohammed Saleh, formerly an officer in Saddam’s Republican Guard. In return for U.S. weapons and equipment and a coalition withdrawal, the Fallujah Brigade leaders pledged to stop insurgent attacks and turn over those who had ambushed the Blackwater convoy.⁹¹ It was a promise that did not last long. The day after the brigade’s activation, fighting flared again, with 300 insurgents attempting to overrun a Marine platoon assigned to a forward observation point. During the battle, two special operators, Master Sergeant Donald Hollenbaugh and Staff Sergeant Daniel Briggs, kept the attackers at bay for nearly 30 minutes, preventing the platoon’s destruction and allowing it to withdraw its wounded. For their actions, both received the Distinguished Service Cross.⁹² Such brazen violations of the cease-fire, as well as a Shi’a political backlash against the brigade’s Sunni leaders, led coalition leaders to remove its commander on May 2. Saleh’s removal technically left the brigade in the hands of his deputy, Colonel Mohammed Latif, a retired officer from Baghdad who was unfamiliar with many of the unit’s men, but a week later Marines found Saleh still directing forces in the city.⁹³

Under Saleh’s and Latif’s command, the Fallujah Brigade failed to follow through on any of its commitments and stood by while insurgents regained control of the city.⁹⁴ With the coalition unable to vet the brigade’s members, many insurgents who had fought against the Marines in April joined its ranks. The degree to which the brigade was co-opted by the insurgency from its inception should have been clear when Latif and Saleh met with insurgent leader Sheikh Abdullah Janabi during the brigade’s formation, and Janabi forced the two commanders to accept 300–350 of his insurgent fighters into the new unit.⁹⁵ Violence and intimidation against government officials returned, and Fallujah gradually reverted to its former state as an insurgent sanctuary.

THE FALLOUT FROM THE APRIL UPRISING

April and the Insurgency

April was a good month for the insurgency, which claimed to have won two victories over the coalition. Insurgent propaganda trumpeted the negotiated cease-fire in Fallujah and with Jaysh al-Mahdi as proof that the mighty American-led war machine could be fought to a standstill, dispelling perceptions of an omnipotent coalition that had destroyed Saddam’s military and occupied Iraq in a few weeks.

April also changed the face of the insurgency. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who had been only one of the resistance leaders fighting the coalition in Fallujah, nevertheless capitalized on his involvement more than others because his group had more mature and

better-funded propaganda cells.⁹⁶ As the fight for Fallujah unfolded, Zarqawi quickly became the icon of the insurgency and began to draw additional funding and recruits that enabled him to eclipse many of the other, more nationalist Sunni insurgent groups.

More broadly, Sunni Arabs who remained on the fence between the coalition and the insurgency and who were fearful of losing their positions of power to Shi'a Iraqis also drew lessons from April. They took the April assault on Fallujah as a bellwether for what the coalition had in mind for them in the new Iraq. Ronald Schlicher, a U.S. diplomat who headed the CPA's Office of Provincial Outreach, prophetically described the Sunnis' sense of alienation in an April 11 memorandum to Bremer:

Fallujah is a microcosm of Sunni Arab Iraq, and of that community's sense of alienation from the new Iraq. The impression that Sunnis have been shorn of all political power, of their livelihoods, and of their dignity is strong. . . . They are convinced that the new Iraq is an American-brokered deal between the Shi'a and the Kurds, specifically aimed at clipping Sunni Arab wings. . . . If the powerful sense of victimization continues or deepens, the last week in Fallujah is destined to be the prelude to many more tragedies.⁹⁷

April had a significant impact on the Shi'a insurgency as well, propelling Moqtada Sadr to the forefront of the Iraqi resistance to the coalition. In May, a CJTF-7 poll of southern provinces and Baghdad showed that 81 percent of those surveyed had a better opinion of Sadr after the uprisings than before and that Sadr enjoyed greater popular support than any Shi'a leader except Sistani.⁹⁸

Sadr and other insurgent leaders also had benefited from growing popular dissatisfaction with the quality of everyday life. The explosion of violence in April was not just a response to proximate events like the Yacoubi arrest and the closing of *Al Hawza*, but also a reaction to the building pressure from a year under occupation. In a letter to Sanchez after the violence subsided, Mowaffaq Rubaie, Iraq's national security adviser, described several undercurrent factors that had contributed to the outbreak, including the large number of dispossessed and unhappy Shi'a living in the slums of Sadr City, the ineffectiveness and marginalization of the Iraqi Governing Council, ministerial inefficiency, and the continued presence of coalition troops. These factors and the lack of security, Rubaie judged, had created the perception among Iraqis that there had been little improvement in their daily lives.⁹⁹ Rubaie's undercurrent factors represented the pent-up frustration of Iraqis who had expected a better life after Saddam but saw the coalition as failing to deliver on its promises. Basic services such as electricity, water, and sewage stood in worse condition in 2004 than before the invasion. Postwar electrical production had fallen to only 2,500 megawatts from a prewar level of 4,300 megawatts, even though demand for electricity and other services had grown as consumerism replaced the Ba'ath's subsidized and controlled economy.¹⁰⁰

A number of coalition leaders could sense the dangerous mismatch between expectations and reality. Walking through the markets of Basrah, for example, British MND-SE Commander Major General Andrew Stewart saw large numbers of Basrawis buying washing machines that required water, electricity, and sewage treatment that his command could not provide for the city. "The biggest concern I had," Stewart recalled, "was the inability to meet the expectations of the Iraqi people."¹⁰¹ Having grown accustomed under the Ba'ath to free or cheap state-provided fuel, electricity, and water, the Iraqi



Source: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sergeant David J. Murphy (Released).

**Iraqi National Security Advisor
Mowaffaq Rubaie.¹⁰²**

friendly Iraqi greetings to being attacked by bricks, gunfire, and IEDs. “The attack that was done by American forces in the north, really kicked off the war with the Sadrists and it just, woosh, went up like a firestorm around about us,” one British officer remembered. “We were completely caught unawares.”¹⁰³

Many coalition allies, especially the British, were under intense media and public pressure at home where casualties among small troop contingents were felt acutely. Faced with a violent, unexpected insurgency, the British, Spanish, Italian, and Ukrainian troops in southern Iraq responded mainly by taking steps to minimize casualties, withdrawing to their bases and seeking to lessen tensions through negotiations. Several allied military commanders, including Stewart, believed their units did not have the resources to take on the militias at the time and wished to avoid civilian casualties in operations in urban areas.¹⁰⁴

Not all allied units limited themselves to defensive measures, however, and some coalition troops acquitted themselves with extraordinary distinction. After a Salvadoran unit in Najaf expended all of its ammunition, it fought in hand-to-hand combat against attacking Jaysh al-Mahdi fighters, earning six of its members a rare nomination for the Bronze Star medal.¹⁰⁵ The 1st Battalion of the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment in Amarah found itself in a protracted fight against Jaysh al-Mahdi that Stewart described as the “most concerted assault on a British battalion since Korea.” In one engagement in mid-May, the regiment counterattacked into Amarah with fixed bayonets, fighting through trenches to capture Jaysh al-Mahdi leaders and seize the militia’s weapons caches.¹⁰⁶ The fighting in Amarah brought the regiment a Victoria Cross, three Distinguished Service Orders, and seven Military Crosses over the span of the next several months.¹⁰⁷

public had expected the same from the coalition, but this was an expectation the coalition could not possibly meet. Sadr and others had harnessed the resulting Iraqi resentment and directed it violently toward the coalition.

The April Crisis and the Coalition

The April crisis signified confounded expectations within the coalition as well. European contingents that had come to Iraq, expecting to assist the United States in stability operations and reconstruction similar to that in the Balkans, suddenly found themselves in intense combat. The seeming overnight change in conditions shocked the British and coalition allies in the south, many of whom viewed the April uprising as an unnecessary confrontation provoked by the United States. In the span of a week, British forces in Amarah went from patrolling in unarmored Land Rover vehicles and receiving

Despite examples of valor, U.S. leaders remained frustrated by their allies' reticence to confront the Mahdi Army directly and believed the militia's freedom of movement through most of the MND-CS and MND-SE provinces prolonged the crisis and enabled the Sadrists to escape the American encirclement around Najaf, Karbala, and Kut. Some U.S. leaders also believed their allies' perceived weakness emboldened the Sadrists and invited intense attack on several coalition bases. These dynamics ruptured relations between U.S. leaders and the Spanish contingent in MND-CS, which already had floundered after Spain's Prime Minister-elect announced his forces would withdraw due to the Atocha train station bombing. The day of Mustafa al-Yacoubi's capture, the Spanish deputy commander publicly called the arrest a mistake and recommended Yacoubi's immediate release.¹⁰⁸ On April 5, Spanish commander Brigadier General Fulgencio Coll began unilateral negotiations with Moqtada Sadr and appointed local Badr Corps leader Haji Hassan Abtal as the provisional governor of Najaf.¹⁰⁹ These moves angered Bremer, who quickly instructed U.S. diplomat Michael Gfoeller that "under no circumstances is Coll to negotiate through any channels with Sadr. His actions have placed him beyond the pale. [Sadr] is a criminal and usurper and will be dealt with as such."¹¹⁰ In a heated meeting in Najaf later that day with CPA official Philip Kosnett, Coll, and MND-CS Commander Major General Mieczyslaw Bieniek pressed for a political solution to the problem and opined that military action against Sadr should wait until after the Arba'een pilgrimage. The two commanders reported that the national leadership of their respective countries had not authorized offensive action, and Coll jokingly offered that the coalition should "make love, not war" to resolve the disagreement with the Sadrists.¹¹¹ The arrival of the U.S. combat units of Task Force Duke on April 13 rendered this disagreement moot, effectively masking the larger differences between the United States and its MND-CS allies for the time being.

Tensions also boiled over between U.S. leaders in Baghdad and the British command in MND-SE. In Basrah, where Jaysh al-Mahdi took over the governor's palace, Stewart initially ignored Bremer's orders to retake the building, believing that the objective could be accomplished peacefully through negotiations.¹¹² The CPA and CJTF-7 were frustrated by Stewart's decision to seek local truces with the Mahdi Army when possible, rather than conduct offensive operations against them. Similar policies had served the British well in Northern Ireland, an experience that was deeply ingrained in their army. Regardless, an infuriated Bremer had requested through the British Embassy in Washington, DC, that Whitehall relieve Stewart of his command.¹¹³ Writing on April 11 to Metz, Stewart had attempted to defuse some of the American frustrations. "I fully recognize that our refusal to close down the OMS [Organization of the Martyr Sadr] offices and take overt aggressive action against Sadr Militia will appear from Baghdad to be both ineffective and apparently out of line with your intent," Stewart conceded.¹¹⁴ But engaging local political and tribal leaders seemed the best way to maintain the consent of the people that he considered the operational center of gravity, the British commander explained. A political approach would also support the long-term objective of returning political and security control to the Iraqis, as it "produced an Iraqi solution to an Iraqi problem." Moreover, British commanders found the CPA's inclination to lash out broadly a misguided one. "Going on to a general offensive without careful targeting and intelligence would be seen as us taking on the population," Stewart argued. "We would quickly destroy all

that we have achieved over the last year.”¹¹⁵ British leaders in London sided with Stewart, opting to leave him in place despite Bremer’s loss of confidence in him. “I was charged with not killing enough people,” Stewart later claimed. “The CPA asked for my removal, because Mr. Bremer’s policy was one of strong coercion: we must defeat Moqtada Sadr militarily.”¹¹⁶

But the difference in British and American approaches represented more than divergent viewpoints on tactics; it reflected nearly diametric perspectives on the source of the problem, as well as its prescription. A letter from MND-SE headquarters to CJTF-7 on May 3 further explained the British opposition to taking a more forceful approach. “The violence [in Amarah and Maysan Province] has been linked to adherents of Moqtada al Sadr, but this assessment oversimplifies the situation,” the MND-SE chief of staff wrote, arguing that most of the violence was actually caused by opportunistic “violent criminals . . . who will rally to any ‘popular’ cause.”¹¹⁷ Sadr was merely the latest cause that the recalcitrants in Maysan had adopted, MND-SE leaders judged, and an overreaction to Jaysh al-Mahdi such as CJTF-7’s orders to MND-SE to “destroy the Mahdi Army in zone” would only serve to empower the Shi’a cleric.¹¹⁸

The disputes during the April crisis clarified British national policy for United Kingdom commanders in Iraq and also signaled a divergence in strategy between the United Kingdom and the United States that widened in the years to come. In the near term, the differences had significant operational consequences. The new security situation negated the American hope that the British might expand their area of responsibility and send additional troops to replace the departing Spanish brigade in MND-CS. U.S. forces needed to fill the void, stretching them even further.

Finally, the April uprisings highlighted U.S. difficulties in managing a coalition of allies driven by their own domestic criticism of the war, lower casualty tolerances, and a differing philosophy regarding conflict management. Balancing operational requirements and unity of effort against the need to keep allies in the coalition vexed senior U.S. leaders throughout the war.

April 2004 stood as the worst month of the war, to that point, for American losses, with a total of 137 servicemen killed—just 1 fewer than the number lost during the entire 6-weeks invasion period of 2003. The outbreak of violence led to several immediate changes within the coalition, as senior leaders took steps to avoid a repetition of what some would refer to as Black April. Metz, the III Corps commander, believed the coalition had lost the information fight during the month and dedicated significant energy to improving the coalition’s information operations capability.¹¹⁹ He and other leaders who had seen firsthand the results of an offensive launched without any political groundwork were determined not to repeat that error. I MEF commander Conway believed the same, noting, “Al Jazeera kicked our butts.”¹²⁰ In addition, having barely avoided a second theater-wide logistics meltdown as a result of cut lines of communications and attacks on convoys, the coalition significantly increased its fuel and ammunition stocks and tasked an entire brigade combat team to accompany convoys and secure major supply routes.

The difficulties experienced in April deflated coalition hopes that it would be able to maintain order in Iraq with the 12 brigades that originally had been planned for the 2004

rotation. Faced with the prospect of an unmanageable situation after the 1st Armored Division's extension ended, CJTF-7 requested immediate reinforcements, and the Army and Marine Corps reacted quickly. The 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, which had only redeployed from Afghanistan in December 2003, responded first, deploying to Iraq a mere 36 days after it was alerted. Indicative of the turbulence the Army was experiencing, the brigade had not expected to deploy for another year and had many of its subordinate units still committed to other overseas contingency operations. Augmented by a hodgepodge of units from across the Army, including troops from the opposing force battalion at the Joint Readiness Training Center, the brigade nevertheless joined MND-B by July.¹²¹ In Korea, the 2d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division, was also notified that it would be making an unexpected, short-notice deployment to Iraq, arriving by August to plug gaps in MNF-W.¹²² Last, the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, CENTCOM's theater reserve, was called forward to replace the 2d Armored Cavalry Regiment, which itself was helping to fill the gap in MND-CS caused by the departure of the Spanish brigade.

The April crisis also drove home the need for the coalition to maintain an operational reserve force. Had Sadr's uprising taken place a month later, the 1st Armored Division would not have been available as a reserve to fill CJTF-7's gaps in the south. Once the crisis passed, CJTF-7 assigned a Stryker battalion from 3d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division, as a corps reserve on a rotating basis, a decision that, while necessary, rendered Task Force Olympia even further understrength for the securing of Mosul and Ninawa Province. The rotational nature of the reserve battalion also interrupted Task Force Olympia's geographic continuity because the Stryker battalions repeatedly had to take over one another's battle space as each of them became the reserve in turn. CJTF-7 leaders decided to assign their reserve from Ninawa based on their perception that the province, which had remained quiet in April, had progressed further than other sectors, an assumption that was overturned spectacularly in the months to come. At CJTF-7, April ended Sanchez's attempts to formulate a coherent campaign plan for the entire Iraq theater. CJTF-7's understaffed, inexperienced planners already had struggled with the effort, and continually changing strategic guidance had delayed their final products. The distraction of the April crisis ended any hope of completing the process. It also upended U.S. plans to take action against Iranian meddling in Iraq, including a proposal to expel Iran's charge d'affaires, a known Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps agent.¹²³

By any measure, April 2004 was a major pivot point in the Iraq War, changing the conduct and character of the conflict. It strengthened the insurgency by providing both a justification for fighting and encouragement that the coalition could be beaten. It shocked and scarred many coalition leaders so much that they would regard similar crises very differently afterward. In retrospect, the coalition's deliberate decision to pressure the Sadrists in the midst of a significant operational crisis in Fallujah was reckless. It ignited a second front across most of southern Iraq that nearly put the coalition into an irretrievable operational position. Had Dempsey's 1st Armored Division not been available to counterattack, the coalition might not have recovered either operationally or politically from the likely consequent losses. Fear of opening a second front against the Shi'a was a legacy of April that would affect the coalition for the remainder of the war.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 12

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CHAPTER 13

THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD, AGAIN, SPRING-SUMMER 2004

The April 2004 uprisings emphatically dispelled the short-war assumption that had underpinned U.S. leaders' thinking since before the invasion. The transfer of sovereignty to an interim Iraqi Government would proceed as planned, but leaders understood any military coalition turnover to an international peacekeeping and reconstruction force within months was unrealistic. The April crisis also proved that it would take longer than coalition leaders had expected to stabilize Iraq and suppress the militant groups that had gained a foothold. To execute the extended campaign, coalition leaders created new commands to compensate for the shortcomings of the Combined Joint Task Force-7 (CJTF-7) theater command that U.S. leaders had come to judge as an under-resourced failure.

Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez's command was replaced by several organizations better designed to handle the strategic and operational challenges of the war. To head the new commands, the United States appointed new leaders, including General George W. Casey, Jr. and Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus, who supervised the coalition campaign in one capacity or another for the next 6 years. Similarly, a new U.S. Embassy team headed by Ambassador John D. Negroponte replaced Ambassador L. Paul Bremer and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), shifting control of the civilian side of the campaign from the Department of Defense (DoD) to the Department of State.

This new political-military team addressed the successes and failures of April and worked according to a new game plan. A new United Nations (UN) resolution prescribed a roadmap toward an elected Iraqi Government and a new constitutional order, while the coalition finally developed a campaign plan to govern its military activities for the first time since the invasion. The new coalition leaders also dramatically revised the effort to organize the Iraqi security forces, which largely had collapsed during the April insurrection, making them a centerpiece of the coalition campaign plan.

As the coalition recovered from the challenges of April, its leaders expressed hope that the rejuvenated coalition structure and new interim Iraqi Government of the summer of 2004 would bring lasting improvements in security and the functioning of the Iraqi state. However, as the coalition handed sovereign authority to its Iraqi allies, the new commands and their plans were tested by the Abu Ghraib scandal and by the Iraqi insurgents' determination to stifle the nascent Iraqi Government.

THE FALLOUT OF ABU GHRAIB

Even before the initial violence of April had subsided, another event occurred that had consequences reaching far beyond the borders of Iraq. In late April, the Abu Ghraib prison scandal broke in the international media, starting with the television program *60 Minutes II* and *The New Yorker* magazine in the United States. In the United States, the scenes of abuse were seen as appalling and created a near-universal sense of outrage, resulting in a public relations disaster. Internationally, the scandal further tainted the public's perception of the invasion of Iraq, which already had been damaged significantly by the inability to find weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Support for the

war dropped precipitously. A Gallup poll showed that the percentage of Americans who believed that going to war in Iraq was a mistake jumped from 42 percent in January 2004, to 54 percent in June 2004.¹

The backlash extended to the United Kingdom as well. Within 48 hours of the Abu Ghraib scandal, British forces in Multi-National Division-South East (MND-SE) were facing similar accusations when the *Daily Mail* published photos of alleged abuse.² The pictures were proved to have been fakes 2 weeks later, but, by then, much of the damage to the British military's reputation had been done, reinforcing the insurgency's narrative of the coalition as brutal occupiers and further deflating British public support.³

Among America's allies, the Abu Ghraib scandal was equally damaging, straining ties with coalition members who wanted to distance themselves from the humiliation. While not decisive in any ally's decision to withdraw from the coalition, the scandal likely became a contributing factor for some nations' withdrawals, as it weakened public support for the mission.

Within the Iraqi and Arabic media, the Abu Ghraib scandal dominated the news for months, providing opponents of the coalition many opportunities to condemn the U.S.-led campaign. Mainstream media outlets such as the influential Al Jazeera television network engaged in a near-daily denunciation of the coalition's behavior, while tending to depict the Abu Ghraib scandal as, in the words of an Iraqi Al Jazeera interviewee, "a great crime committed against Iraqi mujahidin" who had been fighting "to liberate their homeland."⁴ Print media followed suit, as with a *Gulf Times* editorial describing the scandal as "a calamity that destroys the dubious claims to legitimacy that the White House advanced in support of the war and the occupation," with U.S. troops having "refilled the cells and [taken] up where Saddam's torturers left off."⁵ In an attempt to conflate the coalition mission in Iraq with the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, many Middle Eastern media sources also began using the same vernacular for both situations, including "mujahideen," "colonization," and "occupation."

The April uprisings and the indecisive coalition counterattacks that followed gave the insurgents and jihadists in Iraq confidence that they could defeat the United States, just as the mujahideen had defeated the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. At exactly the same time, the worldwide media coverage of detainee abuse by U.S. Soldiers at Abu Ghraib gave the same groups a highly effective recruitment tool and a powerful reason to fight the coalition. Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal, a special operations leader, later reported, "In my experience, we found that nearly every first-time jihadist claimed Abu Ghraib first had jolted him to action."⁶ The scandal created a cause for extremists to take up arms against the coalition, an effect evident to coalition troops at virtually all levels. On the day the Abu Ghraib story broke in the press, Major General James Mattis, commander of the 1st Marine Division, saw a group of Marines watching the television coverage and asked what was happening. One 19-year-old lance corporal responded, "Some assholes have just lost the war for us."⁷

NEW COMMANDS, NEW MISSIONS

The Brahimi Mission and UNSCR 1546

One cause of the April outbreak had been the Iraqis' loss of patience with the political uncertainty of the coalition mission, which had not defined the manner or timeline in which Iraqis would ultimately be allowed to choose a new government. In the spring of 2004, the veteran Arab diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi arrived in Baghdad as a UN envoy to broker political talks among the Iraqi factions and the coalition. By June, the sides had agreed on a program for elections and a new Iraqi constitution. An interim Iraqi Government, appointed by the coalition, would serve until elections in January 2005 would yield an Iraqi transitional government, which, in turn, would draft the country's new constitution.

Under the UN plan, the January 2005 election would be conducted on a nationwide basis in which national parties would vie for a proportional electoral share, rather than individual politicians competing for seats from which they were responsible to a local electorate. This decision had far-reaching consequences because the proportional system would favor larger, better-funded parties such as those receiving significant assistance from Iran, and it would amplify the impact of an election boycott by religious or ethnic groups.⁸ The nationwide proportional system also would facilitate the distribution of electoral spoils on ethno-sectarian lines.

On June 8, 2004, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1546 codified the agreement Brahimi brokered. Among its key provisions, the resolution established a timeline that required the "holding of direct democratic elections by 31 December 2004 if possible, and in no case later than 31 January 2005, to a Transitional National Assembly, which will, *inter alia*, have responsibility for forming a Transitional Government of Iraq and drafting a permanent constitution for Iraq leading to a constitutionally elected government by 31 December 2005."⁹ These dates became the principal guide for the coalition's military and political activities for the next 19 months.

New Coalition Commands

During May and June 2004, new operational- and strategic-level coalition headquarters replaced the deactivated CJTF-7. On May 15, the remnants of CJTF-7 were used to form Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), the senior Iraq command, which was tasked with overseeing strategic and political-military matters. Three new subordinate commands would split the operational functions that had overtaxed CJTF-7. As Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld and senior military leaders had decided in late 2003, MNF-I would be a four-star-level headquarters with Sanchez as an interim commander. General John Abizaid had originally recommended that Sanchez should be promoted to command MNF-I. By spring 2004, however, the public and political backlash to the Abu Ghraib scandal led U.S. leaders to remove Sanchez from contention. The coalition's military crises in April 2004 only reinforced U.S. leaders' impression that Sanchez and his command were not up to the task.

The shift to a more robust theater headquarters had been in motion for several months. With Rumsfeld having rejected David McKiernan, and by default the Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), for command of the new MNF-I headquarters because of Rumsfeld's disapproval of McKiernan's performance in the invasion, only two principal options remained: Abizaid, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) commander, and Army Vice Chief of Staff General George Casey. By May, Rumsfeld had decided the Iraq theater command would go to Casey, and the underutilized CFLCC would remain in Kuwait, rather than returning to Baghdad, with McKiernan as its commander.¹⁰

Like its predecessor, CJTF-7, MNF-I was staffed by individual augmentees gathered by tasking orders sent out from the various services in the Pentagon rather than created from an experienced, standing headquarters. In essence, Rumsfeld's decision to reject McKiernan had the unintended consequence of preventing a standing headquarters, CFLCC, with its trained personnel who had operated together through the invasion phase, from becoming the theater headquarters for Iraq.

Under MNF-I, a new three-star-level Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) would focus on military operations as well as coordinating the various multinational divisions spread across the country. This much-needed change would relieve MNF-I from the pressure of tactical matters and allow the four-star headquarters to function at higher levels of war. U.S. military leaders decided to form MNC-I by splitting the already-deployed Lieutenant General Thomas Metz and his III Corps headquarters from CJTF-7, even though III Corps just had gone through a difficult absorption into the CJTF-7 structure when it arrived in Baghdad in February. Now, 3 months later, III Corps would unwind that process, retrieve hundreds of its people from the CJTF-7 directorates, and return them to operational staff sections in MNC-I.

The process would exacerbate the challenges of staffing both organizations. It created vacancies in the theater command just as the Pentagon determined that MNF-I and MNC-I together would require 2,081 people, more than 600 above the 1,408 that CJTF-7 had been authorized but had not come close to filling during its short life.¹¹ The significant turbulence in both organizations prevented either from coalescing as a headquarters in the summer of 2004, thereby making it harder for the coalition to regain the initiative it had lost in April.

Alongside MNC-I, CENTCOM ordered the creation of another three-star command, the Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I), to replace the Office of Security Cooperation and oversee the coalition's rebuilding of the Iraqi armed forces, an effort that the battles of April 2004 proved had produced little.¹² The new headquarters, under the command of Lieutenant General Petraeus, just 4 months removed from his division command in Ninawa, faced the difficult task of consolidating a train-and-equip mission that had been severely fragmented before MNSTC-I's creation. Building the New Iraqi Army had been the responsibility of Major General Paul Eaton's Coalition Military Assistance Training Team (CMATT), which worked for the CPA. At the same time, the responsibility for standing up the ICDC was decentralized to the various coalition divisions. This devolution of responsibility had created differences in organization, training, and effectiveness of ICDC units across the country. Further complicating matters, the rebuilding of the Iraqi police services in the Ministry of the Interior had been placed under the State Department's oversight, per federal law.



General Babakir Zebari (left) Lieutenant General David Petraeus (center).
Source: DoD photo by Jim Garamone (Released).

**Iraqi Chief of Armed Forces General Babakir Zebari
With Lieutenant General David Petraeus, CG,
Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I).¹³**

MNSTC-I explicitly had been created to resolve such dysfunctions, but from its inception, it faced continuing challenges. Like CJTF-7 and MNF-I, the MNSTC-I headquarters again was created as an ad hoc organization. As Major General Karl Eikenberry had recommended in his special report to Rumsfeld, both CMATT and Civilian Police Assistance Training Team (CPATT) became subordinate headquarters under MNSTC-I, a move that created interagency friction with State Department officials who felt security force assistance and security cooperation should remain under their purview. As Petraeus formed his command, MNSTC-I had to work through tension over exactly where lines of decision-making authority and reporting would fall for the various components of its mission. For example, while the British initially had responsibility for mentoring and developing the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, the U.S. Embassy's newly created Iraq Reconstruction Management Office was responsible for doing the same for the Ministry of the Interior, but CPATT was responsible for developing police below the ministry level.¹⁴

Rounding out the changes at the headquarters level, Task Force 134 (TF 134) was created to supervise detention operations under the command of Major General Geoffrey Miller, who had led the team looking into problems at Abu Ghraib a few months earlier. The new headquarters had been created in response to the Abu Ghraib scandal as well as in general recognition of the significant problems with the coalition's detention operations. A lack of facilities had led to overcrowding at the three principal MNF-I

detention facilities – Abu Ghraib, Camp Cropper at Victory Base, and Camp Bucca near Basrah, which, as of mid-June, held 5,411 detainees.¹⁵ Insurgents exploited the crowded, chaotic conditions to recruit within the detention centers, a problem evident not just to coalition officers but to Iraqi officials as well. Kurdish Regional Government Interior Minister Karim Sinjari warned coalition counterparts as early as March 2004 that jihadist insurgent cells had developed in several detention facilities with the goal of radicalizing otherwise moderate detainees. These jihadist cells segregated themselves from the rest of the prison population and cultivated recruits from among newly arrived prisoners, Sinjari explained. Upon their release, the new jihadi recruits were directed to insurgent cells on the outside where some became suicide bombers.¹⁶ Coalition officials had recognized these problems previously, but the unclear U.S. policy concerning the disposition of Iraqi detainees delayed longer-term remedies, as had the lack of an overarching command structure for detention operations. Miller was given responsibility to fix these problems, which grew daily with the never-ending influx of detainees, and to correct deficiencies recognized in the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib debacle.

Flaws in the New Command Structure

The new commands offered hope of covering operational matters better than CJTF-7 had been able to do, but the new structure was not without serious flaws. Because each of the four new headquarters were ad hoc creations rather than existing organizations, the orders establishing them had to move through multiple layers of CENTCOM and DoD bureaucracy, delaying their manning. Not until September did MNF-I reach 75 percent strength, with two of the other commands lagging further behind.¹⁷ MNF-I also suffered from a dearth of quality, staffed by individual augmentees who often met the bare minimum qualifications for filling DoD taskings. The MNF-I plans section, responsible for the theater strategic level and operational levels of war, was symptomatic of the lack of qualified personnel. “My staff didn’t consist of War College graduates, SAMS graduates, or anybody else who would be trained as what an Army culture would accept as planners,” MNF-I plans chief Brigadier General Peter Palmer later remembered. He added, “I was given an Army lieutenant colonel reservist who had no planning background whatsoever . . . [and] a Romanian colonel whose English was pretty good but obviously knew nothing about any of this. I had an Air Force major space officer and an Australian navy officer, and none of them understood anything about planning processes.”¹⁸

The MNSTC-I headquarters suffered similar difficulties because of its improvised nature. Petraeus had asked DoD for an active duty division headquarters that had trained as a team to form the core of MNSTC-I, but with all of the active duty divisions and Special Forces Groups either deployed or just returned from Iraq or Afghanistan, DoD instead assigned the mission to the Army’s 98th Reserve Division for Institutional Training. The 98th was an imperfect choice, a Cold War-era creation filled with part-time drill sergeants whose mission was to increase basic training throughput in times of a national emergency.¹⁹ It was the first reserve training division ever used for an overseas combat mission.²⁰ The 98th Reserve Division was itself an ad hoc organization, taking

nearly 20 percent of its personnel from four other reserve divisions in order to have enough troops to deploy.²¹ The resulting MNSTC-I headquarters was a slow-forming polyglot of active duty augmentees alongside the 98th Reserve Division, which itself did not arrive in Baghdad until October.²² Because of these challenges, Petraeus would later recall that his new headquarters took “a good 4 to 6 months to get . . . to a basic level in terms of capability and functionality.”²³

Like the other commands, CENTCOM formed the detention command of TF-134 as an improvised organization, instead of assigning a brigade headquarters to the mission. As a result, the individual billets filled slowly. By September, the headquarters stood at a mere 25 percent strength, with only 52 personnel assigned out of a required 226 to handle the problems that had led to the Abu Ghraib fiasco.²⁵ At their inception,

none of the new coalition commands met the needs of the Iraq mission. The complexities of the operation required a fully staffed, fully functioning headquarters made up of top-notch personnel—a claim no command could make.

The Transfer of Sovereignty

On June 28, 2004, Bremer handed Iraq’s executive authority to the Iraqi Interim Government. The transfer had been scheduled for June 30, but U.S. leaders decided, without input from MNF-I, to advance the date quietly to avoid any insurgent attacks during the transfer. On the same day, Ayad Allawi was sworn in as Iraq’s interim Prime Minister, having been selected by his fellow Iraqi Governing Council members. Allawi was a secular Shi’a politician who had been a member of the Ba’ath Party in the 1960s and early 1970s before conflicts with Saddam Hussein resulted in his fleeing to London, where he survived a Ba’athist assassination attempt and ultimately led the Iraqi National Accord, one of the main Iraqi opposition groups. After the collapse of the regime, he had returned to Iraq and served as defense minister on the Iraqi Governing Council. With Allawi sworn in, the CPA disbanded and Bremer departed Iraq the same day. In place of the CPA, a new U.S. Embassy opened, with veteran diplomat Negroponte as its first ambassador. The assignment was part of a long diplomatic career that had begun during the Vietnam war where Negroponte had seen a counterinsurgency campaign firsthand.

The transfer of sovereignty had a significant impact on the conduct of the war. On the one hand, U.S. and coalition leaders assumed the emergence of a sovereign Iraqi



Source: DoD photo by Staff Sergeant Ashley S. Brokop, U.S. Air Force (Released).

Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi.²⁴

Government would resolve many of the anti-occupation pressures coming from within



Source: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sergeant Jeremy M. Giacomino (Released).

Ambassador John Negroponte.²⁸

operations in Iraq, plummeted. The coalition voluntarily transferred authority over the Iraqi armed forces to the Ministry of Defense, meaning that the coalition ceded the power not just to appoint military officials, but also to fire incompetent, corrupt, and sectarian military and police commanders.²⁹ The coalition also lost significant influence over the Iraqi budget, making it more difficult to prevent corruption in the doling out of the Iraqi Government's vast reconstruction contracts. Finally, coalition units had less freedom to conduct unilateral operations or combined operations with the Iraqi security forces, especially against politically sensitive targets such as Jaysh al-Mahdi, a constraint that would blunt the coalition's mission for the remainder of the war. Had the coalition been facing only a Sunni-based nationalistic insurgency, as CJTF-7 intelligence officers assessed, the transfer of sovereignty potentially could have achieved its intended effects. However, as the Shi'a and Sunni cooperation in expelling the coalition began to unravel into inter-communal conflict, the transfer would accelerate the country's descent into civil war. The Iraqi Interim Government's state institutions were insufficient to prevent the sectarian conflict from escalating, and the governments that would follow would not themselves be neutral in the conflict. Few American military and political leaders foresaw these consequences at the time, but Iraqi leaders recognized the significance of the coming changes. While meeting with Carol Haave, the deputy under secretary of defense for intelligence (counterintelligence and security), during a visit to Baghdad in the late spring, a group of

Iraq. Coalition polling showed that 63 percent of Iraqis, indeed, did believe an interim Iraqi Government would improve conditions in the country.²⁶ The Iraqi Governing Council also pressed the coalition to turn over as much responsibility as possible as soon as possible. Council members demanded that the transfer of sovereignty should give the interim government, "absolute control of the administration of Iraq's armed forces and security apparatus, absolute control of the management of Iraq's national and natural resources, and full and complete management of Iraq's development and aid budget."²⁷ Many coalition leaders believed that handing responsibility to the Iraqis would bestow legitimacy on the new state, which in turn would dampen support for the insurgency. U.S. leaders also hoped the transfer would lessen international criticism of the Iraq mission.

In reality, however, transferring sovereignty imposed significant constraints on the coalition's mission while delivering fewer benefits than coalition leaders expected. After the transfer, the coalition's influence over Iraqi internal policy, as well as its own ability to conduct oper-

Iraqi leaders told their American visitor, "You Americans are going to hand us the keys to the car and believe that you are still going to get to drive it."³⁰



Source: DoD photo by Multi-National Force Iraq Public Affairs (Released).

General John Abizaid, Commanding General, CENTCOM, Congratulates General George Casey at the MNF-I Change-of-Command Ceremony.³¹

New Coalition Leadership

On July 1, General George Casey took command of MNF-I from Sanchez. Casey was the son of Major General George W. Casey, Sr., the former commander of the 1st Cavalry Division in Vietnam and one of the most senior American officers killed in that war. Casey had served as the director of the Joint Staff during the invasion of Iraq and had been appointed vice chief of staff of the Army before assuming command of MNF-I. More importantly, he had served as an assistant division commander of the 1st Armored Division in Bosnia, a personally formative assignment that had given him first-hand experience in leading a multinational peacekeeping effort in a shattered country. It also exposed him to the challenges and frustrations of pressing recalcitrant ethnic groups to set aside grievances and vengeance and focus on the future.

One incident had been seared into his memory, that of Bosnian Muslim refugees trying to return to their homes in the Bosnian Serb town of Dugi Dio. After a tense stand-off and grueling negotiations, Casey had brokered an agreement that would enable the Muslims to return so long as they could prove ownership of property and give up their weapons. However, the agreement collapsed when weapons were found in the house of

the Bosnian Muslim deputy mayor.³² While Casey was disheartened, the episode yielded a lesson he carried with him for the rest of his career: American Soldiers, usually imbued with optimism and energy, had a tendency to try to do too much, Casey believed, including trying to solve long-standing political disputes among warring factions. "We were so focused on getting what we saw as our job done that we . . . never let the Bosniacs, Croats, and Serbs do much," he explained later.³³ In Casey's view, U.S. leaders constantly had to guard against their units' tendency to fix problems that a host nation should fix for itself. Otherwise, the indigenous population would grow dependent upon the American Army's assistance. Such solutions, Casey believed, would not last any longer than Americans had troops on the ground.

As Casey prepared to take command in Iraq, he met separately with the SECDEF, the President, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the CENTCOM commander. Of the 4, only Abizaid, the CENTCOM commander, gave written instructions. In a four-page letter that served as initial guidance and higher-headquarters intent, Abizaid outlined 10 objectives for Casey and asked him to report on various elements of the mission. Of the objectives, the top three were: 1) Set conditions for successful Iraqi-led and supervised elections in the December 2004–January 2005 timeframe; 2) Protect key Iraqi leaders and set conditions for Iraqis to transition to this role; and, 3) Build loyal, well-trained, well-equipped Iraqi security organizations.³⁴ Casey dutifully would make these objectives key components of his campaign plan.

Abizaid deployed to Bosnia as a fellow assistant division commander in the 1st Armored Division with Casey and derived many of the same lessons from his Balkans experience. He, too, was concerned American Soldiers would attempt too much and create a dependency among the Iraqis. In addition, Abizaid emphasized to Casey that the coalition was operating on borrowed time in Iraq and that the goodwill of the Iraqi people would eventually run out. "From the beginning, [General Abizaid] did not believe the Iraqis would tolerate a long-term U.S. presence there," Casey later recalled. "He was clear about that. A large armed foreign military presence was not going to be welcomed any place in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq."³⁵ This idea was at the center of Abizaid's "antibody" theory about the Middle East, which held that U.S. forces in Iraq, no matter how benevolent, were equivalent to an infection that eventually would create "antibodies" among the Iraqi population that would seek to eliminate the foreign presence.³⁶ As a result, Abizaid believed the U.S. military presence should be reduced and withdrawn as soon as it was feasible, and more specifically, after restoring legitimacy to the Iraqi Government through elections and after building up viable security forces. These were the first and third priorities in his written instructions to Casey.³⁷

Casey's Bosnia lessons on the limits of U.S. military power and Abizaid's antibody theory dovetailed closely with Casey's guidance from Rumsfeld. Casey recalled later, "Secretary [Rumsfeld] was worried that, in our zeal to accomplish the mission, we would try to do everything ourselves and not allow the Iraqis to gain the experience they would need to ultimately take charge. He felt that this would only extend our time there, and he encouraged me to take this attitude into consideration in my planning."³⁸ Rumsfeld frequently had expressed this concern publicly, comparing turning over responsibility to the Iraqis with teaching a child to ride a bicycle. "They're learning, and you're running down the street holding onto the back of the bike seat," he told reporters on March 19. "You know that if you take your hand off, they could fall, so you take a finger off and

then two fingers, and pretty soon you're just barely touching it. [Leaving Iraq] will be like that."³⁹

Whether by fate or by design, the three principal architects of the strategy that would be employed in Iraq for the nearly 30 months all shared the same philosophical perspective on how the war should be prosecuted. There was no "odd man out" among them who had to be convinced of the merits of the strategy. All three were determined to apply the same remedy: restoring legitimacy to the Iraqi Government through elections and standing up the Iraqi security forces in order to allow the drawdown of U.S. forces as quickly as possible.

MNF-I and the U.S. Embassy

Casey's arrival in Baghdad in June 2004 had a significant impact on MNF-I, reinvigorating the headquarters that had grown demoralized and pessimistic because of the April uprisings. One general officer compared the situation inside CJTF-7 during spring 2004 to the collapse of the British Army at Dunkirk, when an overwhelmed British command had fallen behind unfolding events and sometimes issued orders for British units to proceed to locations the Germans already had taken. The general recalled:

When I went back to Baghdad and became part of that madness, CJTF-7 had begun to fall further and further behind the situation and the enemy's decision-making loop, with CJTF-7 leaders telling themselves, 'If only we could stop things for 24 hours, we could get a grip on this.' Well, they couldn't stop it. For the first time in my military career . . . I was looking around and there was a sense of hopelessness, [with] exhausted middle-aged men stumbling from meeting to meeting, and in every meeting at any one time, 20 percent of them would be asleep. . . . People often say that it's very difficult to define what victory is now. Well, I know what losing looks like, and I was part of it.⁴⁰

For many CJTF-7 leaders, Casey's arrival brought a quick and welcome change. "When General Casey arrived, within 2 weeks he breathed new life into the organization," one senior operations officer remarked. "It reminded me of the description of Matthew Ridgway taking over 8th Army [in Korea]. He just infused the organization with optimism, confidence, and a sense of direction. . . . Within six weeks we had produced a campaign plan."⁴¹

In addition to the change in personality and perspective, Casey made crucial structural changes to bridge the schism that had characterized the relationship between Sanchez and Bremer, as well as between their respective organizations. The final days of CJTF-7 were degraded further by the abrupt departure of the CPA in May and June. "Ambassador [Francis] Ricciardone [a senior U.S. diplomat] was parachuted in to 'make CPA go away,' and so they did," a CJTF-7 general officer remembered:

Every night the bus would roll up, and the next morning in a meeting with the Iraqis, the CPA guy who had been the chair of that [section], he'd [have] gone overnight. Just gone. 'Has anyone got the simultaneous translation headsets that were here last week?' 'No.' 'Have we got an interpreter for this meeting?' 'No.' It was bizarre, like being in a Kafkaesque fantasy.⁴²

To repair this severe disruption in civil-military operations, Casey's MNF-I placed nearly 300 "gals and guys with guns," as Casey put it, into the embassy to handle

political-military affairs and plans, a step Negroponte supported.⁴³ Casey himself established offices at both Camp Victory and the embassy in the Green Zone, more often working at his embassy office across from Negroponte's office.⁴⁴ The embassy and MNF-I also created joint teams to address day-to-day operations and long-term planning, as well as an interagency Red Team that provided alternative insights directly to Negroponte and Casey.⁴⁵ To signal their collaborative approach, Casey and Negroponte issued a joint mission statement that applied to both their organizations, a dramatic change from the near-fratricidal working relations that often had hampered the CPA and CJTF-7.

THE TARGETING OF THE NEW IRAQI STATE

Accenting the challenges the new coalition leaders would face just as they took over, Sunni insurgents in Baghdad killed Ezzadine Salim, President of the Iraqi Governing Council, on May 17, a shocking assassination meant to intimidate the new Iraqi political class. Other assassinations followed, including the June 12 killing of Iraqi deputy foreign minister Bassam Salih Kubba, as well as the murder of Kamal al-Jarah, a senior Education Ministry official.⁴⁶ On July 20, Issam Jassem Kadhem, a director general in the Ministry of Defense, was gunned down outside his home.⁴⁷ After the spate of assassinations, the protection of the new Iraqi national leaders became a serious enough concern that many of them moved into the coalition-controlled Green Zone. Though safer, they were disconnected from the conditions experienced by the population they governed.

Despite the coalition protection, insurgent attacks on key leaders continued and spread to provincial leaders. On July 14, Ninawa Governor Osama Kashmoula, who had collaborated closely with the U.S. troops in his province, was assassinated as he drove from Mosul to Baghdad.⁴⁸ Though Ninawa had been regarded as a relatively stable economy of force area during the rotation of U.S. forces in early 2004, the governor's murder was an ominous sign that Sunni insurgents were seeking to undo the earlier successes of the 101st Airborne Division in the province. Likewise, in the seemingly stable province of Basrah, the interim provincial governor, Hazem al-Ainachi, was shot to death outside his home on July 20.⁴⁹

These attacks represented a concerted effort by insurgents to undermine the legitimacy of the new Iraqi state. The establishment of the interim government and the transfer of sovereignty resulted in a short-lived phase of optimism among some of the Sunni insurgent groups. They incorrectly assumed that both acts were precursors to a complete coalition withdrawal that would be followed by Sunni insurgent victories that would return them to power.⁵⁰ In July in the perennially restive Anbar Province, Tawhid wal-Jihad kidnapped the three sons of the provincial governor, Abdul Karim Burjis. In exchange for their release, Burjis resigned his position and released a videotaped statement that he "repented" for having collaborated with the coalition. When the new governor arrived, the security situation throughout the province had deteriorated to the point that he stated, "The province has collapsed and we feel like hostages."⁵¹ In the provincial capital of Ramadi, the insurgent body of the Ramadi Shura Council headed by Mohamed Mahmoud Latif had grown to the point that it could launch attacks of as many as 50 insurgents at a time, with reinforcements arriving by truck.⁵²

Alongside the targeted assassinations of Iraqi political leaders, Sunni insurgents continued their strategy of hampering the new Iraqi state by targeting its critical infrastructure. On June 11, insurgents blew up an oil pipeline between Kirkuk and a pumping station 50 kilometers to the northwest in Dibis that provided fuel for one of Iraq's largest power stations, resulting in a 10 percent drop in nationwide electrical output.⁵³ In July, Sunni insurgents continued their efforts to pressure smaller coalition members to withdraw from Iraq. Using the same method attempted unsuccessfully against South Korea, insurgents captured a Filipino contractor and threatened to kill him unless the Philippines' small force left immediately, to which the Philippine Government agreed. While the departure of the 51 Filipino troops was militarily insignificant, it was a political blow to the coalition's legitimacy, increasing the number of countries that had dropped out of the coalition to 5.⁵⁴

THE EXPANSION OF THE IRAQI SECURITY FORCES

The creation of MNSTC-I reflected the fact that a year after the invasion, U.S. leaders tacitly had acknowledged that disbanding the Iraqi Army had been a serious mistake, and the plan to replace it with three weak light-infantry divisions and a local civil defense corps had failed its first major test – the April uprisings. With the new military command under Petraeus, the coalition would try to repair the damage by building a much larger Iraqi armed force than the Pentagon had envisioned a year earlier. The UN had provided political cover for this change in UNSCR 1546, which declared that “the multinational force will also assist in building the capability of the Iraqi security forces and institutions, through a programme of recruitment, training, equipping, mentoring, and monitoring.”⁵⁵

When MNSTC-I unfurled its guidon in June 2004, the state of the Iraqi forces was dire. With the exception of only a handful of units, the Iraqi Army and ICDC forces either had refused to fight during the April uprisings or had disappeared. The near-universal disintegration of the Iraqi security forces meant that Petraeus essentially was starting over, with the number of trained and equipped Iraqis frustratingly dropping to almost zero. The fiasco highlighted the flaw in the ICDC concept—most of the units that dissolved had been ordered to fight away from their home areas, something most ICDC soldiers explicitly had expected would not be required of them. Many Iraqi troops refused outright to fight fellow Iraqis. Others “simply wanted a job and did not feel morally obligated to complete their enlistment if they were unhappy with the conditions of service or had a better opportunity.”⁵⁶

Of the units that remained intact after spring 2004, many had problems with the basic tasks of paying their soldiers on time, feeding them, and ensuring they had fuel and ammunition.⁵⁷ There also was almost no higher-level command and control of the local Iraqi units. No organization existed between the nascent Iraqi Army brigades and the new Iraqi Ground Forces Command, while the Ministry of Defense, dissolved by Bremer's CPA Order 2 in 2003, had not been restored yet as a functioning organization.

Petraeus arrived in Baghdad in June 2004 with a charge from Rumsfeld to conduct a complete review of the Iraqi security forces and the plans for their development, after which Petraeus recommended specific roles and missions for the Iraqi forces and the size and structure needed to accomplish them. It was the first time since the invasion that the

coalition had taken the time to assess the Iraqi security sector in its entirety, and Petraeus's review would lead to sweeping changes in the coalition's plans for the Iraqi security forces. To begin with, both Petraeus and Casey judged the Iraqi security forces were far too small for the role it needed to play in securing the country ahead of the all-important elections of 2005. Therefore, they decided that all near-term effort should go toward creating as many infantry battalions as quickly as possible and getting them into the fight.⁵⁸ The initial goal was for these battalions to become proficient at the platoon level so they could provide the inner ring of security during the elections just 6 months away.

In setting goals for the size of the Iraqi security forces, Petraeus and Casey solicited recommendations from the multinational divisions about the security needs in their respective areas and considered historical counterinsurgency ratios of police and army forces to the population. While MNF-I and MNSTC-I originally held that a ratio of one policeman to 300 civilians was sufficient, after input from the multinational divisions, the ratio shifted to 1 policeman to 188 civilians, a change that would greatly expand the size of the Iraqi security forces.⁵⁹ While the updated ratio would increase the size of the Iraqi police force significantly, it still fell far below the ratio most often deemed required for successful counterinsurgency operations, a ratio of 1 policeman to 50 civilians.⁶⁰ Another consideration for expanding the force was the coalition's sober recognition of the negative consequences of the CPA's disbanding of the Iraqi Army. Enlarging the Iraqi security forces would create tens of thousands of Iraqi jobs, coalition leaders believed, thereby draining potential recruits from the insurgency.⁶¹



Source: DoD photo by Sergeant Matt Murphy (Released).

Iraqi Soldiers Head Out on a Mission in Samarra.⁶²

The MNSTC-I review brought an end to the bifurcated efforts to build a separate army and civil defense corps. The Iraqi Army would continue as a national force meant to protect against external threats, but the term "New Iraqi Army" was dropped in favor of the simpler "Iraqi Army." The change also served to reemphasize continuity with

the pre-2003 army, which was one of Iraq's few respected institutions.⁶³ The decentralized ICDC effort, however, was abandoned, with control, recruiting, and funding for the remaining units pulled back to MNSTC-I, and those formations renamed the "Iraqi National Guard." These new, centrally built national guard units essentially would replace the ICDC units destroyed in the spring uprising. Consolidating the ICDC effort also was meant to correct the major equipment shortages that ICDC units had suffered because of CMATT's bureaucratic hurdles and contract challenges. By the time Petraeus issued his review report, the ICDC and national guard still wore captured, pre-2003 Iraqi Army uniforms, possessed just 1,800 of the 42,000 sets of body armor they required, and had almost no radios.⁶⁴

Under Petraeus and Casey's new plan, the Iraqi Army essentially would remain unchanged in size with a personnel strength of 27,000 spread across three divisions and 27 battalions, though the CJSOTF was allowed to expand the 36th Commando Battalion into a full Iraqi Special Operations Forces brigade. However, the Iraqi National Guard would expand dramatically. Its initial size of 48,000 troops spread among 6 brigades and 45 battalions would grow to 77,000 personnel across 6 divisions, 21 brigades, and 65 battalions.⁶⁵ The Iraqi Police Service would grow as well, from 90,000 local police and 16,000 border police to 135,000 local police and 32,000 border police.⁶⁶ Altogether, the new Iraqi security forces would work toward a strength of 271,000, as opposed to the 171,000 the CMATT and CPATT had planned to build under the CPA. In addition to this force, the plan would train nearly 5,000 special police spread across 2 special police regiments, 9 public order battalions, and an emergency response unit.⁶⁷ These police were designed, like the Italian Carabinieri and the French Gendarmes, to bridge the gap between local police forces that focused on local law enforcement and military units that eventually would focus on external threats. Plans also were developed to create a small air force and navy, and MNSTC-I staffers began forming a rudimentary Iraqi joint headquarters to coordinate and lead the different services.⁶⁸

The Petraeus review substantively did not change plans for the Iraqi Army's equipment and weapon systems, which Pentagon planners had limited in 2003 to ensure that the Iraqi military would not be a threat to its neighbors. Under MNSTC-I, Iraqi Army units principally would remain motorized infantry forces equipped with unarmored pickup trucks—lightly armed, with few crew-served weapons, and nearly no RPGs or indirect fire weapons. MNF-I and MNSTC-I judged that NATO weapons were too maintenance-intensive for the Iraqi force, which would instead be armed with the former Soviet bloc weapons Iraqis were accustomed to using. Only one of the 30 army brigades would be a mechanized force equipped with Soviet BMP and MT-LB armored personnel carriers and T55 tanks.

Petraeus's assessment also led Casey and MNF-I to reprogram \$1.8 billion from long-term electricity and water projects in the Iraqi Relief and Reconstruction fund to pay for the growth in the Iraqi security forces and improvement in its capabilities.⁶⁹ The shifting of funds represented a clash of priorities between those coalition leaders who believed investment in the Iraqi security forces was the surest way of stabilizing the country and those who believed reconstruction and economic development should take precedence. The loss of reconstruction funds was a particularly hard blow for Major General Peter Chiarelli, commander of the 1st Cavalry Division and MND-B. He believed reconstruction

had to be initiated first in order to create the jobs that served as the most effective route to long-term security, especially in the Iraqi capital. Robbing the reconstruction fund to pay for security forces was putting the cart before the horse, Chiarelli believed, and within the coalition command councils, he voiced strong opposition to Casey's reprogramming decision. However, with the approval of the U.S. Congress and the newly seated Iraqi Government, the transfers went ahead by the late summer. For the time being, the "reconstruction-first" advocates had lost the argument. This reprogramming was the first of more than \$10 billion spent on the Iraqi security forces during Casey's tenure.

MNSTC-I's focus on generating combat units ahead of the 2005 elections meant that the Iraqis' logistic capability had to wait, because creating organic logistics units in the Iraqi forces would slow the principal mission of standing up combat battalions.⁷⁰ The sticker shock associated with the price tag of the Iraqi security forces also prompted Casey to fund only the minimum logistics capability required to transition security responsibility to the Iraqis.⁷¹ A final factor contributing to Casey's decision was the belief that the overall Iraq mission was a relatively short-term one and that security conditions for the Iraqi security forces would naturally improve over time. Since coalition forces would be withdrawing and turning over responsibility to the Iraqis as soon as possible, MNF-I leaders assumed there would not be time to build institutional and operational logistics organizations.

Instead of their own logistics units, the Iraqis would have to rely on contractors for every aspect of their support functions, including combat resupply. Laundry, fuel, meals, and other basic functions all would have to be contracted with the local market, as the new Iraqi Army did not have cooks or fuel handlers. Even Iraqi unit mobility depended on civilian-contracted support because no Iraqi transportation corps would be established. The army also would not have a medical corps, meaning health care would have to be contracted with local Iraqi civilian facilities or in rare cases provided by U.S. facilities.⁷²

The decision to expand the Iraqi security forces and its capabilities led to another significant change in the coalition campaign: the pairing of American advisers directly with Iraqi units, a move that MNF-I and MNSTC-I hoped would prevent a recurrence of the Iraqi security forces' April collapse. Advisory support teams (ASTs) would embed with each Iraqi battalion, brigade, and division to coach the Iraqi units as they conducted operations. At the battalion level, the ASTs consisted of one major, two captains, and seven noncommissioned officers.⁷³ Under a new Iraqi Assistance Group, MNSTC-I eventually would establish 39 teams, with 31 coming from the 98th Reserve Division, though many of the initial ASTs were manned at only 50 percent strength.⁷⁴

A NEW COALITION STRATEGY

Among Casey's first steps upon arriving in Baghdad was to harness the energy of the MNF-I headquarters to produce a campaign plan that was approved by Washington and published to his major subordinate commanders in Iraq, something CJTF-7 had not managed to do — though not through lack of trying. Constantly reacting to events and bedeviled by conflicting guidance from Washington, Sanchez and his command had instead relied on the original invasion plan, ordering changes through fragmentary orders as needed, but never giving the subordinate commands a common post-invasion game plan

that synchronized their activities across the country. Sanchez's command had worked according to a bifurcated interim mission that called for units to continue offensive operations to root out elements of the former regime and at the same time to conduct stability and support operations.

Casey had something different in mind. Taking his lead from UNSCR 1546 and interpreting Bush's intent from a speech at the U.S. Army War College in May, as well as a National Security Presidential Directive,⁷⁵ Casey published a new campaign plan in August 2004, directing "in partnership with the Iraqi Government, MNF-I conducts full spectrum counter-insurgency operations to isolate and neutralize former regime extremists and foreign terrorists and organizes, trains and equips Iraqi security forces in order to create a security environment that permits the completion of UNSCR 1546."⁷⁶ Central to the campaign, referenced by Casey's requirement to complete the UN-mandated schedule, was the holding of free and fair elections. The elections themselves would contribute to the desired end state, which was viewed as an "Iraq at peace with its neighbors, with a representative government that respects human rights of all Iraqis, and with security forces sufficient to maintain domestic order and deny Iraq as a safe haven for terrorists."⁷⁷ Casey's goals essentially would remain unchanged throughout his tenure as MNF-I commander.

The August 2004 plan introduced several new components into the coalition campaign. Casey had arrived in Iraq concerned that the coalition was overly kinetic in its actions, killing too many Iraqis in raids and accidentally at checkpoints, factors he suspected were creating ill will toward the coalition. In an effort to reduce these casualties, Casey originally had written a mission stating only that MNF-I would "conduct counterinsurgency operations." Subordinate commanders, however, had pressed him to use the wording "full-spectrum operations" out of concern that "when you say counterinsurgency, the troops think about chasing guys in pajamas around the jungle."⁷⁸ In any event, the new MNF-I mission statement marked the first time the coalition headquarters formally recognized counterinsurgency as a crucial component of its mission, in which reconstruction and development projects theoretically were considered as important as combat operations.

The second major component of the new mission, the construction of the Iraqi security forces, was supported by the creation of MNSTC-I and the restructuring of the Iraqi security forces. Casey also specified that the Iraqi security forces were the coalition's exit strategy. Functioning Iraqi security forces units would allow coalition units to drawdown, a process Casey believed would have the positive by-product of reducing the number of antibodies created against the coalition presence.

Casey's campaign plan included criteria that would justify sequentially transitioning three levels of control over security matters in various areas of the country to the Iraqis. "Iraqi local control" would be declared when "local security forces can respond to local incidents with coalition oversight and an operating judicial system can arraign, hold and try criminals in a timely manner," a level Metz and MNC-I initially hoped the Iraqi security forces could attain by October 1, 2004.⁷⁹ Areas then could transition to "Iraqi regional control" when Iraqi security forces units could operate "under civil control within a province [and] can maintain internal security and are capable of antiterrorism measures."⁸⁰ Transition to the final level, "strategic overwatch," would take place when Iraq could

handle internal and external threats on its own, at which point coalition forces would largely withdraw from the country. The exact definition of these three states was debated and redefined for the remainder of the war.

Above all, the new campaign plan reflected the shared philosophical views of Rumsfeld, Abizaid, and Casey that foreign presence in the Arab world was counterproductive and that efforts had to be taken to prevent Iraqis from becoming too dependent on coalition forces. Casey's staff included among its planning assumptions the dictum that foreign presence created natural resistance against itself. "Military/security forces can contribute to the counterinsurgency effort but cannot win it," Casey's Red Team had pronounced during July 2004 planning sessions. The team also concluded that, while an Iraqi Government "that enjoys legitimacy in the eyes of the majority" could temporarily overcome public opposition to foreign troops, "nonetheless, foreign forces will never be broadly welcomed in Iraq."⁸¹

Casey's August 2004 guidance to MNF-I operationalized these ideas, first and foremost, by stressing the need to reduce the coalition footprint by closing coalition bases and moving forces outside of populated areas in an effort to reduce friction with Iraqis. Closing coalition bases also would help with the dependency theory, U.S. leaders believed, because it would force Iraqis to become self-reliant as large coalition units moved farther away, onto what ultimately only would be nine coalition "exit bases."⁸² The coalition would turn over the closed bases to the Iraqi security forces, reducing construction timelines and costs for the Iraqis. A detailed system, nicknamed "Iraqi BRAC" after the state-side U.S. base realignment and closure process, arose to guide the process and to ensure that coalition units would refrain from expanding or improving any base not among the nine exit bases after the fall of 2005.⁸³

Surveys conducted in Iraq at the time appeared to confirm the assumptions of the principal architects of the strategy. A summer 2004 poll conducted by MNF-I contractors in Baghdad, Basrah, Mosul, Hillah, Diwaniya, and Baqubah found that 41 percent of respondents believed coalition forces should leave immediately, while 45 percent believed the coalition should leave after a permanent government was elected. Only 6 percent felt that the coalition should stay as long as was necessary for stability. Furthermore, 55 percent of those Iraqis surveyed responded that if coalition forces left immediately, they would feel "more safe."⁸⁴ Similarly, many of Casey's subordinates who had been in Iraq and fighting for months concurred with his plan's philosophical basis. After Casey briefed his new campaign plan to his division commanders, Major General Martin Dempsey, the commander of the 1st Armored Division and the longest-deployed general officer in Iraq, wrote Casey to comment on the campaign plan's primary premise.

There is definitely a point of descending consent on the near horizon beyond which we will not be welcome here no matter how much good we're doing. We can push that point to the right if we reduce our footprint gradually and visibly. . . . After the elections, I advocate significant reduction in US forces in Iraq and suggest that they be apportioned functionally and not geographically. The functions requiring our presence include the train and equip function, protection from external threat [borders], and support of Iraqi Security Force against internal threat only as requested. As you know, I've lived in this time zone for 3 years. They [Iraqis] will not take responsibility for their problems—even if they have the capability to do so—while we are here doing it for them. I strongly recommend that we continue our effort to get out of Iraqi cities, and I encourage planners

to think out of the box in assigning responsibilities to forces in OIF-3 [third rotation of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in January 2005] and beyond.⁸⁵

This degree of support from Dempsey and other commanders reinforced Casey's sense that he was pursuing the correct course of action and that the core philosophical beliefs that guided him were squarely on target for the Iraq mission.

Glimpses of the Future: Tribal Security and the Baghdad "Belts"

As Casey and other coalition commanders began to reduce their units' presence in Iraqi cities and decrease contact with the Iraqi population, a handful of Iraqi leaders and coalition officers considered alternative approaches that would later come to dominate the campaign. During the spring and summer of 2004, CJSOTF forces under an irregular warfare advocate, Army Major Adam Such, began a limited program to engage and arm the Abu Nimr and Abu Issa tribes of Anbar Province. Concerned with the continuing threat in Fallujah and worsening security in the province, Mattis and his 1st Marine Division endorsed Such's efforts, providing materiel, funding—including pay for the Iraqi irregulars—and other operational support. However, once the promising tribal security initiative came to the attention of the CPA and U.S. Embassy, it skidded. U.S. officials in Baghdad considered the arming of tribal militias a regressive measure out of step with long-term U.S. objectives for a new nontribal Iraq.⁸⁶ In the aftermath of the April uprising and the near-universal collapse of the ICDC, U.S. leaders in Baghdad had no desire for decentralized security efforts outside Iraqi state institutions. As a result, MNSTC-I, the CJSOTF, and MNF-W were prohibited from supporting the tribal irregulars other than with captured insurgent weapons and ammunition. The program effectively ceased when the CJSOTF and Marine leadership rotated out of Iraq in the summer of 2004, though it provided some tactical lessons that later were useful to coalition leaders in Anbar.

Meanwhile, as CJTF-7 prepared to deactivate in early summer 2004, Iraqi Defense Minister Ali Allawi offered coalition leaders a different idea for an Iraq campaign plan, albeit one that U.S. commanders at the time did not explore further. Allawi argued that Salafi jihadist organizations had fused with elements of Saddam's regime in a Sunni insurgency calling itself "Al Muqawamma al Islammiya al Wattaniyya" or "Patriotic Islamic Resistance." The jihadists, working together, exploited symbols of radical Islam to recruit and create religious fervor while the former Ba'athist regime elements provided structure, organization, and discipline. Referencing the captured Abu Musab al-Zarqawi letter that called for civil war, Allawi identified Baghdad as the objective of the Sunni insurgents' strategy, under which they would:

. . . encircle Baghdad, not so much in the form of a classic siege, but rather through unopposed control over certain towns and districts around Baghdad. Again, this would not be in the form of actual physical control over territory. It can be simply a de facto acknowledgment by the inhabitants of these areas of the power of these groups, either by a willing acquiescence to their power or simply through fear.⁸⁷

From these bases and safe havens located in the "belts" outside Baghdad, the Iraqi defense minister predicted, the Sunni insurgents would launch armed raids and forays into the capital to incite sectarian violence and destabilize the government. Military

control of the belts was crucial to any future campaign, Allawi concluded, although elections and a political process were needed to blunt the insurgent strategy as well.⁸⁸ In other words, Iraq's top defense official correctly had identified for his coalition counterparts the insurgency's "Baghdad belts" strategy a full 30 months before coalition leaders would acknowledge it themselves, and almost 3 years before the belts became the centerpiece of the Petraeus-Odierno so-called surge campaign of 2007.

The summer of 2004 brought new leaders, new commands, and a new purpose to a U.S.-led coalition demoralized by the April uprisings and the Abu Ghraib scandal. Taking the helm, Casey brought coherence and hope. Under Casey's new guidance, the coalition would focus on implementing the UN timeline for elections in 2005, while refocusing its efforts to establish expanded Iraqi security forces that U.S. leaders believed would be the coalition's ticket out of Iraq. The Petraeus assessment of the Iraqi security forces, meanwhile, resulted in redesigned Iraqi armed forces, with training, organization, and equipping of both the police and army standardized, and the Iraqi National Guard and Iraqi Army merged into one force. At the same time, the turbulence of yet another transition of headquarters, added to challenges inherent in the transfer of sovereignty and the continuing evolution of the insurgency, would ensure that the new coalition command teams soon would be tested just as violently as CJTF-7 had been. As they raced to prepare for the elections of January 2005, the coalition divisions would find themselves fighting on multiple fronts once again.

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CHAPTER 14

FIGHTING TO THE ELECTIONS, AUGUST-DECEMBER 2004

From August to December 2004, Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) would put General George Casey's new campaign plan into effect. Driven by the United Nations' election timeline, the coalition would focus on eliminating insurgent sanctuaries in seven key cities so that voting could take place on schedule in January 2005—in Casey's words, a "fight to the elections." In Mosul, Tel Afar, north Babil, and Sadr City, the coalition and the Iraqi security forces would continue their ongoing efforts to stabilize the situation and remove the insurgent threat with localized operations. However, in three cities—Samarra, Najaf, and Fallujah—Casey and other coalition leaders judged that major operations would be required to restore government control so that elections could proceed. Removing the insurgent threat in Najaf would require the coalition to continue the war against the Sadrists while securing the kind of Iraqi political support whose absence had thwarted the spring operation against Moqtada Sadr's militants. Removing the insurgent threat to Samarra and eastern Anbar, meanwhile, would require similar efforts to finish the job that had come to such a ragged halt in April.

As these operations unfolded, Casey would find in Najaf a model for future combined coalition-Iraqi operations, but the planned assault on Sunni insurgents in Fallujah would quickly spill over into an unplanned fight for northern Iraq and demonstrate that the coalition was facing a thinking, operationally adaptive enemy.

OPERATIONS IN NAJAF

The proverbial ink was not dry on MNF-I's campaign plan when the tenuous ceasefire with Moqtada Sadr's militia broke down, this time in the Shi'a shrine city of Najaf. After suffering heavy losses mainly in Baghdad and Karbala during the April 2004 uprisings and early summer, Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) had gravitated to Najaf and negotiated a truce that put the vitally important Imam Ali Mosque and the adjacent Wadi as-Salam cemetery off limits to coalition troops, essentially turning Najaf's old city into a rebel safe haven.

For the coalition, the problems in Najaf were in the Multi-National Division-Central South (MND-CS) area of operations but were the tactical responsibility of the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). The 11th MEU, U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM) theater reserve, had arrived in the provinces of Najaf and Qadisiyah on July 21, 2004, to help fill the gap left by the sudden withdrawal of Spanish troops following the Madrid, Spain, terrorist attacks of March 11, 2004. Taking the place of Task Force Dragon, a composite unit from the 1st Infantry Division, the 11th MEU was the fourth coalition unit in 4 months assigned to hold Najaf, and trouble was not long in coming for the newly arrived Marines. Shortly after reaching the city, the 11th MEU was immersed in fighting that began with a chance encounter between an American patrol and Sadrist fighters near Moqtada Sadr's family home on August 2. Sadr's men responded to the meeting engagement by attacking Najaf's main police station on August 5, and an intense battle ensued that spread into the city's previously off-limits cemetery. During 2 days of

fighting, Marines used tanks, attack helicopters, and fixed-wing close air support to gain the upper hand, including the dropping of 1,000-pound bombs and the nighttime use of AC-130 gunships. When the fighting subsided, coalition losses amounted to a downed UH-1N helicopter, 5 Marines killed, and 60 wounded, while JAM lost an estimated 350 killed.¹ The intensity of the August 5-6 battle convinced coalition officers that the sprawling Wadi as-Salam cemetery and the Imam Ali shrine complex had become insurgent operating bases too large for the 11th MEU to handle on its own.²

Although Casey and Lieutenant General Thomas Metz had planned to clear Najaf of insurgents before the January 2005 elections, they had not planned to sequence that shrine city first, having agreed with Prime Minister Ayad Allawi to begin with the less complicated problem of Samarra. However, with the Sadrists having already precipitated a battle in Najaf, the coalition commanders seized the opportunity to remove the JAM threat first. To reinforce the 11th MEU, Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) dispatched an attack helicopter battalion and two Army battalions (1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, and 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment) from the 1st Cavalry Division in Baghdad to assist the Marines in clearing the cemetery and restoring order to Najaf. To clarify the chain of command for what would be a Marine-led operation on the ground, MNC-I gave Multi-National Force-West (MNF-W) temporary control of Najaf and Qadisiyah Provinces from the Polish-led MND-CS.³ While this change fixed the problem of working through MND-CS language barriers and political caveats, placing MNF-W over the coalition troops in Najaf slowed reporting between the city and Baghdad. This eventually led the frustrated MNC-I headquarters to communicate directly with the 11th MEU, especially on matters related to the politically important Imam Ali shrine.

The speed at which the reinforcing battalions left Baghdad — 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, began moving to Najaf just 12 hours after being alerted — made for an impressive operational maneuver but created new problems. As the two battalions departed for Najaf, all but two of their Iraqi interpreters refused to go with them, leaving the two units with a sum total of five interpreters for the first 2 weeks of the battle, which severely hampered the units' ability to communicate with Iraqi security forces and local Najafis.⁴ The rapid movement of the battalions also caused consternation in the 1st Cavalry Division headquarters, which MNC-I had tasked a short time before to designate a "working" corps reserve that was assigned battle space in the Multi-National Division-Baghdad (MND-B) area but could deploy anywhere in the country within 96 hours. In practice, the activation of the working reserve left a sudden gap in the coalition's Baghdad battle space that the 1st Cavalry Division had to scramble to fill. The situation became acute when, as had been the case in the April uprisings, the fighting in Najaf quickly spread across southern Iraq and to Baghdad. Colonel Robert B. Abrams's 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, which had fought the Sadrists in April, again faced off against JAM for 62 straight days.



Source: DoD photo by Staff Sergeant Ashley Brokop, U.S. Air Force (Released).

U.S. Soldiers Search the Najaf Cemetery for Weapons Caches, IEDs, and Sadrist Militiamen.⁵

Fighting Among the Tombstones

The fighting in Najaf drew the U.S. troops into an extraordinary urban battlefield the likes of which American forces have rarely experienced. According to Shi'a Muslims, any believer buried near the tomb of Imam Ali in Najaf is guaranteed to enter paradise, and, as a result, the Wadi as-Salam cemetery is the largest in the world. With over five million graves arrayed in a labyrinthine complex of multistory crypts and underground catacombs, the cemetery was effectively a city in its own right, one with political implications across the entire worldwide community of some 150 million Shi'a Muslims who considered it sacred ground.

After MNC-I's reinforcements arrived, U.S. commanders in Najaf prepared to attack from north to south through the cemetery to end its use as a safe haven by thousands of JAM fighters occupying both it and the nearby Imam Ali shrine complex. On August 9, the attacking U.S. troops began making their way into the vast necropolis while forced to contend with a politically imposed exclusionary zone around the Imam Ali Mosque. Over the next 2 days, American troops fended off mortars, snipers, and improvised explosive devices (IED) throughout the forbidding terrain of elaborate crypts in summer temperatures that exceeded 125 degrees.⁶ With little respite at night, the oppressive heat sometimes caused the coalition troops' sophisticated electronic systems to fail and, as one historian described it, "turned the armored vehicles into furnaces."⁷ To combat the intense heat, some vehicle crews went into battle with bags of intravenous fluid flowing into their veins.⁸

The dense collection of graves, crypts, and catacombs made for a complex three-dimensional battlefield. The threat from Sadrists and Iranian snipers inside the cemetery was serious enough to prompt coalition commanders to gather Navy SEAL (sea, air, and land) and Special Forces snipers from across the country, resulting in a productive teaming of special operators with Marine and 1st Cavalry Division snipers. Yet the tight urban environment also resulted in some close melees, as in one incident in which an insurgent scrambled onto a tank from 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry, shot the tank's commander and loader, and then escaped into the graveyard.⁹

In this challenging environment, the majority of the Iraqi units accompanying the coalition attackers collapsed. The 405th Iraqi National Guard Battalion dissolved under stress, the 406th Iraqi National Guard Battalion disintegrated under fire, and the 404th Iraqi National Guard Battalion in Karbala became combat ineffective when half of its soldiers refused to deploy to Najaf.¹⁰ Some units of the new Iraqi Army performed passably in supporting combat operations, but only the 36th Commando Battalion, working with Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) advisers, managed to conduct high-intensity, kinetic combat operations. The battalion fought in the challenging urban environment and provided critical reconnaissance when a few of its native Najafi soldiers changed into civilian clothes and scouted Sadrist positions near the Imam Ali shrine.¹¹ With this intelligence in hand, the battalion prepared to assault and clear the shrine, if Iraqi and coalition leaders ordered them to do so.

Cease-fire with the Sadrists

As the 11th MEU and the Army cavalry battalions made their way through the cemetery on August 11, the Iraqi Government began negotiations with the Sadrists that produced a series of sporadic cease-fires.¹² Throughout more than a week of unproductive talks, the fighting continued, with coalition troops inflicting heavy losses on JAM and shrinking the militia's foothold in the city while Moqtada Sadr and his spokesmen denounced the Iraqi Government as illegitimate and called for a general insurrection to expel the coalition.

By August 24, Sadr and his militia were practically surrounded in the area around the shrine, while the exclusionary zone around the mosque had shrunk to a mere 100 meters. As the coalition troops prepared for a three-battalion assault on the remaining JAM fighters, Prime Minister Ayad Allawi pressed Casey to order coalition troops to attack into the shrine itself, where Sadr was reportedly sheltering. In Allawi's view, the situation was at a decisive point. Although Grand Ayatollah Ali Husayni Sistani had been in London, United Kingdom, for medical treatment during the fighting, he was due back in Iraq within hours, and the Prime Minister anticipated that the returning Sistani would call for a cease-fire that would enable Sadr and his fighters to survive and fight again another day. Meeting with Casey and other coalition leaders in his residence on the evening of August 24, Allawi urged the MNF-I commander to agree to "finish the job" against Sadr while it was still possible and announced that he was ready to authorize Iraqi troops to attack the mosque with coalition support.¹³ A skeptical Casey, judging that Allawi and coalition diplomats were on the verge of ordering a disastrous military operation that could damage Shi'ism's holiest structure, attempted to restrain the Prime

Minister's inclinations. An operation in the shrine would require the attacking troops to develop extensive intelligence and use extraordinary discipline, Casey observed, and though the Iraqi commandos had demonstrated skill in less complex operations, Casey told Allawi, "they aren't ready to do that yet."¹⁴ To buy more time, Allawi suggested that Casey should close Iraq's airspace and ports in order to block Sistani's plane from landing, but Casey demurred by observing that, since Iraq was sovereign, any such decision needed to come from Allawi's government.¹⁵

One factor staying Casey's hand was that he believed he simply did not have sufficient awareness of the situation in Najaf to assess the coalition's options. To gain clarity on the situation on the ground, Casey decided on the night of August 24 to dispatch Metz to the shrine city to provide a personal assessment. On August 25, Metz reported that with the mosque surrounded, capturing Sadr was possible, but risky and likely to involve high casualties. However, the dilemma was quickly overcome by events. To Allawi's frustration, before he could persuade Casey to order coalition forces to support an assault into the mosque to capture Sadr, Sistani landed in Basrah and began brokering a cease-fire. On August 26, Sistani's efforts yielded an agreement for Sadr and his men to withdraw peacefully from the shrine.

Unlike Allawi, Casey harbored no regrets about Sadr's escape from Najaf. As the days passed, Casey came to doubt that Sadr had actually been in the shrine on August 24 and 25 because some delayed reports claimed the insurgent leader had slipped through the coalition's tightening noose a few days earlier. Despite this second major confrontation with JAM, Casey judged that the Sunni insurgent groups were still a greater threat to Iraq's long-term stability. "I didn't see [JAM] as the chief threat," he recalled later. "In August in Najaf there was kind of a countrywide uprising. But I would say that was more of a . . . tactical threat. By that I mean it was a lot of violence in a short period of time, but it never threatened to undermine the whole mission. The main threat was the former regime insurgency."¹⁶ To Casey's point, Moqtada Sadr and his militia had indeed been dealt a serious blow — Sadr had been forced to slink out of Najaf with the shrine and city back in government hands. His forces had also been devastated, with an estimated 1,500 of his fighters killed. The coalition, meanwhile, had lost seven Marines and three Soldiers killed.¹⁷ Sadr's uprising had also alienated Najaf's local leaders by disturbing the pilgrimage and religious tourist trade on which the city depended, and as a result, the political balance in Najaf shifted toward Sadr's principal rivals, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and his Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI).

For many coalition and Iraqi observers, the negotiated cease-fire and Sadr's escape were an ominous development, leaving intact an organization that still posed a threat to the coalition's end state of a representative and U.S.-allied Iraqi Government. In the aftermath of the battle, Lieutenant Colonel Myles Miyamasu, the commander of 1st Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, put it succinctly: "[with Sadr] it's not over. It's just going to be different."¹⁸

Casey and the "Najaf Model"

For Casey, the battle in Najaf was a model for how future combat operations should be conducted, and he attempted to copy it elsewhere several times during his command

tenure. The “Najaf model” had three main ingredients: Iraqi security forces collaborating with coalition advisers in the military domain, supportive Iraqi Government leaders providing political top cover to legitimize coalition combat operations, and economic reconstruction following closely on the heels of military operations.¹⁹

In political terms, Casey considered confronting Moqtada Sadr in Najaf a significant political achievement in that it had united the nascent Iraqi Government against an insurgent menace for the first time. “Strategically [Najaf] was important to us because we needed a vehicle that would cause the Allawi government to come together and have a success,” Casey recalled later.²⁰ Unlike the April battle in Fallujah, the Najaf battle had seen the Iraqi Government announce its support of coalition military actions, very different from the Iraqi Governing Council’s threats to resign during the April 2004 fighting. While some of this was the result of Allawi’s personal involvement, it was also a sign of the political spadework Casey and Ambassador John Negroponte had done to ensure Iraqi leaders would not blanch when the inevitable collateral damage occurred. Casey observed later, “One of the lessons learned from the first Fallujah [was] that you’ve got to keep the Iraqi political leadership behind the military operations or you have a lot of military effort for nothing.”²¹

Casey also concluded that the Najaf operation had validated the idea that reconstruction would show Iraqis that after the fighting stopped the coalition had their best interests in mind, thereby mitigating the antibody effect of coalition forces and buying additional time for training the Iraqi security forces. The sooner reconstruction could begin after the guns fell silent the better, Casey judged, and, ideally, plans for reconstruction would be made in parallel with plans for combat operations. By mid-November 2004, the coalition had started 226 projects in Najaf valued at over \$50 million.²² The 11th MEU alone distributed almost \$45 million in condolence payments and damage compensation claims while starting construction of 8 new schools and repairing 24 more.²³

The experience at Najaf also convinced Casey that successful combat operations required the meaningful involvement of Iraqi troops in order to put an Iraqi face on the conflict. Casey believed Iraqi troops were indispensable in politically sensitive operations such as entry into insurgent-held mosques and the capture of insurgent-allied political figures. Iraqis also provided situational awareness and local intelligence that coalition units could not hope to acquire on their own. To these ends, Casey judged that Najaf had shown that Iraqi units could perform well when paired with coalition advisers. “We had with [the Iraqi security forces] the early version of transition teams,” Casey recalled. “What we found was [the Iraqi units] do okay when we’re with them. That became kind of a lesson that was going to expand into the transition strategy.”²⁴ This premise would later become a bedrock of MNF-I’s campaign plan as the headquarters reassessed the situation following the January 2005 elections.



Source: DoD photo by Sergeant First Class Matthew Jones (Released).

Iraqi Special Operations Forces From the 36th Commando Battalion Run Toward a Black Hawk During a Joint Training Exercise.²⁵

The Iraqi 36th Commando Battalion

Not all of the lessons the coalition drew from Najaf were valid. Most significantly, the Iraqi security forces' performance in Najaf had been somewhat overstated. In fact, most of the Iraqi Army units engaged in Najaf had performed poorly under fire or disintegrated outright, even when paired with Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq's (MNSTC-I) adviser support teams. The 36th Commando Battalion, the single Iraqi unit that had fought well enough to justify Casey's impressions of the security forces, was not representative of the rest of the new Iraqi Army. In late 2004, most Iraqi units were close to ethnically homogeneous, either mostly Shi'a, Kurd, or Sunni, despite MNSTC-I's intent to promote ethnic mixing. By contrast, from its inception in the hands of the CJSOTF, the 36th Commando Battalion was an Iraqi unit unlike any other. The battalion had originally been authorized by CENTCOM Commander General John Abizaid in response to complaints from five of Iraq's largest political parties that wanted a greater share in reestablishing security, and the CJSOTF had received the mission to build and mentor it.²⁶ Recognizing the potential danger of ethnically homogeneous units, CJSOTF leaders rigorously enforced a heterogeneous composition that roughly matched Iraq's demographics. The Kurdish Democratic Party provided approximately 28 percent of the manpower for the unit; Ahmad Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, 22 percent; the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, 21 percent; Allawi's Iraqi National Congress, 15 percent; and SCIRI, 15 percent.²⁷ The battalion had a Sunni-Shi'a and Arab-Kurd mix at every level, resulting in an organization whose members, in the words of one coalition adviser, "sort

of policed each other and kept each other honest.”²⁸ As the diverse members of the 36th Commando Battalion had fought shoulder to shoulder in 2004, they had forged a unit identity that was Iraqi rather than ethno-sectarian, a factor that helped overcome Iraqi soldiers’ inherent reluctance to deploy outside their home area. It also helped overcome the reticence common in other units to fighting and killing fellow countrymen, especially those of the same ethno-religious group.

Beyond its ethnic makeup, the 36th Commando Battalion was distinguished from the rest of the Iraqi Army in its assessment and selection process. Recruits who did not meet tough standards were sent home. Only 389 of 508 Iraqis in the first group of applicants completed the training, and a similar selection percentage persisted as the unit expanded over time and became part of a larger Iraqi Special Operations Forces Brigade.²⁹ Coalition leaders also allowed the CJSOTF to equip the 36th Commando Battalion differently from the remainder of the Iraqi Army by allowing the battalion to use North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) weapons and equipment, to include M4 rifles, body armor, sniper rifles, and U.S. night-vision devices.³⁰ While training and equipping the commandos with NATO equipment took time and occurred gradually, it was a decision that would both enhance the unit’s capabilities and magnify its differences from other Iraqi Army units.

Even beyond the June 2004 transfer of sovereignty, the 36th Commando Battalion’s CJSOTF advisers retained key authorities over their protégés, including making hiring and firing decisions and controlling the unit’s pay, factors that reduced the problem of corruption that plagued many other Iraqi units.³¹ Unlike most other Iraqi units, the battalion’s advisers were paired with them throughout the organization’s entire history, from initial training through employment on the battlefield – a matching that continued across multiple American rotations. Over time the 36th Commando Battalion developed such skilled combat capabilities that some coalition advisers declared the only way to tell the Iraqi commandos from their CJSOTF counterparts was that the Americans tended to be taller. The 36th Commando Battalion’s abilities and will to fight in Najaf had been impressively atypical, hardly a performance on which to make broad assumptions about the future role of the Iraqi security forces in the campaign to secure and stabilize the country.

Operations in Samarra

After Najaf, the coalition commands turned their attention to the insurgent stronghold in Samarra, another of the seven cities the coalition judged to be crucial to conducting successful elections. The city’s situation was a volatile one, especially because it held one of Shi’a Islam’s four holiest shrines, the al-Askariyah Mosque, where the remains of the 10th and 11th Shi’a imams were buried and the point from which most Shi’a Muslims believe the 12th imam disappeared from the earth. However, Samarra was also a Sunni-majority city and former Ba’athist stronghold of 340,000 people that, by fall 2004, had fallen into insurgent hands. The sectarian issues involved and the town’s relative proximity to Baghdad meant that its position as an insurgent base was a threat to the January elections. Casey also judged that Samarra, like Najaf, was another “strategic opportunity for the [Iraqi Interim Government] to have success against insurgents and terrorists in a

Sunni area," all of which pointed toward a large-scale coalition operation to secure the city before 2004 was over.³²

Though the 1st Infantry Division had retaken the city in the April uprisings, Samarra's security situation had deteriorated as Combined Joint Task Force-7 (CJTF-7) withdrew U.S. units from Iraqi cities in May and June. In June 2004, just 2 months after the division had cleared Samarra, the city council president had been intimidated into resigning, the city's police force had defected, and the local Iraqi National Guard battalion commander had deserted, leaving his unit to disintegrate.³³ By fall 2004, only one CJSOTF operational detachment alpha (ODA) was stationed inside the city, with one battalion from the 1st Infantry Division garrisoned a 30-minute drive away, meaning the city was under neither coalition or government control.

Recognizing that the city needed to be retaken, Major General John Batiste's 1st Infantry Division conducted shaping operations from July through September in preparation for a large-scale assault. The shaping operations were designed to wear down insurgent forces by luring them into battle and thus enabling the coalition to understand better the insurgent networks. The division also received, at the last minute, six Iraqi Army and police battalions to lend additional legitimacy to its operations.

By the time the shaping operations had matured, the task of taking the city itself had become much simpler. On October 1, 2004, the division launched Operation BATON ROUGE, a 2-day clearing of the city by six U.S. battalions under its 2d Brigade Combat Team. In those 2 days of combat against a well-prepared enemy, the brigade combat team killed 127 insurgents and captured 128 more, while losing 1 Soldier killed and 8 wounded.³⁴ The long preparatory phase allowed the coalition troops to spare the city from significant destruction, and, as a result, civilian casualties were minimal. At the MNF-I level, Samarra seemed to validate the lessons of the Najaf model, especially in terms of the Iraqi role. Two of the six Iraqi battalions assigned to the operation fought fiercely. A Special Police Commando Battalion and the 36th Commando Battalion, supported by MNSTC-I and CJSOTF advisers, respectively, performed tasks that would have been politically sensitive for coalition troops, including clearing a hospital used by insurgents and forcibly entering the insurgent-held al-Askariyah Mosque. As soon as the heaviest fighting concluded, the 1st Infantry Division initiated 22 reconstruction projects valued at \$10 million to help garner popular support.³⁵ Unfortunately, obtaining long-term support and funding for reconstruction proved elusive, as future Shi'a-dominated Iraqi Governments were slow to provide national-level assistance to the Sunni-majority city.

At the tactical level, however, Samarra yielded some lessons that were contrary to MNF-I's plans. The 1st Infantry Division had learned that keeping cities secure required U.S. troops living in the city, not commuting to their area of operations from distant bases. Having been forced to cope with the results of what happened when no coalition forces were based in the city, after the battle the division moved forces back into Samarra and reopened outposts inside the city's confines.³⁶

THE SECOND BATTLE OF FALLUJAH, NOVEMBER 2004

Fallujah in Insurgent Hands

Buoyed by the success of combined operations in Najaf and Samarra, the coalition next focused on insurgent-held Fallujah, the city Casey had selected to be the last stronghold cleared before the elections because he believed it would be the most difficult.³⁷ Since the first battle of Fallujah in April 2004, the city had become a magnet for both Iraqi Sunni insurgents who wanted to join the resistance against the United States and foreign militants who sought to join what they considered a worldwide jihad. By the late summer of 2004, the Fallujah Brigade that had been left to secure the city in April had become a visible failure, with its various portions either ineffective or joining the insurgency. Ironically, the coalition-created Fallujah Brigade was effectively replaced by the Fallujah Resistance Brigade, a loose insurgent confederation directed by a Fallujah Mujahideen Shura Council comprised of leaders from 39 different insurgent organizations.³⁸ While no one leader controlled the council, Sheikh Abdullah Janabi, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and Fallujah native Omar Hadid were its dominant personalities. The council also enjoyed the support of prominent cleric Harith al-Dhari and his Association of Muslim Scholars, which considered itself the political wing of the Sunni insurgency.

Despite their operational collaboration, the loose confederation of Fallujah insurgents at times broke down in power struggles and disagreements over strategy and religious orthodoxy. Within Tawhid wal-Jihad, Omar Hadid, a Fallujah electrician who had risen to prominence as a battlefield commander, often clashed with the Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Other conflicts among the various groups at times escalated into violence. When the Albu Issa tribe attempted in July to set up a new Jordanian-trained police force in its tribal area, Sheikh Abdullah Janabi's men kidnapped the nephew of the Albu Issa sheikh as punishment, after which the Albu Issa tried, but failed, to assassinate Janabi.³⁹ Also in July, a dispute between the more pragmatic Janabi, who believed in limiting insurgent attacks to avoid a large-scale coalition response, and Zarqawi, who believed in striking the coalition whenever possible, devolved into fighting, with Janabi issuing a fatwa ordering the killing of Zarqawi's local emir.⁴⁰ Demonstrating how quickly alliances shifted, in August, Janabi's group cooperated with Zarqawi's Tawhid wal-Jihad to capture the compounds of the 505th and 506th Iraqi National Guard battalions near Fallujah. After defeating the two garrisons, the attacking insurgents tortured and killed several Iraqi National Guard leaders and converted the National Guard bases into insurgent headquarters. The executions of the National Guard leaders, who were members of the Albu Mar'ai tribe, led that tribe to change sides and support the coalition, demanding vengeance for the killings.⁴⁰ By September, the temporary alliance between Janabi and Tawhid wal-Jihad had broken down again, with Janabi openly critical of the group's more brutal methods and implementation of extreme religious standards.

As Zarqawi's Tawhid wal-Jihad gradually made Fallujah its headquarters, foreign fighters flocked to the city, swelling the number of insurgents there to as many as 4,000. Fallujans made up about 50 percent of this number, other Anbaris roughly 30 percent, and foreign fighters 20 percent.⁴² The rise of Tawhid wal-Jihad and other Salafi groups, as

well as the influx of foreign fighters, radicalized the insurgency in the city and led to the imposition of Sharia law and basic functions of an Islamic state in many neighborhoods. Religious police began patrolling the streets to promote virtue and punish vice; religious judges were appointed to rule over Sharia courts; and public punishments and executions became commonplace.⁴³ In the words of Luay Ali Hussein, a Shi'a civilian from Fallujah:

Foreign fighters began to drift into the city as things got tenser, Yemenis, Saudis, Moroccans, Palestinians, Syrians, Lebanese . . . thousands of them. They took over the whole city. . . . The foreigners were uneducated and had weird ideas about religion, like they had been brainwashed by fanatics. They forbid smoking, for example. Anyone caught with a cigarette would have his fingers chopped off. They would not allow vegetable sellers to display cucumbers and tomatoes next to each other, because they considered that too erotic . . . they would put underwear on sheep. They apparently thought it was against Islam to allow a female animal to expose her genitals.⁴⁴

Implementing Zarqawi's sectarian agenda, the jihadists began to intimidate and kill Shi'a civilians in Fallujah. "I never had any troubles being a Shi'a in Fallujah during all my years there," Luay Ali Hussein explained later. "And in the early days of the resistance, Iraqi Shi'a and Sunnis were working together just fine. But as the foreigners began to take over, Shi'a like me were pushed to the side . . . [and] eventually threatened by these outsiders."⁴⁵ After Sunni jihadists executed several of his Shi'a friends, Hussein fled to Baghdad and joined JAM, never to return to Fallujah. By September, the I MEF staff headquartered just outside Fallujah had clearly recognized this metastasis and characterized the city as "a safe haven for foreign fighters, terrorists, and insurgents, a cancer on the rest of Anbar Province."⁴⁶

The Politics of the Fallujah Operation

Mindful that political pressure had halted the April 2004 assault on Fallujah, coalition leaders in late 2004 were determined to lay a better political groundwork with their Iraqi Government counterparts ahead of the November operation. Paired with Negroponte, Casey began working to persuade Allawi of the need to retake the city. "[We have to] start together, stay together, finish together," Casey recalled telling Allawi. "If we start this, you've got to commit to me that you'll have the political support to finish it."⁴⁷ As part of his end of the bargain, Allawi delivered a series of emergency decrees to facilitate operations in Fallujah, including a mid-September edict that disbanded the Fallujah Brigade and the city's police force to simplify the identification of enemy fighters and avoid the optic of coalition forces fighting men in Iraqi Government uniforms.⁴⁸ On November 7, just before combat operations began, Allawi declared 60 days of emergency rule and a traffic ban in the city, as well as the closure of the borders with Syria and Jordan to make the arrival of insurgent reinforcements or the escape of insurgent leaders more difficult.⁴⁹ The Prime Minister also went on Iraqi television and radio to explain the government's actions.⁵⁰

Scarred by the information operations failures of the first Battle of Fallujah in April, when the media had depicted the fight against insurgents in the city in highly charged terms, Metz and other senior leaders made information operations a key component of the pending mission. Reporters were embedded with almost all key ground units to facilitate reporting that could discredit false insurgent claims of coalition war crimes. Allawi

also recognized the importance of the battle of perceptions, and observed to Casey that there was “a risk of the impression being given of an impending ‘U.S. invasion’ of Fallujah rather than a combined Iraqi/MNF(I) operation.”⁵¹ To counter this idea, Allawi and Casey agreed that Arabic media reporters should embed with Iraqi units taking part in the operation and an Iraqi general should serve as spokesperson for the operation and be the primary conduit to Arabic media outlets.⁵²

One target, in particular, would require special information operations handling. Fallujah’s hospital had been a rich source of insurgent propaganda during the April battle, when, as MNC-I Commander Metz explained:

the enemy would use [the hospital] as a safe haven every time we would strike the insurgency. They would claim all these atrocities and go to the hospital, and like Baghdad Bob [the Iraqi Minister of Information during the invasion], there was Dr. Bob that would just tell of all the atrocities which we knew were not true because we could watch the strikes with UAVs and watch the one or two people that were taken to the hospital instead of thirty.⁵³

Mindful of the hospital’s importance, coalition commanders developed early plans for the 36th Commando Battalion, supported by CJSOTF advisers, to seize the hospital during the opening phase of the operation and prevent its use once again by insurgent propagandists.

“AL FAJR” in Fallujah

Originally named PHANTOM FURY, the operation to retake Fallujah was renamed AL FAJR, Arabic for “new dawn,” at Prime Minister Allawi’s suggestion to emphasize that it was a combined Iraqi-coalition operation. In Casey’s conception, the operation was meant to secure the approaches to Baghdad and prevent car bomb factories and insurgent cells from sabotaging the election in the capital just a few weeks away.

By the time detailed operational planning for Al Fajr began, the senior Marine leadership of MNF-W had changed, with Major General Richard F. Natonski replacing Major General James Mattis as commander of the 1st Marine Division and Lieutenant General John F. Sattler replacing Lieutenant General James T. Conway as commander of I MEF and MNF-W. Natonski nested his intent for the operation within that of MNC-I: to eliminate the insurgent sanctuary, set the conditions for local control, and secure the approaches to Baghdad.⁵⁴ However, Sattler’s greatest concern, as well as the concern of MNC-I officers who had been scarred by the premature termination of the first Fallujah battle, was in generating sufficient combat power and resources for the operation. Concluding that the upcoming operation would require more than Regimental Combat Team (RCT) 1, already assigned to the Fallujah area, Sattler ordered Regimental Combat Team 7, originally assigned the stretch of the Euphrates Valley from the town of Hit to the Syrian border, to consolidate on Fallujah. Meanwhile, at the operational level, Metz and MNC-I ordered significant reinforcements to move to eastern Anbar. Mindful that the insurgents had cut the coalition’s supply lines in April, MNC-I assigned 2d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, to MNF-W to protect rear areas and lines of communications around Fallujah. MNC-I also committed the corps reserve, a Stryker battalion from Mosul, to assist 2d Brigade in establishing a cordon around Fallujah, freeing Natonski and his

Marines of the task of protecting their rear area as they focused on the city.⁵⁵ MNC-I and MNF-W also built a massive stockpile of supplies near Fallujah to avoid the logistical pressure that had come near to breaking the coalition in April. The stockpiling amounted to a rejection of the coalition's normal Walmart-style "just in time" logistics delivery, but as Natonski observed, "Walmart doesn't have to contend with ambushes or improvised explosive devices."⁵⁶



Source: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Corporal Ben Flores, Combat Camera (Released).

**Lieutenant General John F. Sattler, Commanding General, I MEF,
Speaks With Iraqi Army Soldiers at Camp Habbaniyah.⁵⁷**

Other units were drawn from elsewhere in Iraq and outside the theater. The 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, a battalion from the 1st Cavalry Division that had fought alongside the Marines during the battle of Najaf, was attached to Regimental Combat Team 7, while 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry Regiment, from the 1st Infantry Division in MND-NC was attached to RCT 1. The two Army battalions would provide much-needed armor capability that had been absent from the April battle, and a battalion of Army field artillery would provide additional fire support. In a rare move, British leaders deployed the United Kingdom's Black Watch Battle Group (a battalion task force) from Dhi Qar Province to the eastern portion of MNF-W's sector in north Babil, freeing the RCT 1 units there to join the Fallujah battle. However, in a demonstration of the challenges of coalition warfare, moving the battle group required Prime Minister Tony Blair's approval in a process that took nearly 3 weeks.⁵⁸



Source: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Corporal Daniel J. Klein (Released).

**Major General Richard F. Natonski, Commanding General,
1st Marine Division.⁵⁹**

Also joining MNF-W in Fallujah was the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit, CENTCOM's theater reserve that had been reconstituted after the commitment of the 11th MEU to Najaf. The 24th MEU's deployment was a short-notice alert that sent it to Iraq by aircraft and cargo ships rather than the normal mode of amphibious assault ships. The additional Marines went to north Babil Province to allow RCT 1 to concentrate its forces further on Fallujah.⁶⁰ A third MEU, the Okinawa-based 31st, which served as the theater reserve for the Pacific Command area of operations, was ordered to deploy rapidly to Iraq to provide additional reinforcements for the operation.⁶¹ Altogether, the three MEUs provided over 6,000 additional Marines to MNF-I, more than a full strength Army brigade combat team. Finally, six Iraqi battalions assembled to participate in the operation, two of which, the 36th Commando Battalion and a battalion from the Special Police Commando Brigade, had been involved in almost every coalition combat action in 2004.

The operation unfolded in three phases marked by far more deliberate preparations than had occurred in April. The first consisted of shaping actions, including air strikes and psychological and information operations to confuse the entrenched insurgents and kill key leaders. Special operations forces played a key role in this phase, driven, in part, by their recognition of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's rise to the top of the insurgency. Political anxieties within coalition headquarters and the Iraqi Government, still raw from April's truncated operation, led to a prohibition on ground assault missions into the city, so the special operators turned to precision manned and unmanned air strikes instead. Obtaining approval for these missions was difficult, as fear of civilian casualties led to approval levels that ranged from the MNF-I headquarters to Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld, and often targets disappeared before they could be struck. To speed

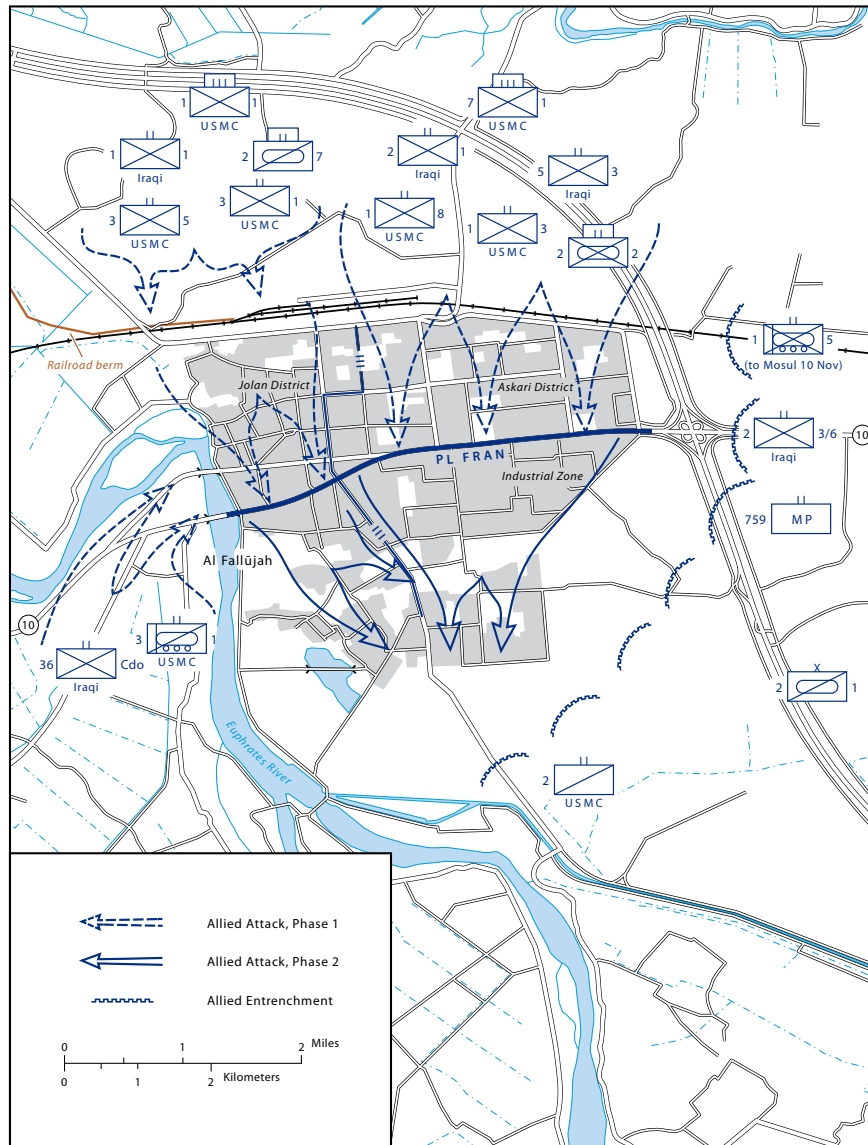
up the approval process, special operators found an innovative way to minimize collateral damage by pairing a Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) guidance system with the smallest bomb in the U.S. Air Force inventory and using a completely vertical angle of attack to drop the bomb. The result was a weapon that could flatten a single house with little damage to nearby buildings. With these changes made, approval authority was delegated to special operations forces for most missions, and they worked with the MNF-W headquarters to identify and strike key targets that would help in the coming battle.

Information operations also played a critical role in the first phase of the operation as the coalition sought to prevent scenes of civilian suffering that were prevalent during the April battle. Warned by leaflets and broadcasts of the impending assault on their town, the vast majority of Fallujah's civilian population fled. With the city mostly empty of civilians, MNF-W began the second phase of the operation, isolating Fallujah by seizing the peninsula, western bridges, and the city's hospital, while jamming communications within the town and cutting off its electricity.⁶²

On the evening of November 8, Marines and Soldiers began the third phase, the actual assault of the city, with RCTs 1 and 7 attacking abreast from north to south supported by the Army's 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, and 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry Regiment. Concerned that the railroad tracks and high berms on the north side of the city would be a barrier to armored vehicles, the assault force breached them, using a combination of combat engineers and close air support that included dropping 2,000-pound guided bombs, after which the lead elements entered the outskirts of the city early on the morning of November 9 (see Map 15).

Coalition analysts had estimated in October that 4,500 hard-core fighters were waiting in the city, against which MNF-I had gathered nearly 18,000 Soldiers, Marines, and special operators.⁶³ As the coalition troops moved into the city, they faced a well-entrenched enemy that had emplaced hundreds of IEDs to disrupt the assault, forcing the attackers to move slowly from house to house and block to block in urban fighting reminiscent of the Battle of Hue during the Vietnam war. The toll on tactical leaders was high. The 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry, lost its command sergeant major, while the company commander and executive officer for Company A were both killed, leaving its first sergeant in temporary command. In a show of special operations and conventional force collaboration, SEALs integrated their forces with Marine battalions to add momentum to the advance, a combination that proved highly successful with SEAL snipers achieving 66 confirmed kills during the battle.⁶⁴

Against this onslaught, the insurgents mounted a fluid defense, organized in small groups of three to six men equipped with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades. The insurgents originally planned to reposition their forces elsewhere in Anbar and north Babil before the battle to be able to open a second front as the coalition began its assault. However, the numerous coalition troops dedicated to the cordon around Fallujah trapped the insurgents inside the city.⁶⁵ The strength of the cordon and the speed at which it appeared surprised the insurgent leaders, who had expected a weak perimeter around the city similar to the one the coalition had emplaced during the April battle. Yet, while the cordon prevented the opening of a second front, it was not airtight, and Zarqawi, Janabi, and several other Mujahideen Shura Council leaders escaped on November 8.



Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 15. Operation AL FAJR: Second Battle of Al Fallujah, November 2004.

As the main effort of the coalition assault, RCT 1 and 2d Battalion, 7th Cavalry, attacked the western portion of the city, which included the densely packed Jolan district; while RCT 7 and 2d Battalion, 2d Infantry, mounted a supporting strike in the eastern portion. With their M1 tanks and M2 Bradley fighting vehicles, the Army battalions proved to be much quicker at clearing terrain than the Marine commanders had expected, arriving at Highway 10, the city's main east-west road, which coalition planners had named Phase Line Fran, by 2200 on November 9.⁶⁶ The rapid advance led MNF-W to scrap its initial plan for RCT 7 to pivot west to clear the area south of Highway 10 alone, while RCT 1 consolidated north of the highway.⁶⁷ Instead, on November 11, RCT 1 continued clearing

south, shoulder to shoulder with RCT 7. As the insurgents' operating space contracted, their fighting cells grew in size, sometimes reaching 50 fighters, many of whom chose to fight to the death rather than flee.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, though MNF-W had hoped that the rebuilt Iraqi Army units would independently mop up insurgents that had remained behind in the northern part of the city, the Iraqi units proved unequal to that task, forcing each RCT to leave a full Marine battalion north of the highway to do the job.⁶⁹ By November 13, MNF-W had crushed virtually all organized resistance, but fighting would continue for weeks as small cells of insurgents who had remained behind were gradually rooted out in sustained search and attack missions.

The Fall of Mosul

As the assault on Fallujah proceeded, the coalition was unexpectedly spared the worldwide attention that had undermined the April 2004 operation. The sudden death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on November 11 dominated the Arabic-language airwaves and distracted the Arab world and much of the international media from the events in Fallujah. Perceiving that the coalition had been given a window of opportunity in information operations, Casey pressed Sattler to take advantage by accelerating the operation, telling the MNF-W commander, "we've got to get this over before they put Yasser in the ground."⁷⁰ Despite the relative dearth of international attention, however, the battle in Fallujah was sending shockwaves through Iraq and, as it had done in April, spilling over into fighting elsewhere. In Hadithah, soon after RCT 7 had left its area of operations, insurgents seized control and executed the town's police force on a local soccer field, sending a warning to tribes in Anbar that cooperating with U.S. troops was cause for severe punishment.⁷¹

The most significant spillover was hundreds of kilometers away in Ninawa Province. On November 10, fewer than 48 hours after U.S. troops began their assault on Fallujah, fighters from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's organization and other Sunni insurgent groups mounted a coordinated attack on Mosul, taking advantage of the coalition's economy of force posture there. The attack led to the shocking collapse of Mosul's government security forces within 24 hours.

Though the fall of Mosul happened quickly, it had been months in the making. In the time since Brigadier General Carter F. Ham's Task Force Olympia had replaced then Major General David H. Petraeus's much larger 101st Airborne Division in early 2004, Sunni insurgents had realized that Ninawa Province was an economy of force area for the coalition and had begun to flow on the path of least resistance toward Mosul. Facing insurgent threats, Ninawa's police forces became reluctant to investigate the insurgent activity. Mosul University, to which the United States had contributed \$3 million, fell under the control of fundamentalist Sunnis who imposed gender segregation and banned coalition force visits. Intimidation hollowed out Iraqi Army units, with one Iraqi National Guard battalion experiencing 100 percent turnover in 2 months due to soldiers being absent without leave, and another battalion losing its commander when he resigned under threat.⁷² By midsummer 2004, Zarqawi's fighters, Ansar al-Islam, and other insurgent groups had taken control of the strategic city of Tel Afar, about 80 kilometers west of Mosul astride the main highway to Syria.

As Tel Afar became a staging base for foreign fighters entering from Syria, Task Force Olympia had mounted an operation to retake the city of 200,000 people. In September 2004's Operation BLACK TYPHOON, the 3d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division (Stryker), cleared Tel Afar in a difficult battle resembling the April 2004 operation in Fallujah. The intense fighting resulted in 102 insurgent deaths, the destruction of a portion of the city, and the exodus of almost half of the population.⁷³ The level of destruction stoked international and local discontent, with the Turkish Government accusing U.S. forces of killing 58 Turkoman civilians during the operation.⁷⁴ Despite the operation's costs, once it had ended, the thinly stretched U.S. brigade had withdrawn from the city to a base 10 kilometers away, allowing Zarqawi's jihadists and other insurgents to reestablish themselves.

By mid-October, Ham recognized that his command was in grave danger. On October 18, he sent an urgent warning to Metz, the MNC-I commander, that Mosul could fall to insurgents at any moment if the coalition did not take immediate action.⁷⁵ However, with all available forces committed to Fallujah, including CENTCOM's theater reserve, Metz had no troops to provide. On October 29, Ham again signaled his concerns, this time briefing Casey that "the point of collapse is very near. . . . Mosul, the leading city in the north, is in jeopardy of being lost to Anti-Iraqi Forces' control due to neglect by the Iraqi Interim Government."⁷⁶

Thus the Sunni insurgents' assault on Mosul on November 10 had been neither a hasty target of opportunity nor entirely unexpected. As Al Fajr's lengthy shaping operations unfolded and coalition troops massed around Fallujah, Zarqawi and other insurgent commanders had exploited the light coalition footprint in Mosul to deliver a counterpunch and relieve pressure from their fellow insurgents in Fallujah. Interrogations later revealed that the insurgents had decided to focus on Mosul out of a belief that "they couldn't stop things in Baghdad or disrupt the election significantly, because there were seven or eight brigades in Baghdad [but] there was [only] one brigade up north."⁷⁷

On November 10, the Sunni insurgents quickly overran much of Mosul and recaptured Tel Afar, ransacking and burning government buildings and seizing five of Mosul's Tigris River bridges. Mosul's security forces, which the coalition had been training for nearly a year, disintegrated as insurgents moved from one police station to the next, demanding the surrender of the police at each station, and seizing their weapons and equipment. After only 2 days of fighting, an active insurgent force of 400-500 with a support base of 2,000-2,500 had driven 80 percent of the city's 4,000 police officers from their posts, leaving about 35 stations unmanned or destroyed.⁷⁸ Following reports that some of the police officers had supported the insurgents' assault, the Iraqi Government fired Mosul's police chief, Brigadier General Mohammed Barhawi.⁷⁹ Ham later recalled, "We did in fact lose control."⁸⁰

The fall of Mosul forced MNC-I to scramble to turn back the insurgent counterattack. Responding with operational-level maneuver again to reposition his scarce resources, Metz directed his corps reserve, the 1st Battalion, 5th Infantry Regiment (Stryker), to leave the cordon around Fallujah and return to Mosul—from which it had come just days before—within 72 hours.⁸¹ After this move, however, MNC-I did not reconstitute its corps reserve because there was not an uncommitted maneuver unit in the entire theater. With no other coalition units immediately available, commanders instead committed two

of the Iraqi Interior Ministry's Special Police Commando Battalions, paramilitary units with a mission similar to that of the Italian Carabinieri.

The battle to retake Mosul would last nearly a week. Given the initial confusion, the two U.S. battalions in Mosul, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, and 3d Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, first had to determine which police stations had fallen and which were still held by the Iraqi security forces.⁸² By November 13, the two units had gained a better understanding of the insurgent situation and began conducting battalion-level clearing operations, with 1st Battalion in west Mosul, and 3d Battalion in east Mosul as the commandos helped recapture police stations throughout the city.⁸³ Equipped as light infantry, the Iraqi police commandos rode into battle in unarmored pickup trucks provided by MNSTC-I and quickly ran into trouble in west Mosul. On their way to rescue Iraqi police trapped in the Four West police station on November 14, a quick reaction force of Iraqi commandos and their U.S. adviser, Colonel James H. Coffman, were encircled and almost overrun. Nearly out of ammunition and surrounded by 60 wounded and dead Iraqi commandos,⁸⁴ Coffman rallied the Iraqis to beat back several attacks until U.S. Strykers arrived, actions for which Coffman would receive the Distinguished Service Cross.⁸⁵ Four Americans died during the battles to clear the city, compared to 71 insurgents confirmed killed.⁸⁶ While insurgents no longer controlled the terrain outright, intermittent fighting would continue in Mosul through the end of December 2004.

The Marez Dining Facility Bombing and the Combat Outpost Tampa Attack

To restore sufficient order in Mosul to allow the January 2005 elections to proceed there, MNC-I committed three additional infantry battalions to MNB-NW, one each from the 82d Airborne Division, the 25th Infantry Division, and the Oregon National Guard.⁸⁷ After the elections, the units would return to their parent brigade combat teams and render Ninawa Province an economy of force once again. Recognizing that this force would not be a long-term solution to the challenges of Mosul, Casey requested additional special operations forces for Ninawa Province. To meet Casey's request, the special operations task force in Iraq grew in size, with the new elements going directly to Mosul. There they established a collaborative relationship with the conventional force leaders in MNB-NW as had been done in MNF-W. However, the clearing of the city and the arrival of the reinforcing troops did not render the Sunni insurgents of Mosul impotent. On December 21, an Ansar al Sunna suicide bomber wearing an Iraqi military uniform blew himself up in the dining facility at Forward Operating Base Marez, the largest coalition base in Mosul. The bombing killed 21, including 14 American Soldiers, and wounded 75, making it the most deadly single attack on U.S. troops since the invasion.⁸⁸

The following week brought another large insurgent attack. In the wake of the Iraqi security forces' collapse in Mosul, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry, Commander Lieutenant Colonel Erik Kurilla, decided to reverse course on MNF-I's directives to consolidate forces and instead established platoon-sized combat outposts throughout west Mosul.⁸⁹ Regaining footholds in the insurgent-dominated territory was not easy. The battalion fought multiple battles during December, culminating in a December 29 assault on Combat Outpost Tampa in which a suicide bomber rammed a dump truck filled with artillery shells into the base entry point, followed by an assault force of at least 50 insurgents. The

outpost's relief force was ambushed, but after the arrival of close air support and additional forces, the American troops beat back the attack. During the fighting, the battalion suffered 1 Soldier killed and 20 wounded. Kurilla's men would be awarded 3 Silver Stars and 11 Bronze Stars for valor.⁹⁰

After the December 2004 fighting, insurgent strength in Mosul waned considerably, leaving the insurgency incapable of complex attacks within the city limits for most of the following year. Nevertheless, the Marez bombing, in particular, had lasting consequences. That the Marez attacker penetrated U.S. facilities in the guise of an Iraqi soldier had the undoubtedly intended effect of driving a wedge between American troops and their Iraqi security forces counterparts in Mosul. As one officer in the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (Stryker), described it, the attack "caused many U.S. Soldiers to distrust the ISF, and by default become less interested in training them, escorting them around the battlefield, and integrating them into their mission planning."⁹¹ This newfound mistrust led to less interaction between the Iraqi security forces and coalition units, which in turn began a downward spiral for some of Mosul's Iraqi units. "On the flip side," the same officer continued:

... the 11th IRA [Iraqi Regular Army Battalion] soldiers felt this distrust from their U.S. counterparts, felt the reality of fanatical violence hit extremely close to home, and they began to debate whether or not they were truly dedicated to the cause for which they were fighting and dying. Many IRA soldiers departed on leave and never returned. Many simply deserted under the cover of darkness. ... By the second week of January 2005, the 11th IRA had only two officers and twenty-one soldiers remaining.⁹²

The aftereffects of the highly publicized Marez bombing were felt throughout the country. The attack led local coalition commanders in many places to restrict Iraqis' access to coalition facilities, including some that had previously been shared. As a result, Iraqi security forces members on many shared bases were no longer allowed to eat in the same dining facilities as their coalition counterparts, and units in many areas found themselves unable to adhere to the old adage that good military advisers must be willing to eat, sleep, and fight alongside the soldiers they are advising.

Sunset of Al Fajr

Back in Fallujah, the elimination of Iraq's worst insurgent safe haven had come at a relatively high cost for U.S. troops, with 57 Marines and 6 Soldiers killed and more than 600 American troops wounded.⁹³ The original estimate of insurgent strength had been relatively accurate, as MNF-I detained 2,052 insurgents during the battle and killed an estimated 2,175.⁹⁴ As a testament to the intensity of the fighting, the November Battle of Fallujah, by itself, accounted for a quarter of all insurgents killed by coalition forces in 2004.⁹⁵ Information gleaned from captured insurgents yielded surprising insights into the insurgency in Anbar. Contrary to coalition officials' expectations, nearly 60 percent of the detainees were married, and a similar percentage had former military experience. Most were young, with 62 percent under the age of 30. Also surprisingly, only 7 percent claimed to be unemployed, meaning that economic dislocation was not a prime motivator. One-third of those captured were from Ramadi, one-quarter from Fallujah itself, and only 6 percent from Baghdad. These characteristics painted a picture of disaffected

Sunnis who supported the insurgency part-time principally for political, ideological, or religious reasons and only secondarily as a way to supplement their incomes and support their families.⁹⁶ In essence, the data reconfirmed MNF-I's firmly held belief that they had a "Sunni problem."

At Al Fajr's end, the coalition found itself in possession of a city full of rubble. The level of insurgent resistance throughout the operation meant there was significantly more collateral damage in Fallujah than had been the case in Najaf or Samarra. The assaulting coalition troops had used 386 close air support strikes and more than 14,000 indirect fire rounds against targets around the city.⁹⁷ More than 60 of the town's 200 mosques and 20 percent of its residences were destroyed, with many more homes damaged.⁹⁸ Four months after the operation, only 30 percent of the city's population had returned.⁹⁹ As coalition and Iraqi troops searched buildings and neighborhoods in the battle's aftermath, the stunning degree to which Fallujah had become an insurgent sanctuary became clear.¹⁰⁰ In addition to insurgent fighting positions and bunkers, U.S. troops found 568 large weapons caches, 24 bomb factories, and 13 command and control nodes spread throughout the city. They also discovered torture chambers and sophisticated audio-visual production facilities used to create insurgent propaganda.¹⁰¹ Insurgents had used 47 mosques as fighting positions, and, though this action invalidated the mosques' protected status under the laws of warfare, jihadist propaganda had highlighted mosque damage in inflammatory media releases picked up by some regional media outlets.

The Battle of Fallujah had a significant impact on the insurgency's leadership. During the fighting, coalition troops killed Omar Hadid, Zarqawi's operations chief – and rival – who had remained behind in Fallujah to lead the fight. Hadid's death eliminated Zarqawi's only native Iraqi competitor for the leadership of Tawhid wal-Jihad, and Zarqawi chose to assume Hadid's duties personally to cement his control over the organization. With many other Sunni insurgent groups weakened decisively by their losses in Fallujah, Zarqawi and Tawhid wal-Jihad moved to the forefront of the Sunni resistance, a position they would not cede for the remainder of the war. Those insurgents who survived the battle and managed to slip through the cordon around the city resettled in areas where they perceived the coalition was weak, including Ramadi, the Triangle of Death in north Babil, Hadithah, and Al Qa'im and other border areas.¹⁰² With the influx of fighters from Fallujah, Hadithah deteriorated so quickly that by early 2005, insurgents had set up a camp to recruit and train replacements for fighters killed in Al Fajr.¹⁰³

Despite Fallujah's yearlong history as key insurgent terrain, coalition leaders did not leave a large footprint of U.S. forces in the city to take part in holding and reconstructing it. Almost as quickly as additional combat power had surged in for Al Fajr, it surged back out. All of 2d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, departed Fallujah less than 1 month after the operation concluded, while RCT 7, which had left vast tracts of western Anbar uncovered for the battle, returned to its original battle space. The quick reduction of U.S. combat power led some of the remaining tactical leaders in Fallujah to fear that the coalition's gains in the city might be short-lived. Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey R. Chessani, RCT 1's operations officer, encapsulated this concern when he wrote to his commander, Colonel Michael Shupp, that it was premature to think the insurgency in Fallujah had been destroyed:

Why would higher headquarters want to create a vacuum like this after successfully crushing an insurgency that has been a thorn for more than a year? I understand there are other fish to fry in Iraq, that we are not the only show. What I do not understand is why higher headquarters would not want to ensure there was some semblance of stability in Fallujah before they walked away from Fallujah. . . . They are going to walk away thinking they did their part and the smoldering heap of rubble that is Fallujah is going to start sparking again because higher headquarters failed to follow through with the resources we needed to smother the embers. Then they are going to ask us why we let the embers become a fire again.¹⁰⁴

The drawdown of combat power in the city, Chessani concluded, amounted to “snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.”¹⁰⁵ However, with just 18 U.S. combat brigades in the country and plans to downgrade the number to 13 by March 2005, MNC-I had few good options.¹⁰⁶ Massing two additional brigades’ worth of combat power in Fallujah had already incurred significant operational risk by exposing other areas to insurgent counterattack, as the fall of Mosul had illustrated. Chessani was right, and the situation in eastern Anbar would see another deterioration in 2005-2006 that would eventually require additional clearing operations, but being right mattered little in the absence of sufficient troops.

Lessons from the Insurgent Sanctuary Cities

For coalition commanders, the planned operations in Najaf, Samarra, and Fallujah, and the unexpected one in Mosul yielded a number of lessons, both good and bad. After an initial year of tension between special operators and conventional units over uncoordinated special operations raids and territorial responsibility, Operation AL FAJR brought a significant advance in collaboration between the two. Special operations commanders attached liaison officers to conventional units and began weekly synchronization meetings with conventional commanders. Discarding past practices, special operations commanders decided that maintaining the trust of conventional battle-space owners was more important than the results of any single special operations force (SOF) mission, and for the first time, SOF commanders began to forgo missions based on battle-space owner preference. The relationship between SOF and conventional forces was far from perfect, but it had begun moving toward the highly efficient working relationships that would prevail later in the war and in Afghanistan.

In tactical terms, Fallujah had also shown the value of armor and mechanized forces in urban combat. The Marine infantry units assaulting Fallujah had benefited from the support of the tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles in the accompanying Army mechanized battalions, especially during the initial entry into the city and in breaching obstacles thereafter.¹⁰⁷ The initial MNF-W plan had called for the mechanized battalions simply to cordon the city, but as their value became apparent, the Army units played a key role in clearing the city.¹⁰⁸ The importance of heavy forces in urban environments was an unexpected lesson that was validated repeatedly throughout the war.

In other areas, the coalition’s approaches had not worked as well. While Iraqi troops fared better in November than they had in the first Battle of Fallujah, when many had refused even to deploy to the city, their combat contributions in Operation AL FAJR were once again not as significant as coalition leaders had hoped. With the exception of the 36th Commando Battalion that cleared insurgent strongpoints in mosques and assaulted

high-value targets, the remainder of the Iraqi units were used in supporting activities such as following behind the American units to conduct searches and process detainees. Though MNF-I hailed the Iraqi troops' contribution, Natonski judged after the battle that the Iraqi units were far from standing on their own:

[T]hey [had] no means to communicate from a battalion to a brigade or from a battalion down to a company in any distance. Their vehicles, although the units that came down to Fallujah had trucks with some armoring on it, . . . are ill equipped. Ultimately to be successful, as an independent unit they need to have command and control and be able to exercise as a staff, but they also need combat service support. . . . The Iraqi security forces are dependent on us for food and water, ammunition and supplies and even health [care].¹⁰⁹

Finally, when put to the test, the practice of using a "working operational reserve" had simply amounted to creating a risky gap in one area of operations to fill a hole in another. MNC-I's after action review of the Najaf battle noted that "the concept of a 'working reserve' does not provide for rapid employment. The operational reserve can deploy faster than 96 hours if it is not committed to missions, but this adds risk to the stability of Baghdad."¹¹⁰ This was a lesson that was repeatedly relearned over the next 2 years as "working" operational reserves were called on to support emergencies, leaving the terrain that they normally covered at risk.

The fall 2004 operations in Najaf, Samarra, and Fallujah cleared Shi'a and Sunni militants from the major insurgent sanctuaries that had threatened to derail the critical January 2005 elections. By December 2004, coalition leaders were generally confident that the impending voting could take place, an issue that had been in serious doubt when Casey took command the previous summer. Coalition troops had shown that even the best-entrenched insurgent groups could not hold terrain in the face of a concerted coalition offensive and that the coalition commanders had greatly improved the integration of the most effective Iraqi security forces units into coalition operations. MNF-I had shown it could blunt insurgent propaganda and had managed to build a partnership with Iraqi political leaders in vital security decision-making. Together these factors exorcised some of the demons of April 2004.

Even so, the battles against the insurgent cities had been incomplete, and "the fight to the elections" had highlighted some of the coalition's military limits. Moqtada Sadr and his forces had lived to fight another day, while the Sunni insurgency, sensing the coming blow on Fallujah, had been able to shift its forces operationally and overrun Mosul, arguably Iraq's most important Sunni city. The battle in Fallujah had revealed that the coalition's combat power was spread thin, with no buffer and no real operational reserve. It would now be in the hands of Iraqi voters and political parties to determine whether the fall's costly fighting could be parlayed into lasting stability.

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CHAPTER 15

TRANSFORMATION IN A TIME OF WAR, JANUARY-APRIL 2005

By the end of December 2004, Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) had successfully cleared what its leaders saw as the largest hurdle to the holding of elections on the United Nations (UN) timeline. Despite the setback in Mosul, the coalition had neutralized the insurgent safe havens, allowing the voting to take place on time with few disruptions. The aftermath of the elections was steeped with change. The interim government of Ayad Allawi would transition into a lame-duck caretaker as the major political factions entered into an intense competition over the premiership.

At the same time, another near-complete rotation of MNF-I's forces would bring new frictions inside the coalition. The Army's continuation of its planned transformation resulted in the deployment to Iraq of National Guard and Reserve forces to an unprecedented degree—far beyond the limited operational reserve role for which they had been prepared. The coalition also developed a new campaign plan that transformed the mission in Iraq, changing its focus from defeating the insurgency to the setting of conditions for transitioning responsibility to the Iraqi security forces (ISF) and Iraqi Government. In the process, MNF-I refocused many coalition units on an advisory mission, a role the U.S. military had largely not performed since the Vietnam war.

As coalition forces were transforming, so, too, was the insurgency. Shi'a resistance groups, bloodied by nearly a year of costly failed uprisings, were dramatically changing their organization and operating modes. The Sunni insurgency, reeling from losses during the November battles in Fallujah and elsewhere, was also evolving into a new threat as Islamist extremist organizations eclipsed militant groups associated with the former regime.

All three of these principal groups—coalition, Shi'a insurgency, and Sunni insurgency—were responding to the same rapidly changing operating environment, as well as to the tempestuous waxing and waning of Iraqi public opinion, with each group attempting to adapt to the changing conditions faster than its foes.

THE JANUARY 2005 TRANSITIONAL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

Securing the Elections

As the elections approached, General George W. Casey, Jr., judged that more combat forces would be required to overcome what he expected would be an intense insurgent effort to thwart the voting and deal the coalition a decisive political defeat. The potential threats were great enough that some coalition leaders were concerned the elections might not actually occur. MNC-I Commander Lieutenant General Thomas F. Metz, for example, believed that "if there was ever really a time, like the Tet of 1968, the enemy would expend all tactical resources for a strategic win, it would [be to] . . . crash the election."¹ Casey believed that coalition forces were "operating in a window of vulnerability" because of the feebleness of the ISF, Iraq's economy, and its weak governmental capacity

and that terrorists and insurgents would seek to take advantage of that window.² As a result, in late October 2004, Casey requested extensions to the year-long deployment of nearly 6,500 Soldiers: a 2-month extension for the entire 2d Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, in Multi-National Division-Baghdad (MND-B) and a 2-week extension for elements of the 1st Infantry Division in Multi-National Division-North Central (MND-NC).³ In early December, the 2d Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, in MND-NC and Multi-National Force-West's (MNF-W) 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) in Najaf also received 2-month extensions, increasing the number of extended troops to over 15,000. Along with the extended units, two parachute infantry battalions from the division-ready brigade of the 82d Airborne Division deployed to Iraq in early December for a 4-month period spanning the elections.

The decision to expand the footprint of American Soldiers, which ran counter to the core concepts of the campaign plan, was a difficult one for Casey, who worried that the additional deployments might cause the Iraqis to question the legitimacy of the Iraqi Interim Government. Given the threat to the political process, however, he ultimately decided it was a risk worth taking.⁴ These decisions brought the number of U.S. forces in Iraq to over 150,000, the highest level since the invasion.⁵

The election itself was a complex logistical problem, with more than 6,000 polling stations and 14 million eligible voters to protect.⁶ On top of the challenge of such large raw numbers, all deliveries of ballots and voting equipment had to be coordinated with multiple election monitoring organizations to ensure the transparency and legitimacy of the vote. The delivery of ballots and equipment left no room for error because a shortage or compromise of ballots on election day could have strategic implications. Election support activities were sometimes costly. As part of these efforts to secure polling sites, ballots, and the overall electoral process, a Marine CH-53 Super Stallion crashed in a sandstorm on January 25, killing 31 in what became the coalition's single largest casualty-producing event of the war. The loss of six other Americans in separate incidents on the same day also made it the deadliest day for U.S. troops since the start of the war.⁷

In advance of the elections, both the coalition and the Iraqi authorities took extra measures for security. MNC-I directed subordinate units to increase their operations in order to kill or capture insurgents who posed a threat to the voting. Information that coalition troops in normal times would not have acted on because of its quality now generated operations to take as many potential threats off the street as possible and throw the insurgency off balance. At the same time, Iraqi Interior Minister Falah Naqib put in place tough security measures that included a nighttime curfew, a ban on carrying weapons, and driving restrictions that made swaths of the country off limits for vehicles. Iraq's borders were also closed on January 29 as an additional measure to prevent foreign fighters from infiltrating and disrupting the elections. General Babakir Zebari, the chief of staff of the Iraqi Joint Forces, suspended leave for all Iraqi forces from January 25 through the elections, a measure that significantly increased the number of Iraqi troops available for election security. Because Iraqi soldiers traditionally took 1 week of home leave each month, one-quarter of the Iraqi forces would have been off duty on election day without Zebari's order.⁸

To ensure the physical security of elections and showcase the effectiveness of the ISF, two rings of security would surround voting sites. An outer ring of coalition forces would

stop any larger-scale attacks, while an inner ring within sight of the actual polling stations would be comprised exclusively of ISF, thereby putting an Iraqi face on the security band that Iraqis would see.

These preparations were for good reasons. In the final weeks leading up to the election, Sunni insurgents made concerted efforts to intimidate voters into not participating and derail the overall process. On December 30, Ansar al Sunna, the Islamic Army in Iraq, and the Mujahideen Army jointly warned Iraqis they faced death as apostates if they participated in the elections, after which the entire 700-person electoral commission in embattled Mosul promptly resigned.⁹ The insurgents also continued their attacks on political leaders and infrastructure as a way to undermine the legitimacy of the new Iraqi Government and derail the electoral process. On January 4, insurgents assassinated the governor of Baghdad Province, Ali al-Haidari, the most senior Iraqi official killed in over 6 months.¹⁰ On January 7, insurgents caused a brief nationwide power blackout by attacking transmission lines in Tikrit and the Bayji power plant.¹¹ On January 23, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi joined the insurgent chorus, calling candidates “demi-idols” and declaring those who voted to be kuffar, or apostates, who could be legally killed without penalty. Zarqawi also claimed that the elections were a coalition conspiracy to bring the Shi’a to power.¹² On January 27, the eve of the elections, insurgents blew up a school chosen to be a polling station in Baghdad and posted a video of the execution of a candidate on Prime Minister Ayad Allawi’s electoral list.¹³

The Decision Not to Delay the Elections

The biggest threat to successful elections came not from the insurgency, but from the political process itself. As election day approached, various Sunni politicians and political factions, including Iraqi Interim President Ghazi al-Yawar, approached MNF-I, requesting the election be postponed so they could mobilize additional Sunni participation. Fearing the possibility of a boycott, Sunni leaders had come to realize that the most significant pitfall of Iraq’s election was the nationwide single district, single list system. If Sunni Arabs boycotted the vote, the single district meant a national Parliament would be formed anyway, and Sunnis would be effectively excluded from the process of constructing the new Iraqi constitution, a result with potentially permanent consequences. “This election has a unique role of drafting a constitution,” Yawar told reporters. “How can you draft a constitution unless all ethnicities, sects, religions, and political ideologies are included?”¹⁴ By late November, with fighting in Anbar and Ninawa still ongoing, 15 Iraqi political parties from across the Sunni Arab and Kurdish political groupings had formally requested an election delay. Those urging delay included Interim Prime Minister Allawi, who worried that the devastation that had been wrought on Fallujah during Operation AL FAJR, a mere 6 weeks before the elections, would deter Sunnis from participating.¹⁵

Despite Allawi’s and the Sunnis’ requests, U.S. leaders decided to move ahead with the elections as scheduled. In a joint letter to Allawi on November 29, Casey and Ambassador John Negroponte stressed that “a decision to delay the election will unavoidably be understood by everyone as military success for the insurgency and a counterbalance

to the success of the battle for Fallujah. In other words, having announced that we were battling to provide room and space for the election we will in essence be saying that that effort has failed, at least for the moment.”¹⁶ Postponing the election would also have been difficult to sell to Grand Ayatollah Sistani and other Shi’a leaders who were clamoring for elections they expected would cement a Shi’a political majority. The letter also noted that asking for additional extensions for forces whose deployment had already been extended for the elections was extremely difficult. During one MNF-I meeting, Casey had dryly opined that an extension should not be granted in hopes that political conditions would improve because “rarely does anything in this country get better with time.”¹⁷

The Vote and the Boycott

On January 30, election day, many of the senior coalition leaders held their breath as polling sites opened, unsure that Iraqis would show up to vote. Ahead of the elections, several estimates from the intelligence community had predicted that the elections simply were not going to be able to happen.¹⁸ But despite 108 reported attacks on election day against polling stations, roughly 8.5 million Iraqis had voted, a 58 percent turnout.¹⁹ The decision to generate Iraqi troops rapidly to secure the voting paid off. Having been trained to the standard that had been decided upon in MNF-I and MNSTC-I’s summer 2004 baseline review, the Iraqi Army successfully functioned as platoons and held the inner cordon around polling sites. Deterred by the Iraqi forces and blunted by Casey’s and Metz’s plans, insurgent groups were simply unable to prevent the vote. For the American troops who witnessed the voting, the Iraqi population’s bravery in the face of insurgent threats was astonishing, as was their determination. Because of the bans on driving, many Iraqis walked for miles for the opportunity to vote in their country’s first democratically held election in decades.

To a degree, MNF-I’s broader strategy of fighting to the elections had succeeded, and at the operational level, the Sunni insurgency was reeling from the loss of its Fallujah sanctuary and thousands of fighters. During December 2004, insurgent attacks in Anbar fell precipitously to 50 percent of what they had been before Operation AL FAJR, and insurgents were unable to mount attacks that would effectively shut down the election.²⁰ The bans on driving and the national curfew were especially effective, and the attacks the Ramadi Shura Council had planned to launch into Baghdad, as well as plans to use car bombs against voters in Fallujah, simply could not take place as a result.²¹

For American Soldiers, the sight of millions of Iraqis voting in the first free elections in 54 years was a wonderful, feel-good moment akin to an earlier generation’s liberation of Europe. One brigade commander in Baghdad later described the event as “the single most professionally inspirational day of my life.”²² The elections produced nearly unbridled optimism among many in the coalition that the campaign plan had been the correct path to follow – that the elections had, as coalition leaders described it, “locked in irreversible momentum” that gave the Iraqis “an alternative to the insurgency.”²³



Source: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Staff Sergeant Jim Goodwin (Released).

Iraqi Police Display Their Ink-Stained Fingers to Show That They Voted During the Election.²⁴

In terms of creating a new government, however, the January elections were inconclusive. Allawi's Iraqi National Accord had clearly lost, garnering only 40 seats representing 14 percent of the vote, but among the winners, there was no consensus on who would replace him as Prime Minister. The United Iraqi Alliance, a Shi'a Islamist grouping that had secured the endorsement of Grand Ayatollah Sistani, had clearly won, with 140 seats and 58 percent of the popular vote, but the group was far from monolithic.²⁵ It was an amalgam of various Shi'a Islamist factions: Sistani supporters, the Da'wa Party, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), a handful of smaller parties, and even Sadrist who had joined the political process despite Moqtada Sadr's calls for a boycott. Because seating a president and Prime Minister required a two-thirds majority of the seats in the National Assembly, the United Iraqi Alliance needed to caucus with the coalition of Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Alliance, which had earned 75 seats and 26 percent of the vote.²⁶ As a result of the fragile alliances within and among the various parties that had to be formed, a full 4 months would pass before the parties would agree on a new Prime Minister and cabinet. The long negotiation created a significant loss in political momentum for the Iraqi Government and an extended lame-duck period for Allawi, who, by the time his coalition lost the elections, had governed for just 7 months.

As Allawi, Interim President Ghazi al-Yawar, and other Sunni leaders had expected, millions of Sunni Arabs boycotted the election. Casey's strategy of clearing seven key insurgent-dominated cities had allowed the elections to take place, but they had not created an environment that encouraged Sunnis to vote. In Ninawa, voter turnout was only 17 percent, most of whom were Kurdish voters.²⁷ In all of Sunni-majority Anbar, only 16,682 Iraqis voted, about 2 percent of registered voters.²⁸ Sunnis boycotted for a variety of reasons, some, in a bizarre example of how conspiracy theories can trump reality in the Middle East, entered the election period convinced that Sunni Arabs were actually a demographic majority in Iraq, and that Saddam Hussein had perpetuated a myth of the Shi'a majority as a bogeyman to instill fear among Sunnis and create a rationale for his rule.²⁹ Even if they did not vote, many Sunnis believed they would so outnumber the Shi'a that the elections would be discredited by their absence, and the Sunnis would then naturally win any ensuing sectarian conflict. Others were swayed by calls from insurgent leaders for a boycott or were driven off by insurgent threats and intimidation. Still others, particularly tribal leaders in Anbar, supported the boycott because they feared elections would upend their traditional standing and influence.³⁰

In the weeks after the election, the extent of the Sunnis' miscalculation became clear. Their boycott guaranteed the election spoils would go to Shi'a Islamist and Kurdish nationalist parties whose aims were antithetical to those of the Sunnis. Of 275 seats in the transitional national assembly that would write their country's constitution and shepherd the country toward independence, Sunni Arabs earned only 16 seats, a dramatic underrepresentation.³¹ Estimated by the UN and the coalition to be roughly 20 percent of Iraq's population, Sunni Arabs would hold just 5 percent of the seats in the assembly. By comparison, Turkomans earned 13 seats and Christians earned three seats, even though both groups combined made up about 5 percent of Iraq's population.

When combined with the abuse of mainly Sunni Arab detainees in Abu Ghraib Prison, the perceived destruction of Sunni Arab Fallujah just 2 months earlier and intense operations by coalition special operations forces, Sunnis viewed the election outcome as evidence that the coalition had embarked on an anti-Sunni project. Thus, for many Sunnis, instead of a unifying moment for the Iraqi nation, the election was a justification to continue fighting. As a result, the election outcome had helped sow the seeds for future sectarian conflict, and a core element of MNF-I's end state for the coalition campaign — that the Iraqi Government should be representative of its population — had been thwarted.

On February 3, just 4 days after the elections, Negroponte sent Casey a September 1967 clipping from *The New York Times*. In the celebratory post-election atmosphere, the article was a caution. "U.S. Encouraged by Vietnam Vote," the *Times* headline read. "Officials cite 83 percent turnout despite Vietcong terror. United States officials were surprised and heartened today at the size of turnout in South Vietnam's presidential election despite a Vietcong terrorist campaign to disrupt the voting."³² Negroponte's warning was simple and prophetic: there was much work still to be done because successful elections alone were no guarantee of democracy and stability.



Source: DoD photo by R. D. Ward (Released).

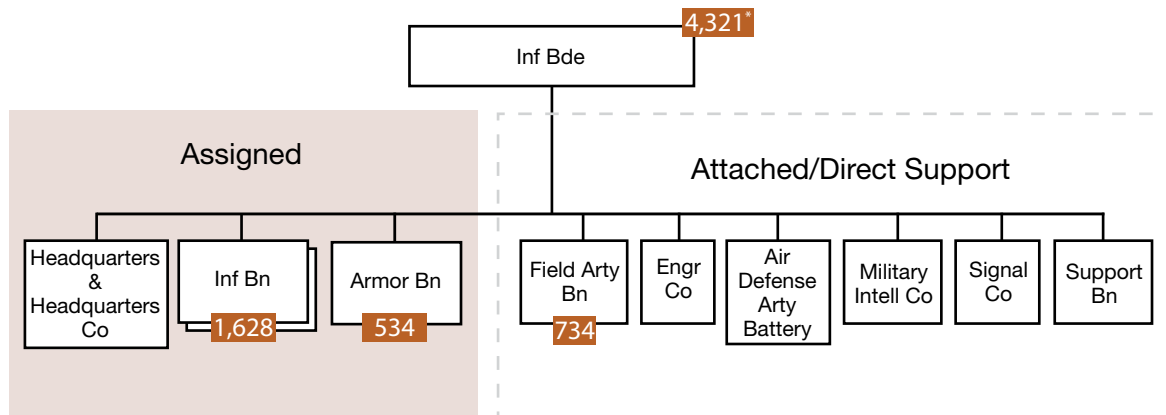
General Peter J. Schoomaker, Chief of Staff of the Army (2003-2007).³³

The Operational Consequences of Force Transformation

With the stress of the election concluded, U.S. commanders deemed it safe for unit redeployments to resume, and U.S. forces began another massive unit rotation. While the yearly rotations generally created friction and a loss in momentum, the rotations of 2005 created particular turbulence because they were the first that involved transformed, or modular, units. Because of the late 2003 decision by Chief of Staff of the Army General Peter J. Schoomaker to follow through with Army transformation during wartime, the institutional Army underwent sweeping change, as did the units it provided for Iraq and other operating theaters. Originally begun in the late 1990s, transformation had aimed to make the Army leaner, more rapidly deployable, and equipped with the most modern technology. However, it was an operationally disruptive process. Even in 1999, a much quieter operational period than 2004, Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera had described transformation as “changing the wheels while driving at 70 miles an hour.”³⁴

At the center of the transformation was the creation of modular brigade combat teams with six battalions of different types, instead of three maneuver battalions of the same branch that existed in untransformed, or legacy, brigades. Modularization would streamline differences among brigades, and the Army would move from an inventory of 17 different types of brigades to only 3.³⁵ This change was meant to create flexible units that could deploy more rapidly, with all necessary supporting elements already contained within the organization. The increased deployability was intended to enable the Army to

respond more quickly to conventional threats such as North Korea or to react to contingency operations such as in the Balkans, Panama, and Somalia.



*Note: The total number includes personnel from all habitually attached forces and forces in direct support.

Chart 1. Legacy Mechanized Infantry Brigade Combat Team Organization.³⁶

A product of the revolution in military affairs, the modular units would theoretically enhance their combat power through new weapons systems, better connectivity, and improved situational awareness, all of which would supposedly allow for a reduction in each brigade's manpower. The transformed brigade combat teams retained only two maneuver battalions, but added a smaller reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition (RSTA) squadron to replace the third maneuver battalion that legacy brigades had. The RSTA squadron had only about half the personnel of a maneuver battalion. It was lightly armed, based on the assumption that the unit would not have to fight to gain information or use scouts to make contact with the enemy, but would instead detect the enemy through sensors deployed by higher-level units.³⁷ This assumption was severely tested in Iraq, and the reduction in personnel would prove to be a significant limitation in manpower-intensive counterinsurgency operations. The transformed brigades would also have their own field artillery battalion, a support battalion, and a special troops battalion that contained military intelligence, engineer, and signal personnel.

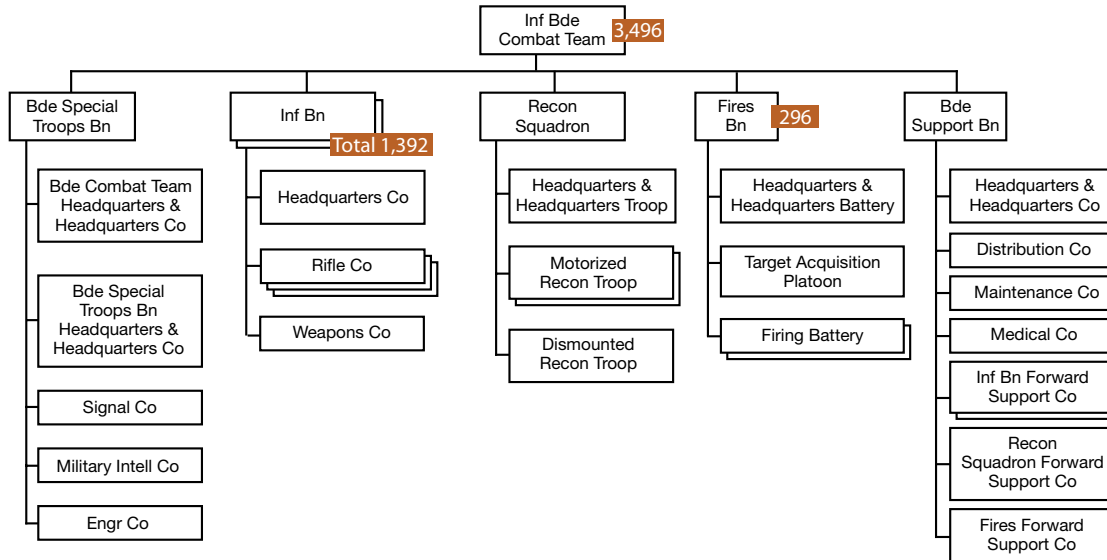


Chart 2. Organization of a Transformed Infantry Brigade Combat Team, September 2004.³⁸

Division headquarters were transformed as well, stripped of many assets that were pushed down to the brigade combat teams. The traditional divisional artillery headquarters, military intelligence battalion, and divisional engineer battalion were dissolved. Having suffered more casualties from friendly than enemy air power since the end of the Korean war, the Army liquidated most air defense units at the division level. While pushing intelligence assets down to brigades was helpful in the counterinsurgency fight, it would also create challenges: the division headquarters responsible for tracking events and synthesizing the enemy picture across multiple brigades in their battle space would no longer have some of the assets they had once used for this purpose.

With the notional personnel excess trimmed from brigade combat teams and divisions, the Army intended to use the personnel “savings” to grow additional brigades, adding one brigade combat team per division. In a sense, the transformational changes were a shell game in that the Army’s configuration would change, but its overall strength would not. Transformation was also a race against time to meet the demands of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, measured in brigade combat teams. As the Army transformed more divisions, the number of brigade combat teams in the Army inventory would increase. In 2004, transformation added three brigades to the Army’s roster for potential deployment. By the end of 2005, three more were added, and in 2006 another four, for a total of 10 new deployable brigade combat teams in 3 years.³⁹

Stresses on the Force

In 2004, as military planners selected the replacement units for the 2005-2006 mass rotation of forces as well as the emergency deployment of forces prompted by the April

uprisings, the Army only had 34 combat arms brigades in its active component and 39 in the reserve component.⁴⁰ Nearly every active unit in the Army had already deployed once, and Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald H. Rumsfeld was extremely reluctant to approve unit extensions beyond the yearlong standard.⁴¹ The Iraq theater requirement was 15 brigades; the Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) requirement was two brigades. The combined missions in Kosovo and Bosnia took another brigade combat team; and for the standing mission to deter North Korea, the Army preferred to maintain two brigade combat teams on the peninsula. The requirements were heavy enough that in January 2004, Rumsfeld, who was loath to increase the size of the Army, had agreed to use emergency authorities granted by Congress to temporarily exceed the Army end strength by 30,000.⁴²

In this context, the Army faced a quandary. Army leaders wanted to continue to transform, but the transformation process would require taking brigades offline from deployments in order to reorganize them, equip them with new weapons and sensors, and train them. Because the Army had run low on available active duty brigades for the 2005 rotation, it had to either postpone transformation or reach deep into the Army inventory to deploy active duty and National Guard brigades that did not usually deploy. The Army selected the second option, choosing to continue transformation with the hope that its perceived long-term advantages would outweigh short-term risks of deploying less experienced Guard and active duty brigades.

Among active brigades, the Army decided to deploy a brigade from the 2d Infantry Division in South Korea that had not deployed outside the peninsula since the end of the Korean war and had served as a strategic deterrent to North Korea for more than a half-century. The 2d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division, was typically manned by Soldiers on a 1-year tour without their families. Signifying the level of turbulence and change the Army was experiencing, during 2004, all Army personnel in Korea were given the option to extend for an additional year in exchange for a bonus payment. Nearly 8,000 personnel had taken the bonus, including many in the 2d Brigade.⁴³ Thus, when the brigade was notified that it would deploy to Iraq for an additional year, it meant that some Soldiers would live apart from their families for nearly 3 years.⁴⁴

Another unusual brigade-size unit that would deploy to Iraq in 2005 was the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR), which served as the opposing force (OPFOR) at the Army's National Training Center in California. When the regiment received its deployment order, it had significant equipment shortages because its principal mission was to operate replicas of Soviet-style weapons in war games against U.S. units, a fact that regimental leaders had trouble making staffers at higher echelons understand.

I had more OPFOR surrogate vehicles than I had [M1] tanks, Bradleys, M4 [rifles], you name it, and as we began the process of getting ready to deploy the regiment, I had staffers at Headquarters DA [Department of the Army] and FORSCOM [U.S. Army Forces Command], when we would send requests for equipment, say, 'Why are you guys calling us? . . . You guys already have all this stuff.'⁴⁵

While both the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and the 2d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division, were technically capable of deploying in the event of contingencies, few had expected such a situation would ever arise.

By 2005, the Army's rotation policies were having other important effects on the active force as well. In 2005, the Army continued to use brigade combat teams as its primary means of measuring "dwell time" between deployments to ensure that repeated rotations did not exhaust units and personnel, but this method did not accurately capture the strain on individual Soldiers. Since Army policy required that deploying brigade combat teams should have a full complement of personnel, all too often Soldiers returning from one deployment were transferred to an organization that was about to begin another, and would thus find themselves back in Iraq mere months after they had left. This challenge was especially true in low-density specialties such as interrogators, Arabic linguists, unmanned aerial vehicle personnel, and military police, among others.

Army leaders did not make these decisions capriciously, but because they were the least bad of the available options given the capped end strength of the Army. Units had to deploy with sufficient combat power to ensure they could accomplish their mission, and sacrifices had to be made. For this reason, on June 3, 2004, the Army issued a stop-loss order preventing Soldiers in units deploying within 90 days from retiring or leaving the service.⁴⁶ The same month, the Army announced that it would involuntarily recall to active service up to 5,600 members of the Individual Ready Reserve to help fill critical specialties and requirements.⁴⁷

Committing the National Guard

Recognizing the Army's dilemma in managing transformation and combat deployments simultaneously – the very kind of issue for which Casey had once been responsible as the Army's vice chief of staff – Casey accepted the Army's plan to deploy eight National Guard brigades for the 2005-2006 MNF-I rotations. "We had to use the National Guard Brigades [in 2005] so that the next iteration of brigades that came in [would be] fully modularly converted," Casey later recalled. "[It gave] the regular Army the breathing space to convert the modular brigades so that when they came over they were more capable than the ones that had been there."⁴⁸

The concept of using National Guard brigades as part of a limited operational reserve had been part of a national military strategy for decades. After the Vietnam war, then-Chief of Staff of the Army General Creighton Abrams established a Total Force concept that moved large numbers of the Army's combat service support units into the Army Reserve and National Guard, thereby ensuring that any large-scale military commitment would require a national mobilization of the reserve component. Likewise, the National Guard would also contribute combat units to the Total Force in the form of round-out brigades that were assigned to mobilize and deploy with active duty divisions, thereby bringing those divisions up to full strength. However, when the concept of round-out brigades was tested during the mobilization of Army forces for Operation DESERT STORM, it failed, with none of the three activated round-out brigades receiving a certification that they were ready for combat.⁴⁹

With the end of the Cold War bringing a reduction in the Army's active component from 18 divisions to 10, correcting the flaws of the round-out system became crucial. In its place, the Army established a new program that created 15 enhanced separate brigades (ESB) in the National Guard. These brigades were the Guard's highest priority

combat units, receiving additional resources, training, and personnel to make them ready to deploy to a combat zone within 90 days of mobilization.⁵⁰ Nearly all of the National Guard brigades that deployed to Iraq in 2005 and 2006 would come from this pool of enhanced separate brigades. Even though enhanced Guard brigades were an important component of the U.S. national security strategy, conventional wisdom held that they would be used similarly to their round-out predecessors, with a brigade or two deploying at a time to fill operational requirements. There had been little expectation that they would be deployed en masse, eight brigades in 1 year.

This decision to deploy nearly three divisions' worth of National Guard brigades during the same rotation would have a substantial operational impact. By March 2005, there were 69,147 Guardsmen in Iraq, making up nearly half of MNF-I's total strength.⁵¹ With transformation in progress among the Army's active division headquarters, the 42d Infantry Division from the New York National Guard was activated to serve as an MND headquarters, becoming the first National Guard division to deploy into combat since the Korean war and the first to command regular Army brigades.⁵² To help synchronize the division's efforts as it assumed battle space in Iraq, the Army assigned an active duty brigadier general as one of the assistant division commanders and sprinkled active duty personnel throughout the division's staff.⁵³

Casey left most of the complex political and tactical issues associated with where to assign the National Guard brigades to the MNC-I commander, though he did monitor their locations. "[W]e put them in places that were not necessarily the highest risk places," he recalled later. "Good commanders put their good guys in the tough spots and the less good guys in the other spots. In my mind I knew that I was not going to get quite the capability out of [the National Guard units] as I got out of some of the others, but I did not think it was going to be a lot different."⁵⁴

Major General Peter Chiarelli, the MND-B commander who would see his 2d Brigade replaced by the 256th Brigade from the Louisiana National Guard at the end of 2004, saw a similar gap. He assessed that the incoming Guard brigade was "less capable based on force structure and equipment" and was 6 months away from being as well trained as an active duty brigade.⁵⁵ Metz, meanwhile, recalled that, for his tenure as MNC-I commander:

(Major) General John Batiste (of the 1st Infantry Division) . . . put the 30th Separate Brigade (North Carolina National Guard), in a province that wasn't as tough of a province, but nonetheless needed those troops to task. . . . General Chiarelli (of the 1st Cavalry Division) didn't have the option in Baghdad. He had to give a part of the city to the 39th Brigade out of Arkansas, and they just had to step up to the plate. Were they as good as the Blackjack Brigade (2d BCT, 1st Cavalry Division) on day 1? Probably not. Were they as good when they left? Probably so.⁵⁶

Several of the National Guard brigades were not assigned their own area of operations, but instead had their subunits detached to augment other brigades or were assigned theater security missions. In only one case among the 2005 unit rotations did Casey become directly involved in emplacing a National Guard brigade. When MNC-I assigned the 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard, to the insurgent stronghold of Ramadi, a skeptical Casey advised MNC-I to change the decision. "I went back . . . probably two or three times . . . and said you really have to figure a different place for

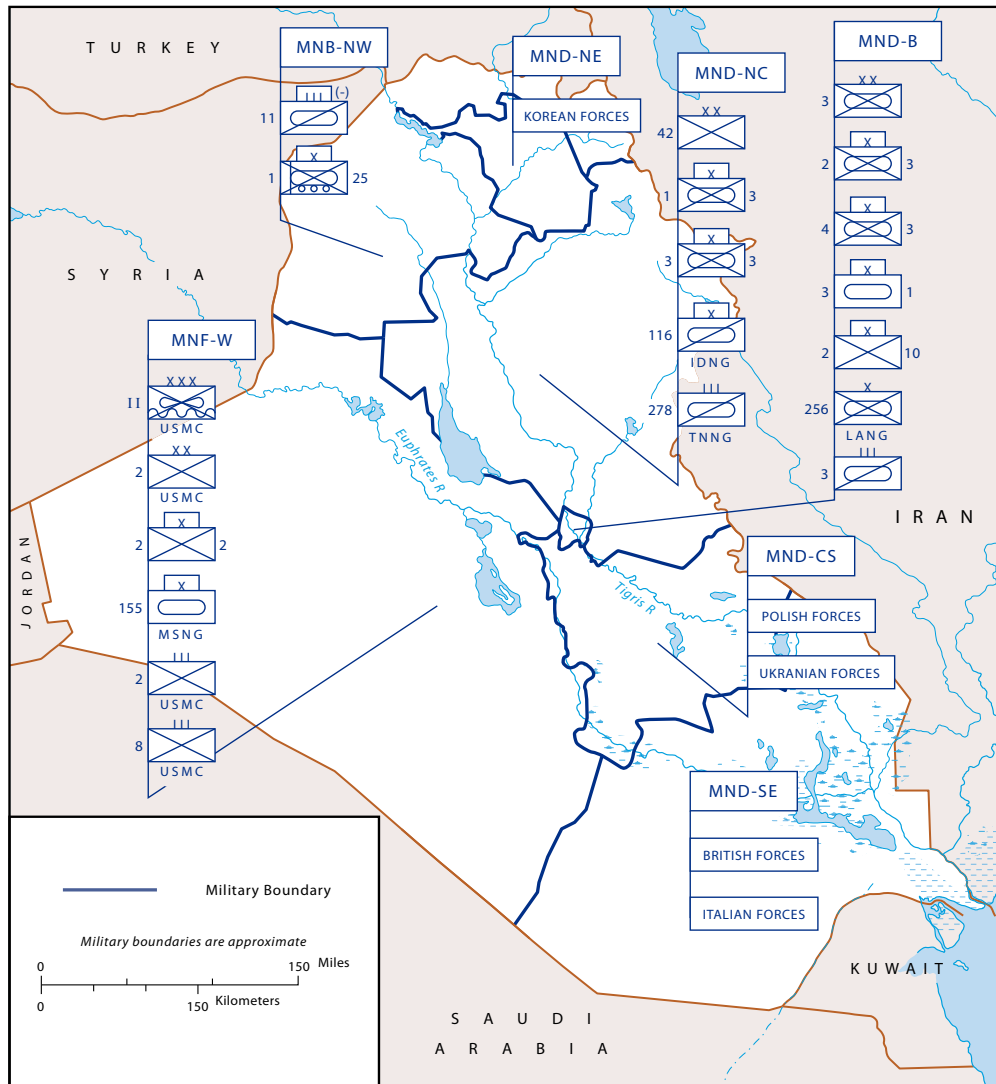
the [2d BCT, 28th Infantry Division] Brigade. Putting them in Ramadi is not setting them up for success," he recounted.⁵⁷ Regimental Combat Team (RCT) 8, a Marine unit whose battle space was adjacent to the area of operations that 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard, would be assuming, shared Casey's concerns that Ramadi might be beyond the abilities of the National Guard unit. "[The] 2/28 IN (Pennsylvania ARNG [Army National Guard]) is going to one of our worst areas, replacing 2/2 BCT, one of the Army's best units," RCT 8 leaders reported to MNF-I counterparts, adding that the assignment was "a recipe for disaster."⁵⁸

One difference in capabilities between National Guard brigades and their regular Army counterparts was that, despite the ESB initiative, many National Guard units lacked the same modern equipment. While the Army had fielded the upgraded Family of Medium Tactical Vehicles in the 1990s, the workhorse vehicle of the National Guard wheeled fleet remained the antiquated "deuce and a half," or 2½-ton truck, a vehicle so old that the last one had rolled off the production line in 1977.⁵⁹ An even more significant disparity was the National Guard units' shortage of armored vehicles, a problem that had bedeviled the coalition from the start of the war. By December 2004, the Army only had 69 percent of the armored or hardened vehicles that it needed in Iraq, and for National Guard units the shortfall was even more acute.⁶⁰

The issue of insufficient armor protection for many of the deploying National Guard units came to a head when Rumsfeld visited National Guard Soldiers in Kuwait who were preparing to move into Iraq. During an December 8, 2004, meeting at which the SECDEF took questions from Soldiers, Specialist Thomas Wilson of the Tennessee National Guard's 278th Regimental Combat Team complained that members of his unit had to "scrounge through local landfills for pieces of rusty scrap metal and bulletproof glass – what they called hillbilly armor – to bolt on to their trucks for protection against roadside bombs in Iraq."⁶¹ The situation was so dire that Lieutenant Colonel John Zimmerman, the 278th Regimental Combat Team's staff judge advocate, noted that 95 percent of the unit's trucks had insufficient armor and that the regiment had been provided 70 tons of steel plates to bolt or weld on in order to compensate. To these complaints the SECDEF responded, "You go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time."⁶²

The Unit Exodus of 2005

After the January elections, the new coalition units began to arrive in Iraq and assume responsibility for battle space. III Corps, which formed the MNC-I headquarters, was replaced by XVIII Airborne Corps from Fort Bragg, NC, and III Corps Commander Metz handed command of MNC-I to XVIII Airborne Corps Commander Lieutenant General John R. Vines on February 10. Vines was an infantry officer who had spent almost his entire career in Airborne or Ranger units and had parachuted into Panama during the 1989 invasion. More importantly, he had commanded all U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan in 2003.



Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 16. Operation IRAQI FREEDOM: 2004-2005 Transitions, January-March 2005.

In mid-February, Multi-National Brigade-Northwest’s (MNB-NW) headquarters, Task Force Olympia, made up of personnel from I Corps, was replaced by Task Force Freedom, comprised of personnel from the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. Task Force Olympia’s only major maneuver element, the 3d Brigade, 2d Infantry Division (Stryker), had been replaced by the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (Stryker), in mid-October 2004. Some of the original mistakes in the creation of Task Force Olympia were corrected during this transition. While the amount of combat power was not increased, and MNB-NW remained an economy of force operation, the task force commander was upgraded to a two-star position and filled by Major General David M. Rodriguez. The shortage of headquarters personnel was also addressed by the addition of nearly 150 Soldiers, including 50 military intelligence specialists to help piece together the intelligence

picture across Ninawa Province. Unfortunately, since the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment was a regimental headquarters performing the functions of a division headquarters, almost all of the additional personnel were individual augmentees pulled from units across Iraq and across the Army, some without the requisite position specialty or experience (see Map 16).⁶³

In MND-NC, the 1st Infantry Division was replaced by Major General Joseph J. Taluto's 42d Infantry Division, the National Guard unit from New York. The 42d Infantry Division itself was a patchwork, with two active duty brigades from the 3d Infantry Division as well as the 278th Regimental Combat Team from the Tennessee National Guard and the 116th Cavalry Brigade from the Idaho National Guard.

The Marines in MNF-W rotated later than the Army forces, mostly in March. I MEF and Lieutenant General John F. Sattler handed over responsibility to Major General Stephen Johnson, deputy commander of II MEF. With the MNC-I commander as a three-star general, the Marine Corps had decided to make the senior Marine in Iraq equal in rank to the other MNDs.⁶⁵ The Marines considered consolidating the MEF and Marine Division headquarters but ultimately decided to retain the two organizations. Below the MEF headquarters, now identified as II MEF (Forward), Major General Richard A. Huck's 2d Marine Division replaced Major General Richard F. Natonski's 1st Marine Division. The 2d Marine Division brought with it two regimental combat teams from Camp Lejeune, RCT 2 and RCT 8, to replace RCT 1 and RCT 7, respectively.

In Baghdad, the 1st Cavalry Division was replaced by the 3d Infantry Division under Major General William "Fuzzy" Webster. Webster's division was assigned one less brigade combat team than the 1st Cavalry Division, but nearly double the territory, since MND-B's area expanded to include part of the area formerly controlled by the Spanish brigade in Multi-National Division-Central South (MND-CS).⁶⁶

The Sgrena Incident

In Multi-National Division-Southeast (MND-SE), a single incident prompted the final withdrawal of the Italian contingent and the creation of another brigade-sized hole in the fragile southern sector. On March 4, 2005, agents from the Italian Military Intelligence Service obtained the release of Giuliana Sgrena, an Italian journalist who had been kidnapped by insurgents and held for ransom for a month. In the immediate aftermath of her release, the Italian agents transporting her to the Baghdad airport came upon a traffic control point manned by troops of 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry, a New York National Guard unit. The Italians had not coordinated their mission and route with MNF-I or any



Source: U.S. Army photo by Sergeant Michael J. Carden, Multi-National Corps Iraq Public Affairs (Released).

**Lieutenant General John R. Vines,
Commanding General,
XVIII Airborne Corps/MNC-I.⁶⁴**

other coalition elements, and as the vehicle carrying Sgrena sped toward the checkpoint, the New York Soldiers on duty gave warnings from a spotlight and a green laser.⁶⁷ Fearing the Italians' vehicle was a car bomb when it did not react to the warnings, the American Soldiers fired at the vehicle, wounding Sgrena and one Italian agent while killing another, Major General Nicola Calipari.

Coming after the 2003 Nasiriyah bombing that had killed 19 Italians, the Sgrena shooting caused the collapse of Italian popular support for the Iraq mission. Less than 2 weeks after the incident, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi announced that Italy would withdraw its 3,000 soldiers, the fourth largest coalition contingent at the time.⁶⁸ The Netherlands, Poland, and Ukraine, facing similar domestic pressure, also announced they would leave the coalition.

Arrival of the Transformed Units

As the units of the third rotation of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) arrived in Iraq in early 2005, the 3d Infantry Division typified the challenges of transforming the Army in the midst of war. Having redeployed to Fort Stewart, GA, in September 2003 after being the main effort of the invasion force, the division was chosen to return to Iraq as part of the troop rotation that would occur in early 2005. Because its equipment had been left in Iraq in 2003 to be reused by the units replacing it, the division had arrived home with only 10 percent of its reportable equipment, much of which had to be sent to maintenance depots to be refurbished. This shortage made training difficult and forced unit leaders to become creative to prepare the division for war a second time. "We had to go back to doing . . . something from the 1920s, establishing pools of equipment that would be handed off from company to company as they went out to train," Webster recalled.⁶⁹ One unit even used golf carts from the Fort Stewart golf course to practice mounted maneuver and convoy operations because they had no combat vehicles.

At the same time, the division faced these training challenges, Army leaders decided to make it the first "modular division" and instructed Webster to reorganize his units. "Figure out how to find four or five brigades out of the three that you have now," Chief of Staff of the Army General Schoomaker told Webster, adding that the new brigades should be "sustainable by themselves and capable of plugging in and deploying with any division headquarters."⁷⁰ The smaller modular brigades were outfitted with new technology designed to improve their tracking of both friendly and enemy forces, along with new equipment designed to make the brigades more capable than legacy brigades. As Webster realigned battalions to grow the additional brigade, he was only able to apportion to each brigade two maneuver battalions, but Schoomaker believed the loss of the third battalion could be mitigated by the improved capability of each brigade. Schoomaker also assumed that if two maneuver battalions were insufficient in a brigade combat team's area of operations, the theater commander could take a battalion from elsewhere in theater and strengthen the main effort.⁷¹ Unfortunately, this assumption ran headlong into the widespread shortage of forces that already existed across Iraq, and maneuver commanders across the country were feeling starved of combat power.

When the 3d Infantry Division deployed to Iraq, the concept of brigade modularity was tested immediately. MNC-I assigned two of the division's brigades to the 42d Infantry

Division in MND-NC, while the 3d Infantry Division, assigned to MND-B, would retain two of its own brigades, but receive the 256th Brigade of the Louisiana National Guard; the 3d Brigade, 1st Armored Division; the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division; and later the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment. The “plug-and-play” nature of the modularized, or transformed, brigade combat teams created additional challenges. Often the division headquarters had not worked or trained with the brigades assigned to them in Iraq. For many units, the critical component of mission command, that commanders should be intimately familiar with their subordinate leaders and vice versa, was simply not in place.

As legacy brigades were replaced by transformed brigades and vice versa, operational leaders began to observe important differences in capability. Because of their diminished manpower, transformed brigades that replaced legacy brigades often had difficulties covering the same battle space. The RSTA squadrons created the most problems. As Webster realized in Baghdad, they were:

too light and too small for the kind of fight we were in. They were not capable of independently gathering reconnaissance and surveillance information for us and they were not capable of conducting security operations by themselves. So, it caused us to change. In the case of each brigade, we had to change the size of the piece of ground that we gave them and the number of tasks that we gave them had to be reduced because the recon and surveillance organizations were smaller than the battalions or squadrons that they replaced.⁷²

To add to the newly arriving brigade combat teams’ challenges, many were broken up as they arrived, with some of their battalions detached to perform different missions. The idea that brigades were modular and interchangeable began to extend in practice to battalions, which Army leaders had not intended to be plug-and-play organizations that could be assigned to different brigade headquarters without any impact on their effectiveness. The 11th ACR illustrated this new trend, as its subordinate battalions were chopped away from the regiment to perform three different missions in Iraq. The regimental headquarters served as the backbone of MNB-NW, replacing Task Force Olympia, but the regiment’s 1st Squadron was assigned to the 3d Infantry Division in Baghdad, and the 2d Squadron rounded out the Mississippi National Guard’s 155th Brigade Combat Team in north Babil. The breaking up of unit cohesion and the familiarity of unit leaders created significant problems with retention, casualty notification, and the process of ordering replacements, as well as with other more subjective measures of performance.⁷³

As the transformed brigade combat teams were broken up and their battalions reassigned to other brigades to meet the needs of the battlefield, transformed battalions with their enhanced connectivity and command-and-control capabilities were often teamed with legacy units that did not have the additional technology and situational awareness, effectively negating some of the transformational capabilities. The transformed brigades, likewise, suffered growing pains as some commanders who had spent their careers in armor or infantry units now had an organic artillery battalion and other support units they were responsible for training in peacetime and employing during wartime.

| | Legacy Mechanized Infantry BCT | Transformed Infantry BCT | Stryker BCT | Difference Between Stryker & Transformed BCT | Difference Between Legacy & Transformed BCT |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|--|---|
| Total (with HHC, BSTB, and BSB) | 4,321 | 3,496 | 4,253 | 757 | 825 |
| Maneuver Bn Total | 2,171 | 1,392 | 2,082 | 690 | 779 |
| RSTA SQD | NA | 402 | 416 | 14 | NA |
| FA Bn | 734 | 296 | 400 | 104 | 438 |
| Battle Space Owning Forces (Maneuver, RSTA, and FA Bns) | 2,905 | 2,090 | 2,898 | 808 | 815 |

Table 3. Comparison of Legacy, Transformed, and Stryker BCTs.⁷⁴

Over time, many MND commanders came to favor the legacy brigade combat teams for their manpower instead of the transformed brigades. Stryker brigades were similarly in high demand because they had three maneuver battalions, like legacy brigades, but also an additional RSTA squadron, giving them a total of 757 more Soldiers than a transformed brigade. The Stryker brigades also had other enhanced capabilities, such as better situational awareness, more human intelligence specialists, and additional unmanned aerial vehicles. Stryker vehicles earned respect because they were survivable, quiet, and fast, with tremendous tactical and operational maneuverability. Strykers could maintain a speed of 60 miles an hour, and some Strykers traveled more than 88,000 kilometers in a year-long deployment.⁷⁵ At the tactical level, the Strykers carried an entire squad of infantry, 11 Soldiers, far more than in Bradley Fighting Vehicles and up-armored High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV).⁷⁶ In terms of both troop strength and capability, in the manpower-intensive counterinsurgency fight, Stryker brigades received almost universal acclaim.



Source: U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sergeant James L. Harper Jr. (Released).

U.S. Army Soldiers Conduct a Patrol in a Stryker Combat Vehicle in Mosul.⁷⁷

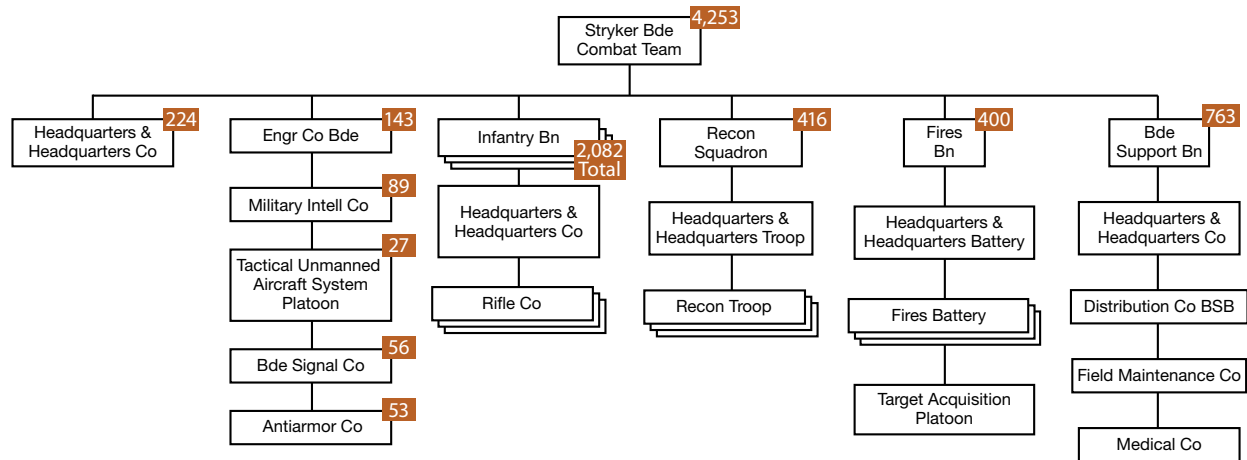


Chart 3. Organization of a Stryker Brigade Combat Team.⁷⁸

“IRAQIZATION”

The Transition Strategy

The newly arrived forces were called on to implement a revised campaign plan. Even before the January election outcome was known, MNF-I had conducted a campaign process review that, coupled with a counterinsurgency study conducted in September-October 2004, reinforced the lessons of Najaf: that building the expertise of the ISF was the most critical ingredient in successful counterinsurgency operations. Improving host-nation capability was so important, the fall 2004 study had concluded, that “no great power had ever succeeded in a counterinsurgency without a capable indigenous partner.”⁷⁹ Accordingly, in April 2005, Casey’s headquarters published an updated plan that aimed to suppress the insurgency through coalition combat operations that bought time and space for a new main effort: training and equipping the ISF so that the counterinsurgency campaign could be transitioned to their responsibility. While Casey’s August 2004 mission statement had focused equally on conducting full-spectrum counterinsurgency operations and on training and equipping the ISF, the new April 2005 mission statement read:

In partnership with the Iraqi Transitional Government [ITG], MNF-I progressively transitions the counterinsurgency campaign to the ITG and Iraqi Security Forces, while aggressively executing counterinsurgency operations to create a security environment that permits the completion of the UNSCR [United Nations Security Council Resolution] 1546 process and the sustainment of political and economic development.⁸⁰

While the mission statement changed significantly, with a new focus on transition, the end state of MNF-I’s campaign remained unchanged: “Iraq at peace with its neighbors and an ally in the War on Terror, with a representative government that respects the

human rights of all Iraqis, and security forces sufficient to maintain domestic order and to deny Iraq as a safe haven for terrorists.”⁸¹

To underscore this change in strategy, Casey emphasized to his BCT commanders that their mission was “to help the Iraqis win, not to win it for the Iraqis.” He also warned against creating Iraqi dependency on the coalition, noting that “the longer the coalition leads the fight, the more dependent the ISF [Iraqi security forces] becomes.”⁸² These statements echoed the same concerns he had expressed when he took command, lessons he had drawn from his tenure in Bosnia.

The Military Transition Teams

The updated campaign plan would unfold in four phases. During phase one, MNF-I would deploy roughly 250 transition teams of military advisers to improve the quality of the Iraqi Army units and some national police units. The teams, which MNF-I considered to be its main effort, had originally been named assistance teams but were renamed transition teams when Rumsfeld balked at the name, noting that the term assistance could imply long-term dependence.⁸³ A small effort of 15 teams would also be assigned to work with the Iraqi border forces that fell under the Interior Ministry’s Department of Border Enforcement. Allawi had rejected pairing transition teams with local police because of sovereignty concerns, so within the Ministry of the Interior, there would only be transition teams with the Special Police Forces (Commandos, Public Order Brigades, and Special Mechanized Brigades) and the Border Police.

In early December 2004, MNF-I began the process of requesting personnel for the transition teams from the joint staff and service chiefs. Knowing that it would take the services time to notify personnel of the new assignments and prepare them for deployment, MNF-I ordered each multinational division in Iraq to create internal transition teams out of its on-station units to support Iraqi Army units in their sectors, a step Casey believed would speed up the transition process by at least 6 months. In what could be a record-breaking speed for clearing infamous Pentagon bureaucratic hurdles, the proposal for the externally sourced transition teams went from concept to troops on the ground in a mere 6 months. However, the ease with which the program cleared the Pentagon bureaucracy masked some significant disagreements about the design of the teams. MNF-I planners had originally envisioned teams of 20 troops each that would embed within Iraqi units down to the company level, the echelon at which planners believed the advisers could best affect the Iraqis’ fighting ability.⁸⁴ This initial plan would mean a personnel requirement of 5,000 noncommissioned officers and field grade officers, a figure that dismayed the joint services in the Pentagon who would have to strip many stateside units of their mid-level leaders to meet the requirement. Casey also had judged that teams of 20 U.S. troops would be unwieldy and would impinge on Iraqi sovereignty, and approved a team size of 10 advisers instead, for a total personnel requirement of 2,500. Because of the force protection risks involved, he also balked at embedding down to the company level and, instead, authorized embedding the advisers at Iraqi division, brigade, and battalion levels.⁸⁵

Casey’s decision did not sit well with the planners responsible for organizing the transition teams, who tried to dissuade him by arguing that “[the] lack of embedded support

at the company level is counter to lessons from successful COIN operations [and] counter to current U.S./UK practice with other indigenous armies."⁸⁶ To collect enough manpower to restore the company-level advisers, they proposed eliminating division-level advisers and pairing transition teams with only a portion of the ISF, but Casey was not swayed by this argument.⁸⁷

Another debate arose over whether the U.S. military should use individual augmentees or standing units to form the advisory teams. As chief of staff of the Army, Schoomaker disagreed with the concept of creating small advisory teams of individual replacements. He believed the advisory mission should be given to standing brigades and battalions whose commanders would be accountable for its success. Cognizant of the drawbacks of the Vietnam-era individual replacement system, Schoomaker was reluctant to deploy individuals rather than cohesive units. He also feared that individuals deployed as advisers would be lost in the personnel system and forced into back-to-back deployments, causing them to burn out faster.⁸⁸

By contrast, Casey and MNF-I believed many Army units were already struggling to adapt to the counterinsurgency environment in Iraq and could not be expected to train the ISF as well. In addition, as he had concluded from his Bosnia experience, Casey believed most U.S. units would be too hands-on in an advisory role, inclined to do too much of the work rather than developing the Iraqis to do it for themselves. These problems would be minimized if the advisory teams were composed of individuals that Casey and MNF-I could train and shape in Iraq. He and MNF-I thus insisted on individuals, and Schoomaker and the Army eventually acceded.⁸⁹ The military transition teams (MiTT), therefore, would be ad hoc organizations made up of individuals from across the Army and other services.

The notion of sending senior noncommissioned officers and field grade officers to work in small teams outside the Army organizational structure to live with Iraqi forces in order to train them was revolutionary for the institutional Army in the post-Vietnam era. In an effort to sell the newly transformed strategy and "bill" for additional forces to the secretary of defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General John Abizaid explained that:

as we follow [General Casey's] vision to shift our main effort to clearly concentrate on ISF development, we will also need to face cultural change for our own Armed Forces. We'll need people living with small Iraqi units and police outposts in isolated and exposed places. Managing such risk will be difficult, especially as the enemy adapts. . . . We must stay focused on a strategy for Iraqi success. Iraqization.⁹⁰

The newness of the MiTT mission meant there was no existing training system for the advisers, and there was noticeable institutional friction in setting up the preparatory training for the initial teams. "The Army couldn't get it set up fast enough to have a productive thing back here in the States, so we had to do it ourselves," Casey told military historians in 2008.⁹¹ To that end, Casey ordered MNF-I to create a 2-week training program in Iraq, called the Phoenix Academy, to train the advisers in their specialized tasks. The program was ready by late April, before the first external MiTTs began arriving.

The MiTT mission also highlighted a long-running challenge that had bedeviled MNF-I since the start of the war: obtaining sufficient Arabic linguists to serve as interpreters.

Even before the transition teams were stood up, MNF-I had been unable to meet the insatiable need for Category 1 interpreters – Iraqi nationals or other non-U.S. citizens who handled most tactical interactions – and the command was nearly 1,500 linguists short, resulting in a 64 percent fill of the critical requirement.⁹² Because of their need to work closely with the ISF, the transition teams would require an additional 1,200 linguists.⁹³ As a result, MNF-I's main effort, the development of the ISF, would be initially hobbled by a severe shortage of interpreters.

Debate over the Role of Special Operations Forces

The Army and MNF-I debates over the construct and sourcing of the transition teams also extended to special operations forces. Many in both MNF-I and the institutional Army argued that the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Arabian Peninsula (CJSOTF-AP) and Army Special Forces operators, long regarded as the premier force in conducting foreign internal defense and training partner militaries, should do more to help fill the onerous burden of the transition teams. Accordingly, MNF-I requested additional special forces units through U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and the Pentagon, but the Joint Staff disapproved the request after U.S. Special Operations Command and U.S. Army Special Operations Command objected on practical and philosophical grounds.

From a practical standpoint, there simply were not enough Special Forces troops in the Army to meet Casey's requirement of partnering with roughly 250 Iraqi battalions. Each Special Forces Group notionally had 54 Operational Detachment Alphas (ODAs) of 12 men, each of which by doctrine could train a host-nation battalion when at full strength. However, by 2005, some groups had so few personnel that they had shuttered some ODAs and combined others in order to constitute fully manned teams. Two Special Forces Groups were already committed to back-to-back rotations in Iraq, with another two committed to Afghanistan, and the final group had a sizable commitment in the form of the JSOTF in the Philippines. Mathematically, fulfilling Casey's transition team requirement for a single year-long rotation required committing four of the five Special Forces Groups to Iraq, without regard to Afghanistan or any other missions across the geographic combatant commands. Even so, partly as a result of the acrimony involved in the rejection of MNF-I's request, a compromise was reached that agreed to a one-time surge of SOF advisers, and the number of Special Forces battalions deployed increased from two to three for a period of 7 months. These advisers deployed to train the Iraqi Army in Ninawa Province and Mosul, where the Iraqi Army had all but collapsed in November 2004, and where Casey would soon be making a push to reestablish control of Iraq's western border.⁹⁴

The decision to reject a larger special operations commitment, as well as the CJSOTF-AP's rejection of a larger role in training the ISF, also reflected a philosophical disagreement over the proper role of special operations forces in Iraq. One element of the disagreement centered on how best to train the ISF. The MNSTC-I and MNF-I model, in the opinion of CJSOTF-AP leaders, compromised quality to stress quantity, based on the premise that counterinsurgency required a certain numeric troop-to-population ratio to be successful. Many in the CJSOTF-AP believed that the emphasis on achieving high

numbers of Iraqis trained, without emphasizing the quality of training, paralleled the misguided use of body counts in Vietnam. As one CJSOTF-AP commander explained:

It was the reverse of the body count. It [was] not the number of guys who we're killing; it [was] the number of guys you [were] training. Just like a body count, that does not really tell you whether you are obtaining your strategic or operational goals. The training body count, how many guys are in [the] Iraqi Security Forces, does not tell you anything about your strategic or operational objectives and how well you are doing towards [achieving] them.⁹⁵

Others who evaluated MNSTC-I's programs shared these concerns. Retired General Gary F. Luck and his Iraq Security Assessment Team visited Iraq to review MNF-I's campaign plan and strategy to develop the ISF in January 2005. They advised MNF-I to "shift focus to quality of ISF versus quantity (individually and collectively)," noting that one of the most important keys to success for the Iraqi military was the will to win.⁹⁶

The disagreement over how to build the ISF ran deeper than a simple debate of quantity versus quality. CJSOTF-AP leaders believed they had developed a successful model in the 36th Commando Battalion and the Iraqi Counterterrorism Force – including forced ethnic mixing, a rigorous selection process, better equipment, long-term partnership, and the ability to pick unit leaders – and did not want to dilute it. In the view of MNF-I and MNSTC-I leaders, however, the 36th Commando model could never produce a force large enough to secure the entire country. Instead, MNF-I and MNSTC-I had pressed the CJSOTF-AP to change the mission of its ODAs and focus on increasing the throughput for basic training as a way to accelerate ISF growth, believing the CJSOTF-AP's model to be too slow.⁹⁷ But because the CJSOTF-AP was merely under MNC-I's tactical control, MNF-I could not change the CJSOTF-AP's base mission, and the organizations simply agreed to disagree on how best to train the ISF.⁹⁸

There were other reasons that the CJSOTF-AP turned down the expanded mission. With CJSOTF-AP commanders changing roughly every 7 months, maintaining consistency in the organization's direction was difficult. The changes in commanders brought not only personality differences, but also divergences in the ethos of the two Special Forces Groups that formed the CJSOTF-AP. As units rotated, foreign internal defense (FID) fell in and out of favor, often eclipsed by direct-action missions that provided more immediate and tangible – albeit fleeting – results. Some CJSOTF-AP commanders believed that they were contributing more by conducting tactical direct-action missions to kill or capture high-value individuals on MNF-I's target list and considered conducting FID with the Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) Brigade simply an extension of that kill-capture mission. Similarly, some of the CJSOTF-AP's principal partners, the multinational divisions that owned battle space, were eager to see the products of its human intelligence network and the results of its direct-action missions and did not have patience for the time-consuming efforts required to improve the ISF. The effect the CJSOTF-AP might have had on the Iraqi forces was watered down by some CJSOTF-AP commanders, who believed their ODAs should not train Iraqi units larger than platoon size, despite the doctrinal standard that an ODA could train an indigenous battalion.

Because SOF leaders had decided not to forward deploy a general officer in Iraq as part of a higher headquarters for the CJSOTF-AP, the disconnects and divergences between the two SOF groups and among different leaders were never adjudicated. This

mistake also hurt the CJSOTF-AP's ability to deliver advice and situational awareness to MNC-I and MNF-I. With a rare responsibility that geographically stretched across the entire country, including areas where no American forces were present, such as MND-CS and the Korean-led MND-NE, the CJSOTF-AP had a unique perspective on Iraq. Unfortunately, with no general officer assigned, the CJSOTF-AP commanders were unable to attend many of the MNF-I level meetings whose attendance was limited to the general officer corps.

The absence of a SOF general officer and a higher echelon headquarters also hampered unity of effort among the various SOF entities deployed to Iraq, and at times considerable friction developed among them because of overlap in missions, targets, and terrain. This deep familial conflict laid bare the fact that SOF units would reconcile and achieve synergy with conventional forces before reconciling among their own disparate elements. In interviews conducted after the war, 10 CJSOTF-AP commanders—every one questioned—lamented that there should have been a higher SOF headquarters in Iraq, led by a SOF general.⁹⁹

Reduction of the Coalition “Footprint”

During phases two through four of the campaign plan, the coalition would progressively transfer responsibility for security operations and territory to the Iraqis. Each transfer was meant to be conditions-based, dependent on the rated performance of the ISF. In phase two, “Transition to Provincial Iraqi Security Control,” ISF would take the lead in planning, directing, and sustaining counterinsurgency operations, while coalition units would shift to a supporting role and decrease their presence and footprint. The plan's ambitious goal was to reach this stage for all of Iraq by November 30, 2005.¹⁰⁰ Abizaid and Casey relayed this plan to have Iraqi forces in the lead of the counterinsurgency fight by the end of the year to Allawi in the days after the election, but the generals would eventually have to renegotiate the plan months later with a new Prime Minister and a shifting security situation.

In phase three, “Transition to National Iraqi Security Governance,” provinces would return to provincial Iraqi control, in which provincial leaders and ministers in the national government would take responsibility for Iraqi security. Because Allawi had refused to allow MiTTs to collaborate with local police, coalition leaders anticipated this transition would not take place before mid-2006.¹⁰¹ In the final phase, “Iraqi Security Self-Reliance,” the relationship between the Iraqi Government and the coalition would evolve into a more typical security relationship between allied states, with embassies serving as the main coalition presence. In this phase, coalition forces would move to “strategic over-watch” outside of Iraq but were prepared to return if needed.

At the same time that MNF-I published its new campaign plan, it also published a contingency plan that established procedures for what the coalition would do as the Iraqis reached each successive stage of the transition. One element of the contingency plan addressed coalition basing, with the goal of reducing the footprint from phase to phase. Although the plan was based on Iraqi performance, it set a baseline for coalition base closures by phase. Of the 108 bases operating as of April 2005, some 7 to 10 were to

be closed during phase one, 46 to 49 during phase two, and 45 to 51 during phase three, leaving only 4 long-term bases at Al Asad, Talill, Balad, and Erbil.¹⁰²

Another element of these procedures involved determining the size of the coalition troop presence in Iraq over time. In June and September 2005, Casey and MNF-I would use assessments of the ISF to make decisions on whether to reduce the force structure for the January 2006 rotation of forces. This would “take the form of early departures from theater, a diversion of inbound forces to fill the requirement for a strategic reserve brigade in Kuwait, or the decision to retain forces in CONUS [continental United States] on prepare to deploy orders.”¹⁰³ The contingency plan sanguinely predicted that these assessments would allow for a reduction to 12 U.S. brigades and 4 allied brigades on the ground in 2006. MNF-I would then conduct another assessment after the December 2005 parliamentary elections, but Casey’s headquarters expected that conditions would likely improve enough that, by mid-2006, the coalition presence could be reduced through early withdrawals to just nine U.S. brigades and two allied brigades. The next assessment would be conducted in June 2006, by which time Casey and his officers expected the situation to be stable enough to require only six U.S. brigades and two allied brigades in the early 2007 rotations.¹⁰⁴

As U.S. combat power decreased along these lines, Abizaid and Casey hoped to replicate the model used in Bosnia and Kosovo, with a multinational organization assuming responsibility for the mission from the Americans. In a January 15, 2005, memorandum, Abizaid described this preferred end state as the transitioning of:

MNF-I to ISFOR [Iraq Stabilization Force], [with a] UN or international mandate with fixed end date; force size fixed at 50,000 inside Iraq led by a non U.S. commander, U.S. contribution limited to no more than 20% of the force; is separate and distinct from training effort led by U.S. Commanders under MAC-I [Military Assistance Command-Iraq] authorities . . . the idea here is to, speed Iraqization, de-Americanize the effort, rejuvenate international effort, let Iraqis get out front.¹⁰⁵

The impetus to hand off the mission to another foreign entity resulted in coalition attempts to garner support for either a NATO mission or a Muslim force led by Jordan’s King Abdullah. These efforts were ultimately unsuccessful because neither NATO nor the Arab states viewed the mission with the same degree of optimism that the United States did in the wake of the January elections.¹⁰⁶

Casey’s confidence in predictions that a rapid growth in ISF capabilities would lead to a rapid drawdown in combat power was not shared by all in the coalition. When the newly arrived XVIII Airborne Corps, serving as the MNC-I headquarters, was asked in February 2005 to comment on the planned timetable, its staff responded that “early 2006 [is] too early to off ramp BCTs. This capability will not be likely until we get into National Control. This is due to the requirement to provide direct support and general support to the ISF . . . C4I [command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence], logistics, joint fires and effects, QRF [Quick Reaction Force], force protection, reconstruction, etc.”¹⁰⁷ MNC-I’s input reflected its leaders’ concerns that “decisions in MNF proposal to off ramp are tied to phase and time and NOT conditions,” and added that any off-ramps should begin at battalion level and below, once the right conditions existed.¹⁰⁸

The Transition Readiness Assessment

While MNF-I would reject the recommendation to begin off-ramps at the battalion level and ultimately discount worries that 2006 was too early to off-ramp forces, it immediately acted on MNC-I's recommendation to develop a conditions-based assessment that would help determine when coalition forces could withdraw. In spring 2005 the coalition commands created a system for the soon-to-arrive MiTT advisers to evaluate the Iraqi units they advised with a view to using the data to inform the coalition's decisions on troop withdrawals. The new Transition Readiness Assessment (TRA) would assign each Iraqi unit an overall rating from 1 (fully capable of planning, executing, and sustaining independent counterinsurgency operations) to 4 (describing a unit that was still being formed and incapable of conducting counterinsurgency operations).¹⁰⁹ These overall ratings were determined by a series of 15 questions, on each of which an Iraqi unit would be rated in descending order of proficiency as green, amber, red, or black. The responses to the questions would then be entered into algorithms that would ultimately produce the overall TRA rating that would serve as an important element in decisions to off-ramp brigades and close coalition bases.

The TRA metrics were a product of significant collaboration among MNC-I, MNSTC-I, the Joint Staff, and Casey. They were designed to be "simple for the Iraqis to understand and simple for the commanders on the ground to come up with the assessment," as one MNSTC-I officer recalled. "Ultimately, you want to know, can you turn battlespace over to this [Iraqi] unit?"¹¹⁰ Implicit within the assessment system, however, was the understanding that even a TRA 1 unit would not be fully ready to operate independently without the coalition's logistical, fire support, and medical evacuation assistance. However, a TRA 1 rating meant to MNF-I planners that U.S. units could begin to disengage large American combat units from an Iraqi unit's area and turn over battle space.

The 15 questions that calculated the TRA rating were divided into six major groupings: personnel, command and control, training, sustainment/logistics, equipment, and leadership. Almost all of the questions were quantitative. For example, all three of the questions under "equipment" and three of the four questions under "personnel" assessed only whether an Iraqi unit had the equipment and personnel it was authorized. There was little subjectivity to the assessment, and little ability for coalition advisers to note, for example, whether an Iraqi unit was proficient in using the equipment it had on hand. No rating in the assessment explored the important subjective questions of sectarianism, willingness to fight, and unit cohesiveness. Only one of the 15 questions addressed training, and it assessed the percentage of mission essential tasks on which a unit was proficient.¹¹¹ Coalition advisers could include a subjective narrative with the assessment, but it did not contribute to the overall calculation of TRA ratings, nor did it override the TRA rating that derived from the calculations of objective data.

Some tactical-level coalition leaders later found the selection of TRA metrics and their overly objective nature problematic. Major Stephen Campbell, a British officer in MND-SE, explained:

The measures of effects [effectiveness] were coming down from Coalition, from the force up in Baghdad, were things that were irrelevant . . . like, 'Is the Iraqi Security Forces fully manned?' I'm like, 'Yes, it's full manned, it's fully manned with militiamen.' The historical record will be quite

entertaining on this . . . because you're going to find a bunch of categories that are color-coded green for good to go. Yet, the text boxes that go with them is going to say something horrific like, 'The Iraqi Security Forces in MND-Southeast are completely dominated by Shi'a militias. They sponsor attacks on the local population and against the occupation. They are sponsored by Iran. We have no control over them. Assessment, green.' I was allowed to write what I wanted to in the box as long as the thing was green, because by their criteria it was green.¹¹²

Nevertheless, the overall rating was a critical component of the campaign plan because, in Casey's words, it was used to make "judgments about when we might transition areas to the Iraqi Army and, ultimately, provinces back to the Iraqis."¹¹³

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE INSURGENCY

The Shi'a Militias and Iran

At the same time that the U.S. Army was undergoing its transformation, Shi'a insurgent groups were undergoing their own transformation after 1 1/2 years of combat. The Shi'a militant groups, Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) in particular, had taken significant casualties in the April and summer 2004 fighting, killing off many of the less capable leaders and fighters. After absorbing these heavy losses, those JAM leaders that remained concluded that to use the same tactics and engage the coalition in open warfare would be to invite extinction. The surviving leaders decided that external assistance was needed to fight effectively against the coalition.

In what must have been a difficult decision for such an independent-minded leader, Moqtada Sadr acceded to his subordinates' recommendation to reach out to the Iranian regime for additional assistance. Qais al-Khazali, one of Sadr's top lieutenants, later explained to coalition officials that "after the fall of Najaf in August of 2004, he and others in the Sadrist movement were unhappy with the way JAM fought and the way Muqtada as Sadr conducted his military leadership. Khazali and his followers decided to fight in a more disciplined manner with better units, and they reached out to Qasem Suleimani for help."¹¹⁵ As commander of the Qods Force, the subset of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps responsible for covert operations in Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries, Qassem Soleimani welcomed the request for assistance because it gave the Iranian regime additional options to destabilize the American and coalition effort beyond its covert support for SCIRI, the Badr Corps, and Da'wa.¹¹⁶ One British intelligence officer who served in MND-SE and witnessed the



Source: Photo by Meghdad Madadi, Tasnim News Agency.

Qais al-Khazali.¹¹⁴

JAM transformation later described why the Iraqi militia sought Iran's support, and how that support transformed it.

They'd [JAM] realized that fighting us in the streets with the rifles and RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] was a good way of not ever receiving your pension, because we'd just kill them. They couldn't take us on openly like that . . . [so] they went over to the Iranians, and the Iranians had done this work in Lebanon with Hezbollah before in the 1980s, so they basically take their manuals from that particular conflict and use it in this context. They got sophisticated IED technology that was above what our countermeasures could defeat. They came back [with] different structure, covert, cellular, insurgency, closer to terrorism in its tactics than an open insurgency.¹¹⁷

The Qods Force established a comprehensive training program for these new cellular organizations, which would soon be known as Special Groups. The training took place mainly in camps in Iran, with additional training sometimes held in Syria and Lebanon. Some of the training was conducted by Lebanese Hizballah members, who were well respected by their eager Iraqi students because of their experience fighting Israel and their ability to speak Arabic, unlike the Farsi-speaking Iranian trainers who had to instruct through interpreters.¹¹⁸

The April and summer 2004 fighting also transformed the Sadrism insurgency by creating fissures in an organization that had been previously relatively unified. Khazali's initiative to reach out to Iran had political overtones. Deeply frustrated by what he and other Sadr lieutenants saw as Moqtada Sadr's erratic and often incompetent leadership, Khazali likely hoped that the overtures toward Iran would give him an opportunity to become the rightful leader of JAM or possibly create his own organization.¹¹⁹ Khazali's resentment of Sadr dated to the 1990s, when Khazali had been a highly regarded pupil of Sadr's ayatollah father, and it is likely he considered himself more qualified to lead the Sadrism movement than Moqtada Sadr, his former classmate in the elder Sadr's clerical school. Over time, these tensions would begin to splinter the movement.

For the Iranian regime, the volatile Sadr movement could serve as an effective cover for the actions of the Badr Corps, which some coalition leaders believed to be a force of stability, in contrast to Jaysh al-Mahdi. In reality, the Badr Corps was often just as brutal as JAM, but conducted itself more covertly, focusing on operations to exact revenge on Sunni leaders and manipulate the new Iraqi Government. Rather than launching overt militant operations, Badr leaders were content to work their way quietly down an assassination list of prominent Sunnis, coordinating their actions with SCIRI to achieve political effects.¹²⁰

For the next year, as the Shi'a groups underwent their Iranian training and prepared for the next round of conflict, the situation in MND-SE and Baghdad was deceptively quiet. The Shi'a militants' overt activities were limited, but the Shi'a groups were active in pursuing their goals, nonetheless. While some MNF-I leaders believed the coalition had defeated the Sadrists and other Shi'a insurgents in 2004, in reality, 2005 was the calm before the storm. The Iranian regime, happy to expand its influence in Iraqi politics, was seizing a new opportunity to keep the United States off balance.

The Ascendancy of al-Qaeda in Iraq

Sunni insurgent groups also underwent a significant change after suffering heavy losses in the battles in Fallujah, Mosul, and other Sunni cities. The insurgents associated with the former regime had been hit particularly hard, and in their weakness lost their leading place in an insurgency they themselves had begun. As though to illustrate this change, in April the Syrian regime handed over to coalition custody Saddam Hussein's half-brother, Sabawi Ibrahim al-Tikriti, who had been a leader of foreign regime elements operating from Syria.¹²¹

The defeat of insurgent elements in Fallujah led to a geographic restructuring of the insurgency. After the battle, insurgent groups dispersed across the country, reconsolidating in Baghdad, north Babil, and the Ramadi-Fallujah and Al Qa'im-Hadithah corridors in Anbar. Fallujah had become terrain the insurgents could no longer access, at least for the near term. Many of the surviving groups were forced to go underground, and they spent the beginning months of 2005 trying to reestablish their organization and infrastructure in Anbar as a temporary lull settled across the province.¹²²

A large force of insurgents also displaced to the Lake Tharthar region due to its remoteness from coalition forces. The depth of insurgent operations in the area became apparent on March 23, 2005, when a rare coalition foray into the insurgent sanctuary to raid a training camp resulted in the largest engagement since Al Fajr. During a day-long battle that involved air support, Iraqi Special Police Commandos, and elements of MND-NC, 85 insurgents were killed, as well as seven Iraqi Police Commandos.¹²³

The most significant change within the Sunni insurgency, though, came when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's group, Tawhid wal-Jihad, evolved from an independent jihadist group into a part of al-Qaeda in late 2004 and early 2005. While the battles of the summer and fall, when the coalition "fought to the elections," were effective in buying space and time for the election to occur, they also created a fertile breeding ground for the Sunni religious militants. The battles that destroyed swaths of the Sunni cities of Samarra, Tel Afar, Mosul, and Fallujah had destroyed much of the local and regional economies as well, leaving large segments of the Sunni population as refugees or impoverished. Reconstruction funds, promised by the coalition and Iraqi leadership, became mired in the Iraqi Government's bureaucracy and sectarianism. In this economic void, Zarqawi's group was able to use its deeper pockets to hire young men away from other, more secular or nationalist groups.¹²⁴ With the collapse of many Sunni resistance groups associated with former regime elements, many of the rank-and-file members switched loyalties and joined Zarqawi. The switch altered the demographics of his organization so that in Anbar most of his fighters were men who had served as military or security personnel under Saddam.¹²⁵

Some of these former regime members brought with them the wealth and economic connections they had accumulated under Saddam, such as Sheikh Ghazi Sami Abbas, a Fallujah businessman who had become one of the five richest men in Iraq and who helped shelter Saddam's wife and daughters after the fall of Baghdad.¹²⁶ Other sources of Zarqawi's money included smuggling, extortion from Iraqi civilians, and kidnappings and robberies.¹²⁷ Zarqawi also received considerable external financial support in 2005 from al-Qaeda's senior leaders, who recognized Iraq's central place in the global jihad.¹²⁸

With these finances, Zarqawi's organization was essentially able to outbid to the Iraqi Government and the coalition for foot soldiers. While a low-ranking member of the Iraqi Army or police was paid roughly \$150 per month, Zarqawi could pay \$100 to \$200 for a single small arms, mortar, or IED attack, and even paid civilians \$10 a day to spy on coalition forces.¹²⁹

In October 2004, Zarqawi himself swore allegiance to Osama Bin Laden and changed the name of his organization to *Qa'idat al Jihad fi Bilad ar Rafidain*, or al-Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers (Iraq), to reflect the new commitment.¹³⁰ To coalition forces, Zarqawi's renamed organization became known simply as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). By January, Bin Laden rewarded Zarqawi's pledge of fealty by naming him emir, or commander (literally "prince"), of al-Qaeda forces in Iraq.¹³¹ The swearing of allegiance was the result of extensive negotiations between the two groups and the realization of the mutual benefits a merger would bring. For Zarqawi's group, association with al-Qaeda brought brand recognition, an important factor in seeking financial donations and new recruits. Coupled with Zarqawi's efforts to capitalize on the post-Fallujah weakness of former regime elements, the merger ensconced Zarqawi at the top of the insurgency.¹³² For Bin Laden and al-Qaeda, Zarqawi's group was instantly the most active and most violent branch of its global franchise, and by the end of 2004, Bin Laden had concluded that Iraq should be the central campaign in his broader war against the West and its Arab allies. Like Bin Laden, Zarqawi saw Iraq as central to a larger scheme, declaring in September, "The spark has been lit here in Iraq and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the Crusader Armies in Dabiq."¹³³ Referring to a prophecy contained in a hadith, Zarqawi intimated that the conflict in Iraq would eventually lead to a battle in the Syrian town of Dabiq, where Islam would finally triumph over the West in the Armageddon. Such declarations had powerful religious meaning but also made headlines, which proved beneficial to the parent organization's recruiting and fundraising.

At the same time, al-Qaeda's senior leaders in Pakistan were concerned with Zarqawi's barbarism and his focus on targeting Iraq's Shi'a and starting a civil war – a plan that he had outlined to al-Qaeda's senior leadership in the 2004 letters carried by Hassan Ghul. As a result, al-Qaeda had insisted on two conditions for the merger: first, that Zarqawi focus his attacks against the United States, which al-Qaeda saw as the more dangerous "far enemy"; and second, that Zarqawi not provoke intra-Muslim conflicts until after the United States was defeated in Iraq.¹³⁴ Zarqawi would essentially ignore this agreement from the start, much to the consternation of al-Qaeda's leaders, who had asked the Jordanian to organize an attack against the continental United States to demonstrate his commitment to the broader jihad.¹³⁵

Indeed, even as Zarqawi negotiated the conditions of his union with al-Qaeda, he made political and tactical moves toward his goal of igniting a civil war in Iraq, meeting with leaders of Ansar al Sunna and Jaysh Muhammad in Abu Ghraib in early January to plan a joint campaign against the Shi'a-led government in Baghdad. An integral part of his strategy was to increase the number of foreign suicide bombers infiltrating the country and use them to target the elections and the new government.¹³⁶ While Ansar al Sunna would ally with al-Qaeda in Iraq after the meeting, the attempted alliance with Jaysh Muhammad would soon break down, and the two groups became bitter enemies.

From late December onward, Zarqawi continued his attacks against the Shi'a without letup. On December 15, a bombing killed seven at a Shi'a shrine in Karbala and wounded an aide to Grand Ayatollah Sistani.¹³⁷ In the next 2 weeks, twin bombing attacks killed 70 in Najaf and Karbala, while a car bomb that targeted the SCIRI party headquarters in Baghdad killed 13 and nearly killed Abdul Aziz al-Hakim.¹³⁸ On January 12, two senior aides to Sistani were killed in separate attacks in Karbala and Salman Pak. On February 22, Zarqawi's operatives carried out 5 nearly simultaneous suicide bomber attacks across Baghdad that killed 39 and wounded 150 Shi'a celebrating Ashura.¹³⁹ A week later, a suicide car bomber dispatched from Anbar by Zarqawi's cousin detonated his vehicle in the midst of Iraqi Army and police recruits in the Shi'a city of Hillah, killing 122 in the single worst bombing of the war to that point.¹⁴⁰

With the body count mounting, Zarqawi's offensive began to have its intended effect, causing Shi'a patience for nonviolent responses to wear thin. In January, frustrated by the seeming inability of the coalition and the government to stop Zarqawi's terror attacks, members of the Da'wa Party and the Badr Corps formed the Mukhtar Battalion – a Shi'a death squad focused against Salafis, Wahhabis, and Ba'athists.¹⁴¹ They represented the first of what would soon become a wave of Shi'a militant groups targeting the Sunni communities of central Iraq.

Zarqawi's ascension represented a tectonic shift in the insurgency. The Sunni Arab resistance, made up mainly of former regime elements that had been the backbone of the insurgency, fell into the background as Zarqawi rose to prominence. The loss of Fallujah, as well as concerns about Zarqawi's extremist attacks on Iraqis, led many of the less religiously extreme Sunni insurgents to seek ways to rejoin the mainstream and reconcile with the new government. Mohammed Mahmoud Latif, the head of the Ramadi Shura Council, met with other insurgent leaders in Hit in early 2005 to advocate for a political solution to the conflict and even asked Dulaim tribal leaders to serve as intermediaries with the Iraqi Interim Government.¹⁴² Though Latif supported the election boycott of January 2005, his overtures created a schism within the Sunni insurgency between rejectionists and those willing to join the political process.¹⁴³ The rift between Latif and Zarqawi deepened so quickly that in the wake of the disastrous Sunni boycott, open fighting erupted in Ramadi between AQI and more nationalist insurgent groups. By February, Latif and others temporarily stopped targeting coalition forces in order to fight al-Qaeda in Iraq and other Salafi groups that promoted takfir (a religious duty to kill apostates).¹⁴⁴

The schism was not solely between Latif and Zarqawi. In March 2005 in Qusaybah, foreign fighters from AQI fought pitched battles with local Sunni insurgents who had grown tired of fighting coalition forces and of the extremist version of Islam that Zarqawi's group brought with them.¹⁴⁵ In the same month, Harith al-Dhari's Association of Muslim Scholars issued a fatwa that prohibited the killing of Iraqi national guardsmen, to which AQI defiantly responded by increasing its kidnappings and assassinations of ISF. Car-bomb attacks against the Anbar contingent of Special Police Commandos became so numerous that the unit effectively disintegrated as a result.¹⁴⁶ Undeterred, Latif and several other insurgent leaders joined forces with Dhari in late March to form the Sunni Shura Council, which sent envoys to the Iraqi Government to propose, as a reconciliation measure, that over a thousand Iraqi police be replaced with former regime officers.¹⁴⁷

To a degree, the offer signified Sunni leaders' realization that they had made a mistake in boycotting the January election. As word spread of the proposal, other Sunni leaders endorsed the initiative, including some of those who had headed Sunni insurgent groups in 2004: Ahmed al-Khalida from the Ramadi Shura Council, Khalid Shirabi from Mosul, some Syrian-based former regime elements, supporters of Sheikh Abdullah Janabi, and even an errant AQI leader, Abdul Qadr al-Damook.¹⁴⁸ For these leaders, contributing Sunnis to the ISF did not mean supporting the coalition; instead, it meant they would be building a bulwark to prevent Shi'a encroachment into Anbar and setting themselves up potentially to retake control of the Iraqi Government once the coalition withdrew. To demonstrate their resolve, they offered a symbolic 3-day cessation of attacks against coalition forces in April that was ultimately respected by over 2,500 insurgents.¹⁴⁹

Unfortunately for those willing to reconcile with the coalition, al-Qaeda in Iraq reacted quickly and violently to these events, targeting the renegade Damook for assassination and forcing him to flee the country, and also targeting members of the Ramadi Shura Council.¹⁵⁰ The brutality and effectiveness of AQI's vengeance campaign, combined with the nationalist insurgent leaders' seemingly desperate outreach to the new government, seemed to signal to the insurgency's rank-and-file that groups such as the Ramadi Shura Council were losing, at least for the time being.¹⁵¹

The View from MNF-I

MNF-I only partially recognized the transformations occurring within the Shi'a and Sunni insurgencies. While MNF-I leaders correctly assessed that Zarqawi and his organization had become a major threat, it was difficult for the coalition to shift from its initial focus on former regime elements and acknowledge the degree to which Zarqawi had usurped the Ba'athists' place as the dominant force within the Sunni resistance. An MNF-I assessment in January 2005 concluded "the primary threat is Former Regime Elements. Zarqawi remains spectacular and effective, but is not the primary threat."¹⁵² Likewise, MNC-I's April 2005 intelligence assessment concluded, "The insurgency in Iraq is principally Sunni Arab, centered on Former Regime Elements, particularly former Ba'ath Party and Former Regime military and intelligence service members. . . . Foreign Islamic extremists are a relatively small, yet lethal, problem in Iraq."¹⁵³ The same estimate also downplayed both Zarqawi's union with al-Qaeda and Zarqawi's ultimate objectives, noting that the "possible merger" aimed to "develop Iraq into a training ground for a generation of global jihadists." They believed that Zarqawi's intent, as evinced by the captured Ghul letter, was to "create tension between Sunni and Shi'a factions within Iraq to forestall the peaceful transition to Iraqi sovereignty."¹⁵⁴ In hindsight, these assessments completely missed the import of Zarqawi's calls to incite civil war in Iraq and between the Shi'a and Sunni sects across the Middle East. Further demonstrating the disconnect between the coalition's assessments and the true state of the insurgency, at the end of 2004, 6 of the top 10 targets on the MNF-I high-value target list were still former regime elements. The number one high-value target was Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, while number two was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Of the 31 names on the list, 17 were part of Zarqawi's organization or other affiliated jihadist organizations, while 13 were associated with former regime elements.¹⁵⁵ Notably, only one name was associated with Shi'a militant

groups. In the big picture, MNF-I was effectively targeting only Sunnis, and the Sunnis knew it.

While the successful elections were a moment to savor, the Sunni boycott would prove to have far-reaching negative consequences. Almost as soon as the election results were tallied, Sunni Arab leaders began to realize that their gamble on a boycott had been a horrible mistake. While many in MNF-I wrote off the boycott as a hard lesson for the Sunnis, in reality, Sunni Arabs became terrified that they had enabled the handing over of the country to the Shi'a. This disconnect in perceptions would persist for over a year, and consequently, the election results, quite paradoxically, made progress on the political track more difficult than progress in security matters. Coalition leaders saw elections as a unifying factor, one that would lend legitimacy to the Iraqi state and decrease violence in the country as the elected government found its bearings. In the course of events, however, the elections would soon be used by political actors to capture the machinery of government and use it to promote their sectarian agendas. At the same time that MNF-I judged its campaign had achieved "irreversible momentum" in Iraq, the institutional Army in the United States was experiencing considerable stress on its forces. Continuing to transform in the midst of two wars without a significant increase in the Army's end strength forced Army leaders to make the difficult choices of operationalizing the National Guard, the nation's strategic reserve, and deploying some units that had not been resourced for combat duty. Other active duty Army units, whose core functions and expectations had not included deploying on contingency operations, were pushed into deploying and faced similar challenges to the operationalized National Guard units.

When these units began arriving in Iraq, they faced further challenges as they were called to implement an entirely new campaign plan—a transition strategy that emphasized preparing the ISF rather than fighting insurgents. This new approach proved difficult for Army units for whom advising and collaborating with host-nation forces had not been a core component of any training or other preparation. In the best traditions of the Army, these units would improvise, making do without doctrine or experience to guide them, inaugurating a long campaign of pairing with Iraqi units to ready them to take control.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 15

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CHAPTER 16

GOING WEST, APRIL-AUGUST 2005

During the waning days of the lame duck Ayad Allawi government, the spirits of the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) staff and leadership had been buoyed by the announcement that a new cabinet and Prime Minister had finally been selected. For the first time, a freely elected Iraqi Government was formed. MNF-I believed that this event signaled that its campaign plan was on track and that the country was on the path to a fully legitimate Iraqi Government that could assume the responsibility for its own security. Yet, under the veneer of this optimism, ethnic tensions roiled Iraq, threatening to overwhelm the entire process. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and his al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) would soon undertake a terrorist offensive in Baghdad, targeting government officials and Shi'a communities in an attempt to destabilize the new government and provoke a Shi'a response. As this sectarian violence began to increase in central Iraq, General George Casey faced a choice about where to employ the coalition's limited combat power: in central Iraq, where the bulk of the damaging sectarian attacks were taking place; or on the Iraq-Syria border, where AQI and other Sunni insurgent groups enjoyed freedom of movement into Iraq.

NEW GOVERNMENT AND NEW SECTARIAN VIOLENCE

The Ja'afari Government and the Mada'in Incident

On April 7, 2005, after 2 months of negotiations among the major parties, the newly seated Iraqi Parliament elected Jalal Talabani, the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, to the position of Iraqi President, with Sunni tribal leader Ghazi al-Yawar and the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq's (SCIRI) Adel Abdel Mahdi as vice presidents. Talabani immediately named Da'wa Party leader Ibrahim al-Ja'afari as Prime Minister designate, meaning that Ja'afari would have 1 month to form a government. Ja'afari had emerged as the United Iraqi Alliance's (UIA) consensus candidate after almost 2 months of negotiations among the major parties. Ja'afari's installation as Prime Minister marked the end of the Iraqi Interim Government and the beginning of the Iraqi Transitional Government, whose primary purpose was to draft a national constitution. For the first time in its modern history, Iraq was about to come under Shi'a political control, an opportunity that Iraq's Shi'a leaders were not going to squander.



Source: DoD photo by Sergeant Ferdinand Thomas (Released).

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'afari.¹

However, the month-long period of Ja'afari's government formation was fraught with tension. On April 16, the week following Ja'afari's appointment, but before he had actually entered office, reports surfaced in the mixed-sect town of Mada'in, 16 kilometers south of Baghdad, that Sunni insurgents had taken as many as 150 Shi'a hostages, threatening to execute them if the remaining Shi'a did not abandon the village immediately. The specter of such overt sectarian cleansing on top of already strained sectarian relations created a political crisis in Baghdad. Iraqi National Security Minister Qasem Daoud, a Shi'a politician close to Grand Ayatollah Ali Husayni Sistani, described the reported incident as "an attempt to drag this country into civil war," while other members of the National Assembly described it as "a kind of ethnic purge."²

Three battalions of the Iraqi Army surrounded Mada'in prepared for a Fallujah-type house-to-house battle, but as Iraqi troops moved into the town, they found no insurgents, only townspeople who claimed to reporters that no hostages had been taken.³ In the days following the incident, Sunni and Shi'a politicians disagreed bitterly on what had happened. Sunni politicians denied the hostage-taking and massacre had taken place, claiming a hoax had been perpetrated as a pretext for "striking the Sunni areas around Baghdad as a preface to sparking riots and fights between the two sects."⁴ Shi'a political groups and government officials claimed the hostages had been killed and dumped in the Tigris, a claim that was bolstered 3 days later when local officials pulled 57 bodies from the river a few miles downstream at Suwayrah. Talabani announced that the corpses at Suwayrah were those of the massacred Mada'in hostages, and SCIRI leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim wrote interim Prime Minister Allawi to provide the names of those that SCIRI

believed were responsible. In one of his last acts before leaving office, Allawi asked General George W. Casey, Jr., to open an investigation into the Mada'in "assassinations," to which Casey replied that the Iraqi Government should conduct the investigation with U.S. help, assuring Allawi that the names of the alleged terrorists SCIRI had furnished would be added to the coalition's intelligence database.⁵

The reported Mada'in "massacre" illustrated that Iraq had become a sectarian tinderbox, where a single instance of sectarian violence, or even a rumor of one, was enough to provoke a national-level crisis and serious talk of civil war. The incident also served as a microcosm of the larger Iraq at the time. After the incident, rather than cooperate on a joint investigation to determine what happened, Sunni and Shi'a politicians created differing narratives of what occurred, complete with their own "facts" that they exploited for personal and political gain. It also revealed the true nature and complexity of the "fog" of Iraq, giving clarity to the depths of the challenges that the coalition faced in trying to determine what really happened in the aftermath of a significant episode with operational implications. In a cogent example of the coalition's limited situational awareness in the area of sectarian violence and cleansing, MNF-I officials remained unsure of what exactly had happened in Mada'in, even though it was mere kilometers from the MNF-I headquarters in Baghdad.

Into this sectarian swamp waded Ibrahim al-Ja'afari. Ja'afari's leadership of the Da'wa Party, one of the few political factions without a militia, made him an acceptably non-threatening Prime Minister option for the various members of the UIA, and Ja'afari was able to garner enough votes to be seated on May 3, 2005, as the first freely elected Prime Minister in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq.

Ja'afari's Da'wa Party was originally a reformist Islamic organization founded in 1959 by young Najaf-based clerics and laymen who modeled themselves after Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood.⁶ Ja'afari, a Shi'a Arab and trained physician, joined the party in 1966, shortly before the Ba'athists came to power.⁷ The ascendancy of the Ba'ath brought considerable pressure on Da'wa, including arrests and harassment, which resulted in the organization evolving into a revolutionary movement by the mid-1970s.⁸ When Saddam cracked down on the party at the outset of the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war in 1979-1980, many Da'wa members fled to Iran, including Ja'afari.⁹ By the end of the 1980s, the exiled Da'wa had fractured into multiple branches, and Ja'afari moved to London.¹⁰ After Saddam's fall, he returned to Iraq and served as one of the two deputy presidents in the Iraqi Interim Government.

On April 28, 2005, Ja'afari received the Parliament's approval for his proposal to create a cabinet consisting of 32 ministers and 3 deputy prime ministers. Following its clear election victory, the UIA meant to ensure that as the government formed, Shi'a leaders would control a majority of the ministries, including the most powerful ones. Ministerial positions and the executive power associated with them were among the most important trophies to the new Shi'a administration in what was soon to become a de facto war to capture control of Iraq's state institutions. The eventual division of ministries reflected 16 Shi'a ministers, 8 Kurds, 6 Sunnis, 1 Christian, and 1 Turkoman.¹¹ Notably, Bayan Jabr, a SCIRI activist with ties to the Badr Corps, became Iraq's interior minister, and three Sadr supporters assumed ministerial positions, despite the fact that Moqtada Sadr had called

for a boycott of the election.¹² Although new Defense Minister Sadoun Dulaimi was a Sunni, the UIA balanced his role by appointing a Shi'a as his deputy.¹³

Bayan Jabr and the Interior Ministry

The distribution of ministries to the political parties within the UIA created fiefdoms that were accountable to their party leaders rather than to the new Prime Minister. The most clearly detrimental posting was Bayan Jabr as the interior minister. The coalition initially met Jabr's appointment with optimism. At Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I), Lieutenant General David H. Petraeus came away from initial meetings with Jabr hoping that he would prove to be less corrupt and more focused on security than previous interior minister Falah Naqib, whom the coalition suspected had stacked the ministry with cronies.¹⁴ Naqib had also been responsible for staffing the Special Police with former officers from the Republican Guard and Special Forces, a step the Shi'a and Kurdish parties had vehemently criticized.¹⁵ However, Jabr quickly proved to be worse than his predecessor was. Shortly after taking over the ministry, Jabr purged the Special Police of 300 Sunni leaders, labeling them "criminals," and replaced them with



Source: DoD photo by 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division Public Affairs (Released).

Bayan Jabr, Iraqi Minister of the Interior (2003-2004).¹⁷

Shi'a officers, mostly members of the Badr Corps. In his first weeks in the ministry, Jabr hired 15,000 new recruits into the Special Police, the majority of whom were Shi'a.¹⁶ As the demographics of the Commandos and other Special Police shifted, becoming majority Shi'a, the units took on the nicknames of the "Wolf Brigade" and the "Scorpion Brigade," and under the pretext of hunting down insurgents and terrorists the brigades began a campaign of extrajudicial violence and intimidation in Sunni neighborhoods. Jabr initiated a shift in the Interior Ministry's local Baghdad strategy from defensive to offensive actions (under the name Operation LIGHTNING) and greatly increased the number of police battalions in Baghdad.¹⁸ While this change had little impact on the number of insurgent attacks in the Baghdad area, it did result in accusations by the Sunni Arab parties that the Interior Ministry was deliberately "allowing large-scale infiltration of Shi'a militias and alleged 'death squads' into its ranks."¹⁹ As this infiltration progressed, reports became more frequent from Sunni neighborhoods that "gunmen in police uniforms routinely abducted people from their homes, cars, and – in one particularly flagrant case – hospital beds."²⁰ According to Finance Minister Ali Allawi, "It was common knowledge that Baghdad's 60,000 strong police force was divided between the Mahdi Army and the Badr Organization" with 12,000 former Badr Corps members absorbed into the Police Commandos.²¹

With its focus on the Sunni insurgency and on transition to the Iraqi security forces, MNF-I failed to recognize this escalation in government-sponsored sectarian violence. In briefings during mid-2005, several of Casey's senior intelligence analysts warned their

commander that their greatest fear was that the Iraqi security forces would become dominated by the Shi'a, which could spark sectarian violence and a civil war, a danger Casey discounted since the minister of defense and the majority of Iraqi Army generals at that time were Sunni.²²

The Rise of Sectarian Cleansing

Partially as a reaction to the formation of the Ja'afari government, sectarian elements crept into Baghdad's mixed-sect areas aiming to establish bases of operation and cleanse neighborhoods. For AQI, the objective was to intimidate Shi'a living in Baghdad and destabilize the first Shi'a Iraqi Government in the nation's modern history. To this end, Zarqawi formally announced the creation of the Umar Brigades on July 5, although it is likely that they were operating before the announcement. The brigades were named after the second caliph, Umar, who, in a symbolic reference to the contemporary struggle against Iran, had conquered Persia and spread Islam through South Asia. Virulently anti-Shi'a and anti-Iranian, they began targeting Badr Corps leaders and Shi'a civilians in Baghdad and Anbar, successfully assassinating Badr commanders Kharry al-Amri and Adel Khosk Khabar. Using sophisticated media campaigns that created a strategy for each major city in Anbar Province, the brigades were largely successful in harnessing Sunni fear and painting Zarqawi as the defender of Iraq's Sunni population.²³

Shi'a militias from Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) and Badr responded to AQI's violence with their own attacks as a way to cement their hard-won political gains, protect their own neighborhoods, and extend their influence and control. Often, these sectarian elements first threatened civilians of rival sects, pressuring them to move. When intimidation failed, they quietly resorted to violence to achieve their objectives. One resident of the primarily Sunni neighborhood of Ameriyah described how the initial phases of the sectarian infiltration occurred:

In 2005, we began to see how insurgents, Al-Qaeda, were taking root in the gangs roaming Ameriya. The first sign that al-Qaeda was moving into our area was the graffiti. . . . [Then] one of the mosques in the area known for its sectarian leanings became a gathering point for those of the al-Qaeda mindset. That was when this new ideology began emerging in the neighborhood. People started saying that Shi'ites were infidels. Many of my Shi'ite neighbors fled then.²⁴

Shi'a militias, both Jaysh al-Mahdi and the Badr Corps, were using strikingly similar tactics in other mixed neighborhoods of Baghdad and north Babil. Saman Dlawer Hussein, a Sunni who lived on the sectarian border between the Baghdad neighborhoods of Mansour and Washash, described how the Jaysh al-Mahdi militia moved in:

Everything started to change for the worse . . . around the beginning of 2005. . . . The troubles started with three suicide car bombs in Washash . . . then we started to hear stories about how the Mahdi Army was forcing Sunni families to leave Washash. There was no killing during this time that we knew of, no murdering of Sunni families. Sunnis were being made to leave Washash under threat, but widespread murders were not happening yet. . . . As the neighborhoods around Baghdad split along sectarian lines, it became difficult to move around the city because of the checkpoints set up by insurgents and militias. . . . A lot of my classmates began dying in their neighborhoods.²⁵

The sectarian gangs often disposed of their victims' bodies in the Tigris River, resulting in scores of bodies being recovered each month downstream of Baghdad at Salman Pak and Suwayrah, as had potentially been the case with the Mada'in hostages. Despite the level of terror, the violence was controlled: acts of intimidation were usually methodically planned and often covert. On both sides, functioning organizations managed the violence, preventing it from becoming chaotic and uncontrollable.

The developments were not just a Sunni-Shi'a affair. As the sectarian violence escalated and rival militias and extra-governmental armed organizations began to propagate, Kurdish parties also recognized what was happening and became more overt in expanding their own extra-governmental security apparatus, which had existed as a failsafe to prevent another genocide. In July 2005, Talabani began to establish an official all-Kurd Presidential Security Brigade outside of the Iraqi security forces. Even though Casey sent a formal letter strongly warning him against the move, Talabani went ahead with the formation of the unit, based in his presidential compound in Baghdad's Karada neighborhood. With ethno-sectarian armed groups, both official and unofficial, springing up across the map, Baghdad was becoming an armed camp.²⁶

MNF-I had assessed that violence would spike during the volatile period while the government was forming and then die down. However, as the new government took office and attacks remained high, MNF-I was slow to appreciate its true sectarian nature and depth. Even so, MNF-I leaders intuitively knew that something had changed. In an April videoconference with Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld, Casey had acknowledged the escalating trend and added that "the feel is different," without being able to articulate the shifting character of the conflict.²⁷ At the same time, however, the MNF-I commander optimistically noted that the violence was still below the levels that prevailed before Iraq had regained its sovereignty and that Iraqi security forces continued to grow significantly in size.²⁸ Despite the rosy statistics, Casey's intuition was correct—the conflict was undergoing a tectonic shift, morphing from an insurgency to a sectarian conflict.

Al-Qaeda's Car-Bomb Offensive

To this already bitterly toxic sectarian environment, AQI added a massive car bomb campaign in Baghdad that exceeded in size or scope all of its previous campaigns. In the mind of Zarqawi, the formation of the Ja'afari government, and the handing over of the reins of power to Shi'a apostates, was cause to launch an offensive against Baghdad's Shi'a civilian population. Determined to incite civil war, Zarqawi employed tactics that were distinct from the more secular Sunni resistance organizations in their nihilistic violence, killing hundreds of innocents by design to achieve his overall objective. With the ascendancy of Zarqawi and al-Qaeda in Iraq, a sea change had quietly taken place in the war. The focus of the Sunni insurgency was no longer on expelling the "occupying forces," but on killing Iraqis, specifically apostate Shi'a, in support of Zarqawi's goal of starting an apocalyptic sectarian civil war in Iraq and beyond. Describing Zarqawi's blind hatred of the Shi'a, one coalition analyst noted that "if he had gas [chambers] and ovens, he would be throwing the Shia in them."²⁹ Years later, while imprisoned as coalition detainees, some of Zarqawi's senior lieutenants described the AQI leader's desire to incite a global

sectarian war by comparing him to the Joker, Heath Ledger's character in the 2008 movie, "The Dark Knight," whose central desire was "to watch the world burn."³⁰

It was to this end that the Jordanian launched the car-bomb campaign and infiltrated extremists into Baghdad neighborhoods. The spike in these attacks in the capital during the period surrounding Ja'afari's swearing-in was striking. During a 13-day continuous surge in activity that lasted from the end of April until May 11, AQI carried out 79 car-bomb attacks against primarily Shi'a targets. On the last day, Baghdad endured nine such assaults that killed 112.³¹ By the end of May, the number of bombings reached 142, the highest monthly total for 2005. In June, the bombings and sectarian violence continued unabated, resulting in the deaths of 1,347 Iraqi civilians, the most since the invasion phase of the war.³² On July 15, Baghdad was hit by eight car bombs in a 24-hour span.³³ The next day in Musayyib, 56 kilometers south of Baghdad, a single suicide bomber killed over 100 and wounded 150 more, destroying 150 shops and a Shi'a mosque when his device set off a nearby propane tanker.³⁴

The majority of these suicide bombers were foreigners; Saudis and Kuwaitis were chosen, often personally, by Zarqawi. After their selection, they were ensconced in a safe house with four to five other bombers as the car bomb itself was constructed, separated from others, and fed a daily diet of religious readings and diatribes to strengthen their resolve. The isolation also offered AQI the opportunity to videotape their "suicide statement," which was a critical element in the deadly cycle of recruiting new bombers.³⁵

As the bombings continued throughout the summer, a pall of fear hung over Baghdad. For Baghdad residents, simply leaving home to shop or run errands became a risky proposition because a car bomb or suicide bomber could strike public areas at any moment. The sense of fear was especially strong on public transportation because of the predilection of suicide bombers for targeting the city's buses, and because most Iraqis had no other transportation option. One Baghdad resident recalled that:

minibuses were a target for bombings during the bad period, and we were always reminding each other to stay off the crowded ones. The idea was that a bomber would probably not waste explosives on a minibus carrying few people. . . . So, if your bus pulls up and it's packed, better to wait for the next one in the hope that it is less crowded.³⁶

This pervasive sense of dread was an indicator that the sectarian violence was rapidly becoming self-perpetuating. AQI and the Sunni insurgents launched car bomb and kidnapping forays into Shi'a neighborhoods, while Jaysh al-Mahdi and other Shi'a militias continued their campaigns of intimidation, violence, and sectarian cleansing against Sunnis. At the same time, many Iraq Special Police units conducted a campaign of illegal arrests, torture, and execution of Sunnis. By midsummer, sectarian killings of all types had reached unprecedented highs, with the Baghdad morgue recording 1,100 violent deaths in July. A full 900 of the victims showed evidence of some type of torture or execution, such as cigarette burns, hands tied and bullet in the head, or power tool wounds.³⁷

During this critical period of governmental transition and sectarian horrors, the U.S. Embassy lacked an ambassador. Ambassador John Negroponte had departed Iraq on March 17 after being selected by President George W. Bush to serve as the first director of national intelligence.³⁸ Serving in his place, the charge d'affaires, Ambassador James Jeffrey, was a career foreign service officer who had served as an infantry officer in Vietnam

and had been deputy chief of mission during the turbulent transition from Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to the embassy. Jeffrey was highly capable but was an interim leader of America's diplomatic efforts who had to manage two portfolios, as well as navigate relationships with some Iraqis who were circumspect and restrained in their relations with the embassy, until the new ambassador arrived.

COALITION RESPONSE IN ANBAR AND NINAWA

Reestablishing Control of the Western Border

While the overall level of sectarian bloodshed did not alter MNF-I's new transition plans, the size and scope of al-Qaeda in Iraq's suicide car-bombing campaign led to extensive deliberations on how best to stop the attacks. In June, Casey began to suspect that the car-bomb campaign was threatening the legitimacy of the Iraqi Government, and thus the coalition's center of gravity because AQI's ability to bomb targets with impunity created the perception that the government was incapable of protecting its citizens.³⁹ Casey also feared that the bombings could unhinge the October constitutional referendum and December parliamentary elections, effectively derailing the coalition's campaign plan. Major General Richard P. Zahner, MNF-I's deputy chief of staff for intelligence, commented, "We had days . . . of 17 plus VBIED operations [in Baghdad] and the question really boiled down to at what point were the Shia going to cease exercising restraint in the face of an extraordinarily violent campaign?"⁴⁰ The question was an apt one. Even for the most restrained Shi'a community leaders, patience was running out. On July 16, Grand Ayatollah Sistani, who previously urged the Shi'a not to retaliate violently against the sectarian attacks, began calling on the Ja'afari government to "defend the country against mass annihilation."⁴¹

Worried that an end to Shi'a patience could lead to sectarian reprisals against Sunnis that, in turn, could threaten the upcoming elections, coalition leaders began exploring how to stem the tide of bombings. The vital components of the car bombs were following two infiltration routes, or rat lines, that originated in Syria, MNF-I and Multi-National Corps Iraq (MNC-I) analysts determined. They also believed that the vast majority of the suicide car-bomb drivers were foreign fighters who had to infiltrate along these routes because Iraqis were purportedly less willing to participate in suicide operations. These factors led Casey to conclude that targeting the infiltration routes and the foreign jihadist car bombers who used them could be decisive for stopping the wave of attacks in central Iraq. By reestablishing control of Iraq's western borders, Casey believed the coalition would cut both infiltration routes into Anbar and Ninawa Provinces, thereby preventing the bombings. The first infiltration route crossed near the border town of Al Qa'im in Anbar Province and followed the Euphrates River Valley past Hadithah, Ramadi, Fallujah, and into Baghdad. The second originated along historic desert smuggling routes in western Ninawa Province near the town of Sinjar, traveled east through Tel Afar to Mosul, and then followed the Tigris River Valley south through Salahadin Province into the Baghdad region.



Donald Rumsfeld (left). Source: DoD photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Chad J. McNeeley (Released).

SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld and Major General Richard P. Zahner, MNF-I CJ-2.⁴²

Casey's and Zahner's judgment that the main security problem was externally driven aligned with the public narrative of many senior Iraqi leaders. Senior officials such as national security adviser Mowaffaq Rubaie charged that Iraq's violence stemmed not from internal strife, but from foreign powers who sent suicide terrorists into Iraq to thwart the political ascendancy of Iraqi Shi'a and Kurds. Most of the internal fighting, these Iraqi leaders contended, was merely a response to this foreign intervention. At any rate, the belief that the foreign-facilitated car-bomb network constituted the greatest threat to the coalition's objectives represented a shift in MNF-I's perceptions. Before June, MNF-I had considered former regime elements intent on derailing the political process to be its principal enemy, but as the number of car bombs increased, MNF-I leaders came to the conclusion that foreign fighters and terrorists, especially Zarqawi's AQI, were the greatest danger to the coalition campaign. Despite this considerable change in threat assessment, MNF-I leaders saw the sectarian attacks as tactical moves best answered by repositioning coalition tactical forces rather than by altering the plan to transition responsibility to the Iraqi security forces. On June 23, Casey reported to Rumsfeld that "the nature of the insurgency has not changed in a way that invalidates our strategy or places our campaign plan at unacceptable risk."⁴³ Still describing the insurgency somewhat monolithically, Casey's report also sanguinely judged that "insurgents will retain sufficient popular support to sustain operations. Intimidation will have limited effects, but will not increase popular support to the insurgency. . . . Attacks against civilians will continue, but will not prevent growing optimism and support for the political process."⁴⁴ The report concluded with the optimistic statement, "Support for the government is growing."

In retrospect, it appears that MNF-I saw the transformation of the insurgency in 2005 as a change in management rather than an alteration in aims or ideology. Thus, MNF-I officials failed to address Zarqawi's plan—known to the coalition since his correspondence had been captured in early 2004—to ignite a sectarian civil war, even as the sectarian situation in central Iraq grew more combustible.

Syria's Role

The idea that the coalition needed to reestablish control of the border was also a tacit recognition of the role that Syria was playing in the conflict. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad provided open sanctuary to foreign jihadists and Iraqi insurgents and even assisted them on their way to the border. One striking example of this was the Syrian regime's support to Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, the former deputy leader of Saddam's Ba'athist regime, to whom the Assad regime supplied weapons via Syria's intelligence services. Douri had seen the shifting political sands within the insurgency and had become a de facto ally of Zarqawi and al-Qaeda in Iraq, using his former Iraqi Intelligence Service contacts to smuggle the Syrian weapons across the border. To leverage the former Ba'athist infrastructure fully, Douri told former Ba'athists that they would be reinstated to senior positions when the Ba'ath returned to power.⁴⁵

While Assad, a leader of the Shi'a-minority Alawite sect, gave sanctuary to Sunni jihadists that would normally be his archenemies, the jihadists returned the favor. For jihadists such as al-Qaeda in Iraq, ignoring the Alawite "apostate" ruling Syria gained them the freedom to infiltrate Iraq easily with foreign fighters, weapons, and supplies. The route had become so important that by the summer of 2005, news correspondents had begun calling the upper Euphrates River Valley "Iraq's Ho Chi Minh Trail" as a way to explain its importance.⁴⁶ A senior Sunni insurgent known as Abu Ahmed later recalled, "All the foreigners I knew got into Iraq that way. It was no secret."⁴⁷ MNF-I's intelligence analysts estimated that 100 to 125 foreign fighters entered Iraq each month through the Euphrates River Valley route.⁴⁸

Most foreign fighters entered Syria by flying into the Damascus Airport. From there, facilitators from local mosques would transport them to safe houses. The volunteers would then be assessed for their skills, with experienced fighters sent quickly across the border while raw recruits entered training camps. At the camps, the recruits learned military skills and took classes on Iraqi dialect and customs in order to assimilate better into the Iraqi population. When the fighters were ready to enter Iraq, they used two main infiltration routes from Syria into Iraq, both of which MNF-I had correctly identified. In the north, they would enter through the Tel Kushik border crossing or back roads near Shaddadi or Qamishli. Once inside Iraq, fighters who had shown less promise went through a second training cycle near Biaj, while experienced fighters proceeded to Tel Afar or Mosul. A southern route passed through Albu Kamal, through Al Walid, or across the vast expanses of the Jazeera desert north of the Euphrates before moving on to Al Qa'im, Ramadi, or Baghdad.⁴⁹

For the Assad regime, support to Iraq's Sunni insurgency was a way to regain leverage against the United States at a time when the Syrian military was being ousted from Lebanon by the U.S.-backed Cedar Revolution. Allowing Salafi fighters to enter Iraq through

Syrian territory would help keep the United States off balance, while perhaps preventing Iraq from becoming a U.S. ally from which attacks against Syria could be launched. The mission was important enough that senior regime officials headed by Bashar al-Assad's own brother-in-law, Assef Shawkat, were directly involved in facilitating foreign fighters into Iraq. Helping jihadists flow into Iraq also served as a relief valve for the Syrian regime's own domestic Sunni opposition. Each Syrian jihadist killed across the border equaled one fewer problem the regime might have to contend with in the future. Providing official support and transportation to the jihadists also enabled Assad's security services to identify and track individuals and groups in Syria's domestic opposition, cataloging them for potential future use.⁵⁰

Because disrupting the insurgent sanctuary inside Syria was beyond the authority and means of the operational commanders in Iraq, Casey worked with General John Abizaid at U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) and senior U.S. officials in Washington to address the problem. Abizaid, who recognized the extent of Syrian regime involvement, argued in a July 2005 letter to Rumsfeld, "We must send a clear message that they [Syria] will either secure their borders to include insurgent flow in and out or we will do it for them."⁵¹ To achieve this end, Abizaid proposed several options, including armed reconnaissance into Syrian airspace, using ground forces to strike Syrian targets of opportunity while in "hot pursuit" of insurgents retreating across the border, and a naval show of force in the eastern Mediterranean.⁵² While reviewing these options, CENTCOM officers assessed that 65 to 75 percent of the foreign fighters entering Iraq came through Syria, with Damascus as a "funnel point for foreign fighter entry to Syria." They further noted, "restricting the flow [of foreign fighters] on a 600-kilometer eastern border is difficult; [we] must focus on Damascus as the entry point."⁵³ Accordingly, Abizaid and General Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, proposed to Rumsfeld that the United States bomb the Damascus Airport to stem the flow of foreign fighters and to send a signal short of invasion that Syria should stop supporting the infiltration routes.⁵⁴ The two generals believed that, even if Syria did not comply, damaging the airport could effectively shut down the foreign fighter pipeline fueling Zarqawi's car-bomb campaign. Though Rumsfeld did not endorse the military leaders' suggestion, at a higher level, the National Security Council was also exploring options for the Syria problem.⁵⁵ One course of action discussed at both deputies' and principals' meetings in the summer of 2005 was that of conducting "regime change" against the Assad government, but, as with the Damascus Airport proposal and other coercive actions, U.S. leaders ultimately rejected the idea.⁵⁶ As a result, the strategic problem of the Syrian sanctuary was effectively left for Casey and MNF-I to manage.

The Casey-Vines Dispute

While there was general agreement at the strategic and operational levels about how foreign fighters were entering Iraq, there was considerable disagreement on how best to respond to the threat. In particular, the MNF-I and MNC-I commanders disagreed on how to interdict the two infiltration routes and ultimately turn the tide of the bombings in Baghdad. Casey believed that the geographic center of gravity for the campaign had shifted to the Iraqi-Syrian border in Ninawa and Anbar Provinces. As such, he believed

that there should be an operational-level restructuring of forces to reflect the changed priority, with additional combat power shifted to the border. In his view, waiting until the explosives, suicide bombers, and other key components of the car bombs arrived in Baghdad amounted to acting too late.

By contrast, Vines believed that the operational focus should remain in Baghdad and its environs. “[T]here was an area of healthy tension between MNF-I and MNC-I headquarters about the nature of the threat and what to do about it,” he recalled. “[T]here was an argument about whether [reestablishing control of the borders] was to be part of our main effort, center of gravity, or a decisive point because there were a lot of resources that were going to have to be committed.”⁵⁷ From the MNC-I commander’s perspective, the border zone was a huge, porous area that would require massive amounts of combat power to control, something the shortage of coalition forces would make difficult to achieve. Vines judged that a push to the border would require more than two brigades’ worth of combat power, 80 percent of the coalition’s engineer assets, and 70 percent of its tactical transportation assets.⁵⁸ Rather than committing so many forces to the border area, he favored focusing intelligence resources on that region, especially the increasing amounts of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) becoming available in the form of unmanned aerial vehicles. Coalition ISR platforms could identify the car bombers at the border and then track them to the belts of Baghdad, which Vines described as “support zones,” using classic insurgency terminology. Because the threat had to consolidate in the belts before launching attacks into the city, he believed it was more effective and economical to track the enemy combatants there and then strike before they could execute their attacks.

Vines was not alone in his judgment. At MNSTC-I, General David Petraeus was aware of the differing views and believed that Vines was right. For Petraeus, it made little sense to shift significant forces from the center of the country to the border in hopes of disrupting the insurgency because “the bad guys were already inside the wire” in central Iraq. Removing troops from the center amounted to uncovering insurgent-contested territory, the MNSTC-I commander believed.⁵⁹

Marine leaders in MNF-W also were reluctant to move forces to the border and argued that securing the populated areas closer to Baghdad encompassing Ramadi, Fallujah, and Habbaniyah was more important for the holding of successful elections in the fall of 2005.⁶⁰ This disagreement resulted in miscommunication and interservice friction. With the Marines reluctant to internally retask their forces and move them west, MNF-I was unable to force the issue.⁶¹

The friction with MNF-W only served to further cloud the way forward between Casey and Vines, essentially delaying an eventual confrontation over the border initiative. After a multi-week delay by MNC-I in moving forces west, Casey realized the disconnect and clarified his intent with Vines. By that time, the disagreement had become intense. Vines felt so strongly that the diversion of resources from Baghdad to the border was a mistake that he asked Casey to provide the order in writing. Convinced his strategy was correct, Casey overruled Vines, and MNC-I began planning to move forces west to restore control of the Iraqi-Syrian border.

Bad to Worse in Anbar

When coalition officers began to write the specifics of the plan to reestablish control of Iraq's western border, they had to face the hard reality that the tactical and operational approaches used in Anbar were not working. The security situation in the province in general, and at the border specifically, had deteriorated significantly since the end of 2004 and the withdrawal of the forces that had conducted Operation AL FAJR in Fallujah. By April, al-Qaeda in Iraq had regenerated after its losses in Fallujah and MNF-W's disruption campaign.⁶² Because of new AQI offensives, Hit, Hadithah, and Rawah effectively fell to AQI control. In Hit, al-Qaeda in Iraq established Sharia courts, took control of government offices, and used profits from commandeered gas stations to help finance operations.⁶³ In Hadithah, insurgents took over a defunct government power station and used it as a bomb factory and foreign fighter safe house.⁶⁴ One hundred insurgents openly paraded through Rawah daily and used the local water treatment plant as their headquarters.⁶⁵ Al Qa'im also fell in April, after which Zarqawi declared it the new capital of Iraq and made it his headquarters. To make Al Qa'im a symbol of what life would be like under an Islamist state of his making, Zarqawi set up Sharia courts, implemented Islamic law and punishments, and took over mosques to ensure they preached his orthodoxy. Religious police patrolled the streets to ensure men were cutting their hair and growing their beards, and the town hall flew the green flags of an Islamic state instead of Iraq's flag.⁶⁶

To a degree, Zarqawi's shift west was a result of pressure from Mohammed Mahmoud Latif and Ramadi-based insurgent groups that had decided to explore joining the Iraqi political process. The counterbalance that Latif and the Ramadi Shura Council provided against the eastward expansion of AQI was temporarily upset in May when coalition forces arrested Mohammed Daham, a key ally of Latif on the council.⁶⁷ With Daham arrested, Latif changed course and opened discussions on realigning the Shura Council with AQI.⁶⁸ The temporary realignment would not last, however, as Latif and Zarqawi's perspectives on the future of Iraq and the route to achieving that vision were simply irreconcilable.

Despite internal disagreements among the Sunni insurgent groups, the insurgent position across Anbar Province was strong in relation to the coalition. Demonstrating their strength, on April 11, AQI fighters launched a sophisticated attack against Camp Gannon, a Marine outpost located in Qusaybah on the Syrian border.⁶⁹ The attackers used three successive explosive-laden transports driven by suicide bombers, each designed to breach farther into the compound. The first was a sport utility vehicle, the second a dump truck with welded-on armor, and the third a fire truck so heavily laden with explosives that it blew up in a mushroom cloud, with effects felt 16 kilometers away.⁷⁰ The vehicles were followed by an assault force of nearly 100 insurgents, leading to a battle that lasted 24 hours and required fixed- and rotary-wing air strikes to put down the militants.

Because of a lack of sufficient coalition combat power either to hold ground or to gain adequate situational awareness, many of MNF-W's operations during the spring and early summer of 2005 were more akin to raids, in which Marine forces would clear an insurgent sanctuary and then leave. Colonel Stephen Davis, the Regimental Combat Team 2 commander responsible for western Anbar Province, explained that, because he

only had four rifle companies, he was only able to conduct operations that would disrupt the insurgency. He later recalled, "I was trying to create the illusion of a greater force structure by showing up everywhere but nowhere, in order to not be predictable."⁷¹ Operations RIVER BLITZ, RIVER BRIDGE, MATADOR, and NEW MARKET all fell into this category of temporarily disrupting only the insurgent activity. So little was known about the enemy situation that part of the mission of the 1st Marine Division during Operation RIVER BLITZ was to "conduct offensive operations in Al Anbar Province to disrupt Anti-Iraqi Forces [AIF], defeat AIF elements, and generate intelligence in order to set the conditions for operation River Bridge."⁷² On May 9, Operation MATADOR was different from the other operations in that it struck Ramana, on the north side of the Euphrates River. During the battle, an Army engineer unit built a ribbon bridge across the river under enemy fire – the first time since the Korean war – while Marine amphibious vehicles swam the Euphrates to secure the far side of the bridge site. Despite fighting that left 9 coalition troops killed and 39 wounded, as well as 144 insurgents killed and 40 detained, all of the coalition forces that conducted the operation returned to their garrisons less than a week later, effectively ceding Ramana back to the insurgency.⁷³ Many Marines were intensely frustrated by this operational approach, with one officer later describing their technique as, "we cleared, [and] abandoned; cleared, [and] abandoned."⁷⁴

This operational disruption approach was neither effective in keeping AQI and other Sunni insurgents off balance nor in preventing them from successfully attacking high-value targets among the coalition's partners. On May 12, Zarqawi's men managed to kidnap Anbar Governor Rajah Nawaf Farhan al-Mahalawi, along with his son and some of his supporters.⁷⁵ The governor's body was discovered in Rawah nearly 3 weeks later in the aftermath of a battle between U.S. forces and insurgents. Because of Farhan's position within the Albu Mahal tribe, his death reignited the long-standing hostilities between AQI and the Albu Mahal, with the tribe again looking for vengeance against Zarqawi's group.

Worse yet, the disruption approach had a series of unintended consequences. In some cases, AQI insurgents fled to other, more remote areas of Anbar that had been untouched by extremism, spreading the insurgency like a malignant cancer as they went. During operations in Hit, Hadithah, and Ramadi, al-Qaeda in Iraq and other insurgents left temporarily but returned as soon as coalition forces departed and targeted Iraqi civilians who had cooperated with the coalition. One group of Syrian foreign fighters went house to house in March offering those who had committed the "crime" of allowing coalition forces into their homes a choice between being killed or joining the insurgency for a monthly salary that was twice that of an Iraqi policeman.⁷⁶

However, the disruption operations did reveal to MNF-W and its higher headquarters the degree to which western Iraq had been taken over by al-Qaeda in Iraq. When coalition forces battled disciplined fighters wearing paramilitary fatigue uniforms and body armor, the insurgents demonstrated tactics and capabilities that coalition forces had not previously seen. This knowledge provided further impetus for MNF-I to take bold action on the border.⁷⁷

The Western Euphrates River Valley (WERV) Campaign

Realizing that the level of resources that had been available in Anbar Province for the first half of 2005 was insufficient, MNC-I flowed reinforcements westward to meet Casey's intent. MNF-W received three additional Army battalions (taken from three separate commands, as MNC-I did not have an uncommitted operational reserve), considerable Army intelligence assets, and even the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, CENTCOM's theater reserve.⁷⁸ The arrival of the additional combat power would allow Regimental Combat Team 2, the subordinate Marine element that had responsibility for Area of Operations Atlanta in western Anbar Province, to consolidate its forces closer to the border and increase the tempo of its operations. From the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF), an entire company, one of only nine in the country at the time, moved from Kirkuk to Anbar, accompanied by a Navy Sea-Air-Land (SEAL) Task Unit, representing the first Special Forces returning to Anbar in nearly a year.⁷⁹

Before the arrival of these additional forces, only a single regimental combat team of 3,200 Marines and Sailors had held the westernmost districts of Anbar Province, a battle space of about 77,700 square kilometers equal in size to the state of South Carolina.⁸⁰ By the time all of the reinforcements arrived in the early fall, more than 14,000 coalition troops were occupying the same area.⁸¹ As these forces concentrated, MNC-I planned Operation SAYAID ("Hunter") (more commonly called WERV by the Marines), focusing on reestablishing control of Al Qa'im and Hadithah. The operation also envisioned that the Marines would push east near Ramadi as a hammer against the anvil of the 3d Infantry Division in Baghdad.

As MNC-I and MNF-I drew up the details of Operation SAYAID, a challenge emerged north of the Euphrates that had first materialized during Operation MATADOR. Originally, the Marines in Multi-National Forces West (MNF-W) had responsibility for both sides of the river, with the boundary between their area of operations and Multi-National Brigade Northwest (MNB-NW) lying north of the river. However, a lack of bridging assets made it "extraordinarily dangerous," in Vines's words, for the Marines to consistently operate north of the river.⁸² As a result, MNF-W had limited its presence and operations there, meaning that the territory along the Syrian border north of the Euphrates River but south of Tel Afar in Ninawa Province had become an open seam between the two coalition commands. For all intents and purposes, the vast Jazeera desert region – an area with a rich smuggling history – had been left virtually undefended against incursions from Syria.

After a considerable internal debate, MNC-I closed the gap by shifting the boundary between MNF-W and MNB-NW south and assigning MNB-NW responsibility for the north bank of the Euphrates. This decision, based on MNC-I's inability to convince MNF-W to reposition forces internally, created significant discord among the coalition commanders because it meant that MNB-NW had to move some of its already limited combat power hundreds of kilometers away from its original area of responsibility and stretch its extended span of command and control even farther. Simply resupplying the forces in the new sector from Mosul would require over seven hours of driving each way.⁸³ The boundary change, however, did enable MNF-W to focus its combat power

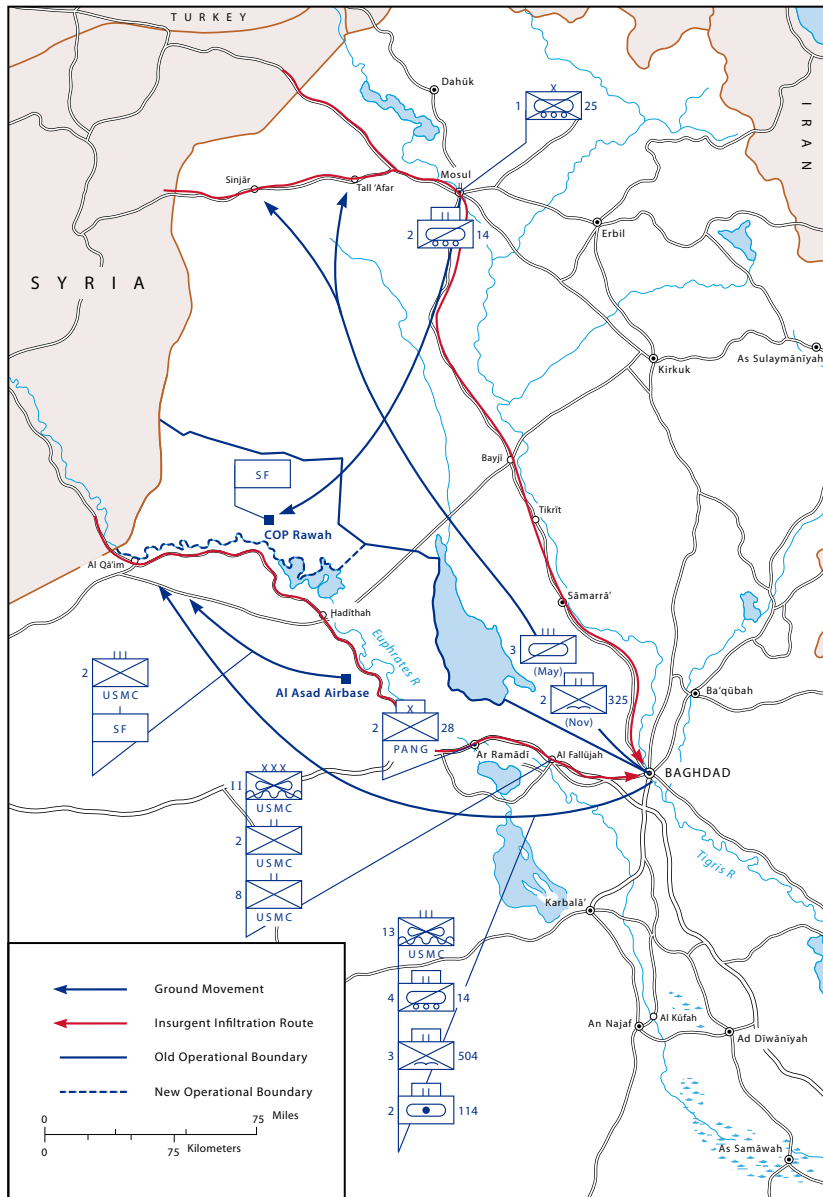
over a smaller area and push additional forces to the Syrian border from Fallujah and Ramadi.

As Task Force Freedom took up its expanded battle space in MNB-NW, MNC-I ordered Major General David M. Rodriguez's command to establish a combat outpost in the desert roughly 30 kilometers northeast of the town of Rawah by July 15. It was a location theoretically optimal for patrolling roads on the north side of the Euphrates River and running interdiction missions into the empty Jazeera desert space between the two major routes from Syria. Given the size of the area to be covered, Rodriguez and Task Force Freedom ordered the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (a Stryker brigade) in Mosul to send its reconnaissance squadron with an attached infantry company to establish the new outpost.⁸⁴ After establishing Combat Outpost Rawah, the Soldiers began patrolling the towns along the north side of the river and realized their fears of finding an insurgent sanctuary were well founded. When the reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition (RSTA) squadron first entered Rawah, it had to fight its way into town, enduring two dozen improvised explosive device (IED) attacks and eight suicide car bombs in its first month after arriving.⁸⁵

At MNF-I's request, other special operations forces also supported Casey's operational surge into Anbar as part of the WERV Campaign. Combat elements were pushed west to the newly cleared outpost at Rawah, along with additional enablers, support assets, and rotary-wing assets – all aimed at disrupting the flow of foreign fighters and targeting key leaders. The increased assets included the significant deployment of a new battalion that had served as a strategic reserve in the United States and required authorization by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for commitment to Iraq. In a change from normal command relationships that regularly had special operations forces working to support conventional forces, MNC-I instead designated the assigned special operations headquarters at Combat Outpost Rawah as the supported element, with some Army and Marine conventional forces in support.⁸⁶ Support from conventional forces included ISR, Strykers, a company of Apache attack helicopters, a Multiple Launch Rocket System battery, and a platoon-size quick reaction force (see Map 17).⁸⁷

The 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment to Ninawa Province

As part of his operational plan to reestablish control of the Iraqi-Syrian border, in May Vines ordered all but one squadron of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment to reposition from southern Baghdad to Ninawa Province. While the move of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment to Ninawa represented a northern complement to the WERV Campaign that aimed to shut down the foreign fighter infiltration route that passed through Sinjar and Mosul, it also was a tacit recognition of the under-resourcing of MNB-NW. The move also highlighted the turbulence of forces that was a by-product of not having an operational reserve. The 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment's repositioning came a mere 3 months after it had assumed responsibility for its original battle space in the infamous "Triangle of Death" area encompassing the towns of Yusufiyah, Mahmudiyah, and Lutufiyah, south of Baghdad.



Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 17. MNF-I Border Campaign, Summer-Fall 2005.

The addition of these forces effectively doubled the combat power in Ninawa Province, and MNB-NW was temporarily renamed MNF-NW. Task Force Freedom then assigned the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment the mission of pacifying the town of Tel Afar and the terrain beyond the town to the Syrian border, including Sinjar and the border town of Rabiah. At the same time, the unit was tasked to block insurgent infiltration from

Syria. The new concentration of combat power allowed Task Force Freedom to focus its remaining brigade, 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, on Mosul.

The Zarqawi-Zawahiri Dispute

Just as the coalition had experienced considerable internal debate and disagreement over how to respond properly to al-Qaeda in Iraq's operational moves, AQI experienced similar discord with its professed headquarters of al-Qaeda's senior leaders in Pakistan over what constituted the most appropriate strategy. Zarqawi's tendencies to use unrestrained violence and to target Iraq's Shi'a population deeply worried al-Qaeda's senior leaders. While unafraid to massacre civilians when it served their purposes, al-Qaeda's central leaders generally made cautious, almost business-like calculations before launching attacks to maximize their effectiveness and achieve the desired intent. By contrast, Zarqawi seemed to be driven by a deeply held theological hatred of the Shi'a – a reckless style that many in al-Qaeda's senior levels were coming to believe was counterproductive.

It was this style that prompted Ayman al-Zawahiri, thought to be the intellectual "brains" of al-Qaeda, to write Zarqawi a letter on July 9, warning him that he had gone operationally off track and asking him to get back on course. In the letter, Zawahiri expressed concern that the violence and sectarian strife that Zarqawi sowed endangered his movement's popular support in Iraq and neighboring countries.

If we are in agreement that the victory of Islam and the establishment of a caliphate in the manner of the Prophet will not be achieved except through jihad against the apostate rulers and their removal, then this goal will not be accomplished by the mujahed movement while it is cut off from popular support. . . . In the absence of this popular support, the Islamic mujahed movement would be crushed in the shadows.⁸⁸

To avoid losing this popular support, Zawahiri counseled Zarqawi that "the Mujahed movement must avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve, if there is no contravention of Sharia [religious law] in such avoidance, and as long as there are other options to resort to."⁸⁹ Zawahiri specifically criticized Zarqawi's practices of beheading hostages and attacking Shi'a Muslims, which the al-Qaeda leader believed jeopardized the popular support he deemed so critical to al-Qaeda's broader efforts. Zawahiri was blunt in his challenge to Zarqawi's tactics, explaining that:

among the things which the feelings of the Muslim populace who love and support you will never find palatable also are the scenes of slaughtering the hostages. You shouldn't be deceived by the praise of some of the zealous young men and their description of you as the shaykh of the slaughterers. They do not express the general view of the admirer and the supporter of the resistance in Iraq, and of you in particular.⁹⁰

Zawahiri noted that while he believed the coalition used equally brutal tactics, citing the use of cluster bombs, depleted uranium, and the death of his own wife and daughter, al-Qaeda should not bring itself to the same level, for practical reasons. Al-Qaeda should



Osama Bin Laden (left). Source: Photo by Hamid Mir.

Al-Qaeda Leaders Osama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri.⁹¹

not be governed by emotion in its responses, Zawahiri concluded, because at least half of the battle would be fought on the media battlefield, where maintaining popular support and the “hearts and minds” of the Muslim community was paramount.

On the topic of provoking a sectarian civil war, Zawahiri wrote that most Muslims had not come to realize that the Shi’a were apostates, and as a result, “many of your Muslim admirers amongst the common folk are wondering about your attack on the Shia. The sharpness of this questioning increases when the attacks are on one of their mosques, and it increases more when the attacks are on the mausoleum of Imam Ali Bin Abi Talib, may God honor him.”⁹² Attacking the Shi’a, Zawahiri warned, “won’t be acceptable to the Muslim population however much you have tried to explain it.”⁹³ Mirroring Abizaid’s counsel not to provoke a fight with Shi’a militants in early 2004, Zawahiri warned Zarqawi that starting a civil war with the Shi’a was folly because it amounted to the opening of a second, unnecessary front when AQI was already fully committed in its fight to eject the coalition. Emphasizing the difficulties associated with opening such a second front, Zawahiri rhetorically asked Zarqawi, “can the mujahedeen kill all of the Shia in Iraq? Has any Islamic state in history ever tried that? . . . [W]hat loss will befall us if we did not attack the Shia?”⁹⁴ He also questioned why Zarqawi would want to openly publicize making war against the Shi’a and claim responsibility for such attacks, noting that doing so “compels the Iranians to take counter measures,” which could endanger the de facto Iranian-al-Qaeda nonaggression pact. Pointing out that Iran held over 100 al-Qaeda leaders in custody, Zawahiri reasoned, “we and the Iranians need to refrain from harming each other at this time in which the Americans are targeting us.”⁹⁵

Zawahiri also addressed the topic of the overall objectives of the Iraqi jihad and how they should be achieved. First, Zawahiri reaffirmed the centrality of the campaign in Iraq for al-Qaeda's global strategy and instructed Zarqawi that his ultimate objective should be reestablishing the caliphate in the country. He wrote, "The victory of Islam will never take place until a Muslim state is established in the manner of the Prophet in the heart of the Islamic world, specifically in the Levant, Egypt, and the neighboring states of the Peninsula and Iraq."⁹⁶ Yet as a first step, Zawahiri counseled, Zarqawi's primary near-term objective should be expelling coalition forces from Iraq. Declaring the return of the caliphate too early was unwise, Zawahiri judged, because it might bring stronger external opposition against al-Qaeda in Iraq. Instead, Zawahiri argued that an emirate should be established in Iraq, but only after American forces had withdrawn. The al-Qaeda emirate should be allowed to grow and strengthen before the declaration of an Islamic state and the return of the caliphate.

Despite the warnings from Zawahiri, Zarqawi continued along the same path, barely altering his tactics. The disagreements between al-Qaeda's senior leadership hiding in Afghanistan and Pakistan and its more violent Iraqi offshoot would persist until relations between the two groups would finally fracture in 2014.

Targeting of the New Government and the International Presence

Over the summer and early fall of 2005, Iraq's internal security situation deteriorated, with elected officials attacked by rival factions intent on affecting the future government and enhancing the power of their own ethno-sectarian groups. Zarqawi's operatives and other Sunni insurgent groups continued to assassinate and intimidate government leaders and Shi'a religious leaders as a way to undermine the legitimacy of the new Shi'a government, but rival Shi'a organizations and Iranian proxies also joined in the violence. On April 18, 2 days before an attempted assassination of Allawi, insurgents assassinated Major General Adnan Qaragholi, a senior adviser to the defense minister, in his home in southern Baghdad.⁹⁷ On July 1, gunmen killed a senior aide to Grand Ayatollah Sistani in a drive-by shooting outside a Baghdad mosque. On the same day, a car bomb struck the offices of Prime Minister Ja'afari, killing one Iraqi. Also on that day, a mortar attack against a government-run power station caused a water plant to shut down, leaving millions of Baghdad residents without running water in 100-degree temperatures.⁹⁸ Lower-level government officials were targeted as well, with 83 mid-ranking officials assassinated from the start of the year until the end of June, and reported acts of intimidation against Iraqi police increased 73 percent over the same period.⁹⁹ Intimidation events of all classes skyrocketed in the fall as the elections approached, jumping from a generally consistent monthly average of approximately 70 events from March through August to 275 in September, and nearly 400 in October.¹⁰⁰

Attacks against weaker members of the coalition and supporters of the new Iraqi Government persisted during the same period. On July 2, al-Qaeda operatives kidnapped and executed the new Egyptian ambassador shortly after his arrival in Iraq, making him the most senior hostage to be murdered since the start of the conflict. His killing was meant as a message to neighboring states that supporting the new Shi'a-led government would carry a price, even among those who normally had immunity. In the case of Egypt,

the attempt to isolate the new Iraq from its neighbors was effective, as the Egyptians did not assign a new ambassador to Baghdad until 2009. A mere 3 days after the abduction of the Egyptian ambassador, gunmen attacked separate convoys carrying the senior diplomats for Bahrain and Pakistan, wounding the Bahraini diplomat and leading Pakistan to withdraw its ambassador. Sixteen days after those attacks, al-Qaeda in Iraq continued the tactic by abducting and eventually murdering two Algerian diplomats in Baghdad.¹⁰¹

On July 7, four terrorists inspired by the larger al-Qaeda movement detonated bombs on London's public transportation network, killing 52 and injuring over 700. While the bombers had no direct ties to al-Qaeda in Iraq, in prerecorded videos aimed at the Western audience they described themselves as soldiers; praised Osama Bin Laden, Zawahiri, and Zarqawi as heroes; and promised additional attacks that would "continue and become stronger until you pulled your troops out of Afghanistan and Iraq."¹⁰² A second set of terrorists made a failed attempt at similar strikes in London 2 weeks later. These assaults were in keeping with Zawahiri's advice to Zarqawi to focus on expelling the coalition rather than focusing on the Shi'a, but, unlike many of the previous attacks on coalition countries, they did not buckle the British support for the mission.

The Arrival of Ambassador Khalilzad

On July 24, the senior U.S. diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad arrived in Iraq to fill the ambassador's post that had been vacant for 4 months. Khalilzad was an Afghan-American Sunni Muslim who had served in senior Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of State posts in various administrations. Prior to his appointment as ambassador to Iraq, he had served as the ambassador to Afghanistan, and his experiences there shaped his approach to Iraqi politics. In Afghanistan, he had become well versed in the basic concepts of counterinsurgency and had broken new ground on collaboration between embassy and military commands, championing the concept of provincial reconstruction teams that focused on nation building and economic development.

Khalilzad also arrived with a Washington-endorsed mission of reversing the January Sunni boycott. Whereas Casey and other MNF-I leaders believed Negroponte had slowed outreach to Sunnis in the crucial period before the January 2005 elections, Khalilzad arrived in July with an explicit mission of persuading Sunnis to join the political process in time for the constitutional referendum and the next round of parliamentary elections.¹⁰³ Casey was predisposed to such outreach, and by July he had begun proposing to use engagement and nonlethal tools with Sunni rejectionists and insurgents who espoused the ideas of neither AQI nor the Ba'ath Party as a way of driving a wedge between different elements of the insurgency.¹⁰⁴

Also during the summer, Bush had asked Casey to remain the MNF-I commander for another year, until roughly June 2006, and the general agreed. These decisions resulted in the establishment of the sixth interagency team to head the coalition in Iraq since the fall of Saddam slightly more than 2 years before.



Ambassador Khalilzad (left), Rumsfeld (center), General Casey (right).
Source: DoD photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Chad J. McNeeley (Released).

**Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad and Commanding General, MNF-I,
George W. Casey, Flank Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.¹⁰⁵**

THE CONTINUING DETENTION PROBLEM

Roots of the Detention Problem

By mid-2005, the coalition's detention problems had begun to boil over again. A fundamental problem that had bedeviled the coalition from its earliest days was that the Fedayeen Saddam, insurgents, and militias that opposed the coalition did not neatly fit into any category under the Geneva Conventions. From an early stage, the coalition had decided to hold captured enemy fighters as civilian internees or security detainees addressed by the Fourth Geneva Convention, rather than enemy prisoners of war covered under the third Geneva Convention. That decision drove much of the coalition's subsequent detention policy because civilian internees were due considerable legal protections, including a review of their detention status every 6 months after capture. Based on a legal interpretation of the rules associated with civilian internees in the initial months of the war, the CPA had also established a requirement for an Iraqi-U.S. board, called the Joint Detainee Committee, to review detainees' status after 18 months of detention. Barring convincing evidence that detainees posed a security risk, it was assumed that detainees should be released after that review. Consequently, holding a detainee past 18 months required the

approval of both the Iraqi Prime Minister and the MNF-I commander.¹⁰⁶ The requirement for this review did not change for the duration of the war.

Another factor contributing to MNF-I's detention problems was intense pressure from Rumsfeld to transfer detention responsibilities to Iraqi authorities as quickly as possible. His frustration with the fact that U.S. troops were still running the detention program in Iraq spurred him to send three snowflakes (short memoranda requiring action on the part of a DoD official) over a 5-week period in February and March 2005, calling on Casey to expedite the transition. In his second snowflake, Rumsfeld was particularly blunt. "We have to figure a way to get out of the Iraqi detainee business," he wrote. "Iraq is a sovereign state, with an elected government, and must get arranged to take on the responsibility of holding, interrogating, and trying their prisoners with relatively few exceptions."¹⁰⁷ When told that developing a transition plan would take until early summer, he again pressed MNF-I to speed the transfer of detainees, writing, "That is too long. I need something much faster, by mid-July at the latest, this ought to be a top planning and execution priority."¹⁰⁸

Iraqi Government leaders echoed Rumsfeld's views. Almost as soon as the coalition transferred sovereignty to the Iraqis in June 2004, Iraqi political leaders questioned why the coalition was conducting unilateral arrests of Iraqi citizens and sending them to detention centers not run by the Iraqi Government. Demands to release prisoners became commonplace, with both Allawi and Ja'afari personally interceding with Casey on several occasions to obtain the release of relatives of constituents. For example, on April 11, 2005, Allawi wrote to Casey in an attempt to take more control over the process.

I would like to request that the detainee file be re-addressed, there are numerous Iraqi suspects that have been apprehended during times of instability under the suspicion of involvement in terrorist or insurgent activities, however, these detainees have not yet been convicted of any crime and currently remain in an undefined form of detention. . . . I consider this matter to be of the utmost importance and look forward to a briefing on how it is to be resolved in a timely manner.¹⁰⁹

When these factors were paired with a rapidly expanding prison population, they produced a volatile cocktail. Rumsfeld's desire to transition the detention program to the Iraqis translated into a policy of little-to-no new prison construction, a decision that only exacerbated a rapidly developing overcrowding problem. That overcrowding, when combined with intense Iraqi political demands and the legal requirements of the Geneva Conventions, created tremendous pressure to release large numbers of detainees regularly. Those releases would create a rift between the tactical and operational level that would persist for the duration of the war. At the same time, the overcrowding would also lead to a loss of control within the camps, a problem that itself created further pressure for additional releases.



Source: U.S. Army photo by Sergeant Lynne Steely (Released).

Major General William H. Brandenburg, CG, TF 134.¹¹⁰

Evidentiary Requirements and Review and Release Boards

In the summer of 2004, MNF-I had created Task Force 134 (named after the building number of its headquarters) to handle the pressures on the detention system and to correct the problems that the Abu Ghraib scandal had brought to light. The new headquarters created regulations and policies to meet the legal requirements of the Geneva Conventions, to effectively manage the detention program, and to try to balance demands from Washington and Baghdad.

Some of these well-intentioned regulations created unintended burdens at the tactical level as they reshaped the military detention system into one resembling civilian law enforcement operations. By mid-2005, MNF-I required two sworn witness statements or forensic evidence in order for units to detain an individual beyond 72 hours.¹¹¹ For most units, this requirement was a substantial hurdle. Only a handful had conducted predeployment training with police forces on writing witness statements and collecting evidence. The quality of physical and testimonial evidence was uneven, resulting in some detainees ultimately being released. In 2005, Task Force 134 Commander Major General William H. Brandenburg tried to remedy the deficiency by sending a mobile training team to each brigade in Iraq, but transitioning combat Soldiers to a new law-enforcement-like paradigm was difficult.¹¹²

The new rules were meant to address concerns that some U.S. units tended to detain military-age males in large dragnets not driven by specific intelligence – mockingly nicknamed “block parties” or “roundups” – as well as to set limits on how long detainees could be kept at each level. After initial capture, detainees could spend a maximum of 72 hours at a battalion or brigade detention facility and then either be moved to a division-level detention facility for up to 21 days or processed into one of the theater internment facilities.¹¹³ At each level, the detainee’s arrest packet was reviewed, resulting in some detainees being released for insufficient evidence.

Tactical units generally bristled at these requirements, with commanders objecting that the arbitrary timelines prevented them from exploiting intelligence obtained during interrogations and that, once detainees were sent to theater internment facilities, units tended to receive no information about their further interrogations. MNF-I and Task Force 134 officials countered that the timelines prevented potential detainee abuses by centralizing the process and simplifying oversight, and that information gained after the 72-hour time limit was often of little tactical value.¹¹⁴ Interrogations were conducted at the theater facilities in 2005, but lingering concerns from the Abu Ghraib abuses, coupled with the lack of resources to conduct the interrogations properly and exploit documents and other materials captured with the detainees, limited their effectiveness.

Once detainees entered one of the coalition’s four theater internment facilities, their legal status as civilian internees under the fourth Geneva Convention meant that a review of detainee records was required every 180 days to determine if the detention should continue.¹¹⁵ These assessments were conducted by the Combined Review and Release Board (CRRB) composed of MNF-I officers and representatives from Iraq’s Ministries of Interior, Justice, and Human Rights, with the Iraqi board members usually constituting a majority.¹¹⁶ There were significant drawbacks with this system, as there were no fixed criteria for release. The evidence that coalition units used to lead to arrests was usually classified, and witness statements often were taken from sensitive human sources, meaning the Iraqi members of the board often could not examine all of the information explaining why detainees had been captured in the first place. Additionally, the requirement for two witness statements or forensic evidence, which had not existed during the early months of the war, proved particularly onerous since most of the early detainees had neither statements nor forensic evidence in their detention files. Technology to facilitate capturing such forensic evidence, such as hand swipes that could detect explosive residue and biometric sensors, was only beginning to be fielded to coalition forces by the summer of 2005. Worse, as the Interior and other ministries came under the control of various Shi’a sectarians in 2005–2006, the integrity of the board itself came into question at times.

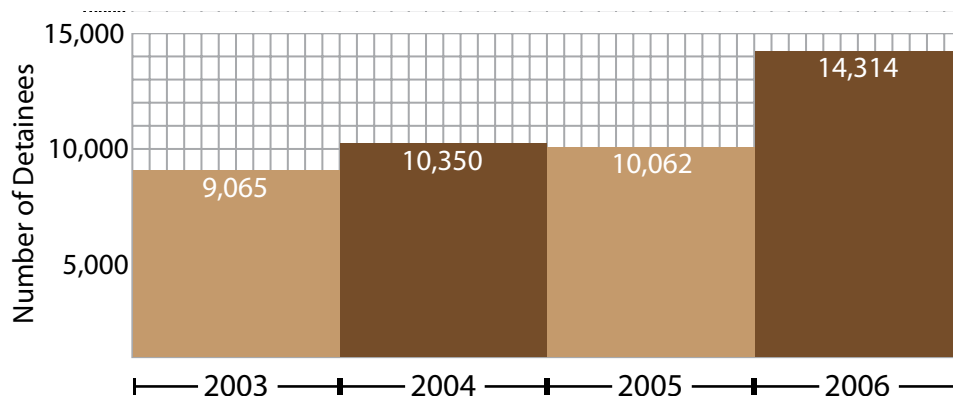
If the CRRB determined that detainees met the criteria for release, Task Force 134 would send notices to all of the multinational divisions 10 days before the planned release date. If any coalition units objected to a detainee’s release, Brandenburg, the Task Force 134 commander, would intervene to halt the process. “If the division came back and red carded [the detainee], I would hold them and not release them,” he explained later, and “I would override the CRRB.”¹¹⁷

Brandenburg and Task Force 134 believed this approach was a sufficient check and balance, but the gulf between the tactical- and operational-level perspectives was profound. Many tactical units believed the notification timeline was not sufficient for

involving their commanders in the process, given unit deployment cycles and personnel turnover. In many cases, by the time the board reviewed detainee packets, the unit that had captured the detainee had already rotated home. While Task Force 134 made efforts to contact units in these cases, the reassignment of personnel, or the wholesale moving of units from one base to another because of Army transformation, often meant the original unit and its leaders had dropped from the picture.

“Catch and Release”

From August 2004 to November 2005, the Combined Review and Release Board reviewed 23,079 detainee files, recommending 4,546 for unconditional release and 7,902 for discharge with guarantors (local Iraqis who promised to keep the detainee on the straight path), of which just over 400 were blocked from release after the multinational divisions raised objections.¹¹⁸ After the multinational divisions’ responses and objections were evaluated, ultimately 12,025 detainees were released during this period.¹¹⁹ In sum, this meant that over 50 percent of detainees that went before the board were recommended for discharge when their files were reviewed, and almost 97 percent of detainees recommended for release by the board were ultimately freed.¹²⁰ When these releases were added to the discharges resulting from legal reviews at the brigade and division level, statistically 75 percent of detainees were freed within 6 months of their capture.



A total of 43,791 detainees released over the course of 4 years

Chart 4. Releases at Theater Internment Facilities by Calendar Year.

The high percentage of releases was at least partly a response to prison overcrowding. Rumsfeld’s goal of handing over detention operations, combined with the coalition’s overarching assumption that a coalition drawdown and withdrawal were on the horizon, translated into a U.S. policy of not funding prison construction in Iraq. Rumsfeld had initially wanted MNF-I to return the tainted Abu Ghraib prison complex to the Iraqis by February 2005, a goal that was missed by more than a year. However, the slowdown in prison capacity was not matched by a decrease in the number of detainees being captured, so that the coalition’s detention facilities quickly became filled to capacity and required a relief valve in the form of detainee releases on a regular basis to prevent dangerous overcrowding. With little-to-no new construction authorized because of Rumsfeld’s aim

to “get out of the Iraqi detainee business,” the question of whether to hold detainees or discharge them became partly a mathematical one. Each day, an average of 50 detainees arrived at the theater internment facilities, although this number spiked to 70 detainees a day during the higher tempo of operations in the January 2005 pre-election period.¹²¹ As of February 1, 2005, the coalition’s detention facilities held a detainee population of 8,517, virtually equal to the maximum detention capacity of 8,540. Despite numerous releases and some slow growth in temporary tent-like facilities, the capacity of the detention facilities did not keep pace with the growth in the number of detainees in 2005. By November, the population had reached 13,389, far exceeding the maximum capacity of 11,506.¹²²

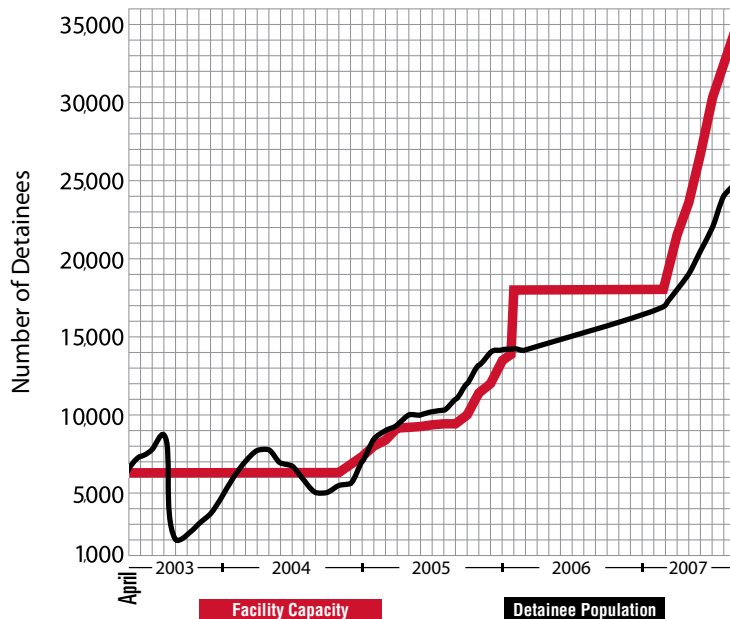


Chart 5. The Detention Conundrum.

As a result, releasing detainees became not just a policy goal, but also a security imperative if the coalition were to avoid escape attempts, prisoner riots, or the reproduction of the conditions that had led to the Abu Ghraib abuses. According to Brandenburg, one of Task Force 134’s core problems was “just the pure physics of it. We could only house so many. Security operations ramped up. We were scrambling to keep up with it. It is a function of how long it takes to build and get money to be able to build and where you are able to do it.”¹²³ The MNF-I headquarters and Casey also used discharges of screened detainees as a relief valve for prison overcrowding and targeted releases of detainees, of whom about 95 percent were Sunnis, as part of a larger plan to entice Sunnis into the political process after the January 2005 election boycott.¹²⁴ Several detainee releases were part of back-channel negotiations to try to improve Sunni participation, including a large-scale discharge of 929 detainees in August and a second round of 1,134 in September.¹²⁵ However, even with this approach, the buildup of detainees exceeded the rate of releases for both of these months and every other month of 2005 except for one.

The high rate of discharges created frustration and mistrust in many tactical-level units, who chafed at the idea of risking their troops' lives to capture insurgents only to have them released a few months later, sometimes seemingly without explanation. For many U.S. field units and commanders, the coalition seemed to have strayed into a "catch and release" approach to the insurgency. By the summer of 2005, U.S. units saw signs that insurgents had begun to understand the detention system and were making efforts to manipulate it. In one case, an insurgent taken into custody by a Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha in Anbar Province defiantly told his captors, "I've killed a lot of tribesmen [who were assisting the coalition] in the past. I've probably been detained for it before. I'll go to Abu Ghraib or to Camp Bucca for a few days. I'll eat my three meals a day, and I'll be back and kill them again."¹²⁶ In another egregious case, one insurgent captured while emplacing IEDs had his Combined Review and Release Board (CRRB) release papers in the truck that contained his bomb-making devices.¹²⁷

The recidivism rate of released detainees was one of the most problematic and divisive issues of the entire process. As of December 2005, Task Force 134's statistics showed an impossibly low 1.6 percent recidivism rate. However, tactical units claimed that the recidivism data was often based on fake or mistaken detainee names and insufficient biometric databases that some released detainees were being killed rather than recaptured, and that other released detainees had returned to the fight but had simply evaded recapture.¹²⁸

Added together, MNF-I's detention policies had the unfortunate effect of creating mistrust between tactical units and higher echelons, as well as producing a lack of faith in the entire detention system. In some cases, it created moral-ethical dilemmas for junior leaders. Soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and junior officers on numerous occasions had reason to question why the dangerous insurgents they captured were often released from detention and back on the streets, sometimes within a unit's year-long rotation. Some commanders noted that the catch-and-release system created a perverse incentive among U.S. troops to use deadly force on any insurgent that did not immediately surrender. Anecdotal evidence indicated that, though most leaders did not act on this incentive, some troops and leaders condoned such practices. In one case, during the planning of a mission to capture an insurgent for the third time, an officer recommended that his men should "just shoot him unless he surrenders first."

Loss of Control Inside the Camps

The overcrowding of the theater internment facilities made it difficult for Task Force 134 to maintain a careful separation among different classes of detainees. One RAND report later described, "The large number of detainees presented such logistical challenges that, initially, their administrators were fully occupied with the task of simply 'warehousing' them and accomplishing crude separations of those groups judged most likely to harm or kill each other if housed together."¹²⁹ In 2005, the overcrowding created a lack of order and control in many of the coalition's larger, open-air detention camps, where insurgent groups effectively took control of what happened inside and made them too dangerous for coalition guards to enter. Insurgents in the camps formed recruiting cells, conducted training, and in some cases ran their own Sharia courts. As new detainees

arrived, hard-core jihadists and other extremists set up propaganda cells to radicalize those less prone to extremism. One former insurgent leader from Dhuluiyah, Mullah Nadhim Jabouri, described the process of radicalization:

While I was detained, my ideology changed from that of the Islamic Army to that of Al Qaeda. . . . Because of the freedom that the Americans gave to the prisoners, I was able to learn and study Al Qaeda's ideas while I was in prison. I had the chance to meet foreign fighters who fought in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Sudan while I was in prison. They started to move the Iraqis towards their ideas and beliefs.¹³⁰

In addition to recruiting, insurgent leaders were able to meet with fellow leaders from across the country to network and exchange tactics, techniques, and procedures. "We could never have all got together like this in Baghdad, or anywhere else," one mid-level insurgent recalled in 2014. "It would have been impossibly dangerous. [In Camp Bucca] we were not only safe, but we were only a few hundred meters away from the entire al-Qai'da leadership. . . . Bucca was a factory. It made us all. It built our ideology."¹³¹ Some frustrated tactical units began to refer derisively to the detention facilities as "Jihadist Gladiator Training Camps" in recognition of this development.

Riots and escape attempts went along with the lack of control. On January 31, 2005, riots at Camp Bucca escalated to the point that U.S. commanders on the scene, fearing a massive prison break, authorized guards to use live ammunition to quell the uprising. Four detainees were killed and six injured.¹³² Another riot at Camp Bucca that began on April 1 lasted 3 violent days. After discovering that the hand sanitizer in the camp's portable bathrooms was flammable, detainees set fire to tents and made launchable fire-bombs, using slingshots and milk cartons filled with the liquid. The detainees also used wooden sleeping pallets as shields and broken chunks of rock as slingshot ammunition. In the riot's early hours, they targeted the on-scene commander of the 105th Military Police Battalion from the North Carolina National Guard, injuring him so seriously with a rock that he required evacuation.¹³³ Just before the riot, military police discovered and destroyed a nearly complete 357-foot escape tunnel that could likely have turned the riot into a massive, coordinated escape.

At exactly the time the April riots at Camp Bucca were consuming much of Task Force 134's attention, al-Qaeda in Iraq insurgents launched a complex attack on April 2 against the detention center at Abu Ghraib. Seven suicide car bombers and up to 150 fighters struck the prison with crew-served weapons, vehicles, and mortars in a battle that lasted for several hours, until a Marine quick reaction force arrived from MNF-W and turned the tide against the attackers. Zarqawi himself allegedly planned the assault, and the assailants were composed of foreign fighters and Albu Issa tribe members. The tribesmen were reportedly attempting to free fellow tribe members and seeking vengeance for coalition operations that killed some of their sheikh's family.¹³⁴ Twenty Soldiers and Marines were wounded in the fight.¹³⁵ After the battle, Rumsfeld again questioned Casey in a snowflake about why the Iraqi security forces could not take over the detention mission.¹³⁶

Halfway through Brandenburg's command, the problems inside the detention camps had become clear, as had the fact that Task Force 134 was too poorly resourced to solve them. In July, Brandenburg requested an additional three battalion headquarters, eight military police companies, and other support troops that would double the task force's

strength to 1,700.¹³⁷ The general's request would also expand the transition team concept to the detention field, creating Detention Transition Teams (DTTs) to train Iraqi correctional officers. Ironically, despite Rumsfeld's intent to close down America's detention operations in Iraq, Brandenburg's request was approved, and the task force became one of the few organizations in Iraq that grew in size on the SECDEF's watch.

Recognizing that the loss of control within the camps was also a facilities problem, Brandenburg pushed requests for military construction through the budgeting system. Despite considerable resistance from Rumsfeld and others in DoD, the construction requests ultimately prevailed, at least partly because of Casey's dogged support. The new construction would expand Task Force 134's detainee capacity while replacing most of its temporary facilities and tents with buildings that complied with the Geneva Conventions requirement to house detainees in structures similar to those of the soldiers fighting the war. At the same time, the new facilities would be designed to segregate detainees into smaller groups and allow the task force to separate radicals and leaders from insurgent foot soldiers and less ideologically driven fighters. Reflecting the slow speed of the military bureaucracy, however, none of those additional resources would arrive until after Brandenburg's departure from Iraq in December 2005, and the problems inside the detention facilities were left to his successors.

By the late summer of 2005, MNF-I had concentrated combat power in Anbar and Ninawa Provinces and was poised to begin its campaign to stop the car-bomb offensive against Baghdad by retaking the WERV and the Sinjar-Tel Afar corridor. In doing so, Casey and MNF-I believed they would be striking at foreign fighters who were the principal threat to central Iraq and to the elections scheduled for October and December. Unfortunately, this MNF-I view of the problem missed the gathering threat of sectarian violence and civil war that was spreading across the Baghdad region and surrounding provinces. As the coalition shifted almost a division's worth of combat power to the Syrian border with the intention of protecting Baghdad, the perpetrators of most of Baghdad's violence were already within the city. Death squads from sectarian militias and rogue sections of the government were already working to cleanse the capital of their rival sects. In other words, the coalition was pulling forces from central Iraq's cities just as sectarian violence was rising there. These sectarian threats and the pervasive sense of fear that hung over the country manifested itself in Baghdad on August 31, 2005, as over a million Shi'a pilgrims made their way to the Kadhimiyyah shrine to mark the martyrdom of Musa al-Kadhim, the seventh Shi'a imam. After a nearby mortar attack killed seven and injured dozens, a rumor began to spread among the crowds crossing the al-Aimmah Bridge into Kadhimiyyah that suicide bombers were in their midst, causing thousands of panicked pilgrims to stampede. As they reached a chokepoint near the bridge, the crowd surged through the small area, trampling those unable to keep up and pushing others off the bridge to their deaths in the Tigris River below. Nearly 1,000 died, most of them elderly, women, or children. There had been no suicide bomber, but the terror of the crowd had produced what was the single largest loss of Iraqi lives in the entire war.¹³⁸

The tragedy at the bridge made clear how deeply the sectarian attacks had cut into an already fragile society. The violence in central Iraq was approaching the point of becoming self-sustaining, and the tinderbox of Iraq needed only a spark to send it into a conflagration.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 16

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88. Letter, Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, July 9, 2005, available from <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2013/10/Zawahiris-Letter-to-Zarqawi-Translation.pdf>. This letter was captured during combat operations in Iraq later in 2005 and released as a transcript by ODNI on October 11, 2005. Although some scholars doubt the authenticity of the letter, our team is convinced that it is genuine as it matches the context of other letters across the span of the Iraq conflict and is consistent with the actions and thought of Zarqawi and Zawahiri.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Photo by Hamid Mir, "File:Hamid Mir interviewing Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri 2001.jpg," November 8, 2001, available from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hamid_Mir_interviewing_Osama_bin_Laden_and_Ayman_al-Zawahiri_2001.jpg.
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105. DoD photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Chad J. McNeeley, "The Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld (center), U.S. Secretary of Defense (SECDEF), Dr. Zalmay Khalizadm (left), U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, and U.S. Army Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., Commander, Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), conduct a press conference at Al-Faw Palace, Baghdad, Iraq, Dec. 22, 2005. The SECDEF is in country after visiting the affected areas of the Oct. 8, 2005 earthquake in Pakistan and to support the U.S. Service Members of the region," DIMOC Identifier 051222-N-TT977-456, December 22, 2005, Released to Public.

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109. Letter, Prime Minister Allawi to General George Casey, Jr., April 11, 2005.

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112. Interview, Sobchak with Major General William H. Brandenburg, May 13, 2014.

113. PowerPoint Briefing, MNF-I Commander's Orientation Conference, February 28, 2005.

114. Interview, Sobchak with Brandenburg, April 10, 2014.

115. As of 2005, the four theater internment facilities were Abu Ghraib, Camp Cropper, Fort Suze, and Camp Bucca.

116. Bill, "Detention Operations in Iraq," p. 427.

117. Interview, Sobchak with Brandenburg, April 10, 2014.

118. MNF-I, Year in Review Fact Sheet, as of November 30, 2005.

119. Memo, Task Force (TF) 134, CF Detainee Status, Iraq Theater of Operations, December 10, 2005. This total includes all releases from the theater internment facilities level, those executed as part of the CRRB process, and the Sunni outreach efforts that bypassed the CRRBs.

120. This statistic comes from both MNF-I, Year in Review Fact Sheet, as of November 30, 2005, as well as Memo, TF 134 for MNF-I, September 25, 2005, sub: Detainee Population, CRRB Internment Statistics. This memo confirms the numbers and percentages in the Fact Sheet, based on a 7-month span from March 2005 to September 2005; 51 percent of detainees were recommended for release in the CRRBs. These numbers do not count the several thousand detainees who were released as part of Casey's Sunni outreach program and do not count detainees released by reviews at the brigade combat team or multinational division level.

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122. PowerPoint Briefing, MNF-I Detainee Operations: The Year in Review, December 2, 2005.

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CHAPTER 17

INNOVATION IN THE FACE OF WAR, SUMMER-FALL 2005

With almost a division's worth of coalition combat power moved from central Iraq to the Syrian border zone by midsummer, General George Casey, Jr.'s operations to reestablish control of the Syria-Iraq border were ready to begin. An operation in western Ninawa and an operation in western Anbar would seek to disrupt al-Qaeda in Iraq's (AQI) lines of communications from its Syrian sanctuary in time to protect the October constitutional referendum and the December elections that were crucial to the U.S. political strategy for Iraq.

The ensuing battles in Tel Afar and Al Qa'im would showcase several innovative units employing tactics that had been refined and distilled over the first 2 years of the war. In broader terms, these organic innovations represented a larger trend in which tactical units were learning to conduct counterinsurgency operations through experience and self-study. Curiously, while these tactical units would find surprisingly successful approaches to local security problems, the coalition's large-scale, strategic-level initiatives experienced slow starts, at best, in the second half of 2005.

COUNTERINSURGENCY REDISCOVERED

The Counterinsurgency Survey

Casey had arrived in Iraq convinced that stabilizing the country would require a counterinsurgency approach, with American troops working through indigenous forces rather than conducting high-intensity security operations themselves, and he had emphasized this concept in his April 2005 campaign plan. He had also been concerned that U.S. troops focused for 3 decades before 2003 on preparing for high-intensity, force-on-force battles were not prepared for the kind of counterinsurgency fight that Iraq required. Accordingly, in late summer 2005, Casey dispatched a team of close advisers led by Colonel William Hix and Kalev "Gunner" Sepp to survey the U.S. units in theater and assess whether they were following an appropriate approach and to compile a report of best practices. In August 2005, Hix's team conducted its qualitative counterinsurgency survey by visiting 5 multinational divisions and 9 of the 15 U.S. brigades that held territory in Iraq, as well as coalition units in Multinational Division Central-South (MND-CS) and Task Force Maysan in southern Iraq.¹ The team's field reports were illuminating. All U.S. forces in the country were committed, and the lack of a "credible reserve force" at any level meant that units were unable to surge for any new initiatives or offensives.² "Few, if any, units have enough troops to maintain any meaningful presence in an area after they clear it of insurgents," Hix's team noted, "which only serves to create a vacuum that insurgents quickly refill, leaving units to re-clear an area again at a future time. Units are paying twice (sometimes three times) for the same terrain in too many cases."³ As a result, MNF-I had created a situation that "assumes risk everywhere."⁴ In Ninawa and Anbar where coalition troops were sparse, the average coalition battalion was tasked with controlling

over 2,000 square kilometers and 430,000 inhabitants.⁵ Under these conditions, the team concluded, “MNF-I/MNC-I should postpone any decision on off-ramping until at least Spring [20]06” in order to avoid “a rush to failure by handing over battle space to ISF [Iraqi security forces] before they are capable and ready.”⁶

Another factor hampering operations, the Hix team found, was that many of MNC-I’s unit boundaries did not take into account “cultural, political, tribal, or traditional linkages . . . creat[ing] seams that the enemy is effectively exploiting.”⁷ The restive Babil Province, for example, had been inexplicably split between Multi-National Force-West (MNF-W) and MND-CS, allowing the enemy to launch attacks on one division’s battle space and then cross the boundary when pursued. The report also recommended establishing a reconciliation council for disaffected Sunnis (such as those who refused or were unable to participate politically because of their Ba’athist ties), harnessing all elements of the U.S. interagency for the counterinsurgency campaign, and ensuring transition teams had at least 2 years to mold the Iraqi security forces into shape.

However, not all of these recommendations went to Casey and General John Abizaid. Some of the team’s leaders considered the conclusions too harsh and instead briefed a milder version of their findings to Casey on August 19, focusing heavily on the performance of tactical units rather than on some of the problematic operational issues the team had uncovered. In terms of the coalition forces themselves, Hix reported, “20 percent of the Brigades got it, 60 percent were in the middle, and 20 percent clearly didn’t get it.”⁸ While some units arrived in Iraq well prepared to conduct counterinsurgency operations immediately, many units underwent a difficult trial by fire because home-station training lagged well behind the current situation in Iraq.⁹ U.S. units and their Iraqi counterparts were “not yet sufficient to stop intimidation of the population and local Iraqi force,” meaning that the bulk of security operations were not necessarily contributing to the security of the Iraqi people. Rather than increase combat power, refocus forces on protecting the population, or reorient the mission entirely, Hix recommended a greater emphasis on governance and economics, for which the military had limited capacity.¹⁰ Many units focused only on killing or capturing the enemy and not engaging with Iraqis, Hix told Casey. Much of MNF-I’s operational approach was not conducive to a counterinsurgency campaign, Hix said, particularly MNF-I’s effort to build and train an indigenous military in its own image, and its ongoing concentration of coalition military units on large bases. Finally, the present counterinsurgency campaign, Hix concluded, was a “decentralized company and battalion fight but without the commensurate resources and authority decentralized to the same levels.”¹¹

Casey disagreed with most of Hix’s conclusions, except for the concept of denying the enemy access to the population, which he endorsed.¹² Two days later, Hix and his team presented the same findings to Abizaid, though once again without emphasizing their findings of the insufficient number of coalition forces and the lack of a credible operational reserve. Hix repeated his observation that, while military operations received most of the coalition’s attention, much more needed to be done in the areas of governance and economics. “Units are generally doing that ad hoc,” Hix noted, by “pulling reservists with direct experience and other talented people out of their existing units and forming Provincial Reconstruction type units.”¹³ When Hix suggested Abizaid should request additional reservists with civilian skills related to governance, such as judges, mayors,

city managers, and police chiefs, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) commander responded that taking responsibility for governance was not the military's core mission and that the rest of the government needed to contribute more effectively. Undeterred, Hix pointed out that the Army has been asked to do these functions since its founding.¹⁴ Without knowing it, Hix had touched on a key issue for Abizaid, who was engaged in a struggle inside the U.S. Government to get agencies beyond the military involved in the campaign to stabilize Iraq. As he tried to mobilize nonmilitary help, Abizaid was not interested in Hix's suggestion that the military should go ahead and do the civilians' jobs for them.

The 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment and Colonel H. R. McMaster in Tel Afar

Casey's operations to block the northern infiltration route across the Syrian border began in May 2005 with the movement of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment from the "Triangle of Death" south of Baghdad to western Ninawa, an area that had not recovered from its fall to insurgent control 6 months before. As an economy of force sector, Multi-National Brigade-Northwest's (MNB-NW) area of operations had not had sufficient coalition combat power to take the initiative against the insurgency. This was especially true in the restive mixed-sect Turkoman city of Tel Afar, which played an outsized part in the Sunni insurgency. Tel Afaris (or "Afiri," as Iraqis knew them) had been over-represented in Saddam Hussein's army and intelligence services, giving the city an unusually high proportion of men with military experience. A number of senior Iraqi military leaders hailed from the city or its surrounding area, and after Saddam's fall, some of them had relocated to Syria to facilitate insurgent attacks against the coalition, Kurds, and the new Shi'a-led government.¹⁵

The post-2003 environment in western Ninawa was one of sectarian strife among Tel Afar's population, which U.S. units estimated were approximately 60 percent Sunni and 40 percent Shi'a. Sunni Turkomans who had been loyal to Saddam's regime resisted the new ascendancy of Kurds—the Sunni Turkomans' natural enemies throughout northern Iraq—and the rise of the Shi'a Turkoman minority, which grew in power by aligning itself with the newly empowered Shi'a Islamist parties in Baghdad. In the months leading up to 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment's arrival in Tel Afar, parts of the primarily Shi'a Turkoman police force had effectively become sectarian death squads. The situation worsened in April 2005 when the Iraqi security forces responded to a request for assistance from Tel Afar's Shi'a Turkomans by deploying the Scorpion Brigade, an Arab Shi'a special police unit from Hillah. The addition of the predominantly Shi'a unit with a fierce reputation for fighting Sunni insurgents inflamed the situation, and, as the International Crisis Group put it, "battles between government forces and insurgents turned into a fight between Sunnis and Shi'ites within the Turkoman community."¹⁶

The change of mission to Tel Afar was the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment's third assignment in Iraq. The regiment had originally expected to be assigned to Mosul, but had been redirected to the Triangle of Death, and, in fact, Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) had kept one of the regiment's three maneuver squadrons behind in north Babil when the main body moved to Ninawa. The unit's flexibility in taking on the successive new missions reflected, in part, the approach its commander had taken in predeployment

training. Colonel Herbert Raymond "H. R." McMaster, the regimental commander, had authored an important study on the Vietnam war that concluded senior military leaders had been derelict in allowing President Lyndon Johnson's flawed strategy to continue with only muted internal protest. McMaster was also a student of counterinsurgency doctrine and practice, an often-overlooked academic topic in the Cold War Army and the Army of the 1990s. Upon taking command in June 2004 and in anticipation of the unit's impending deployment, he had required his subordinate leaders to complete a reading list on counterinsurgency and Middle Eastern culture. In training, he had enlisted the aid of Arab-Americans to play roles in a variety of tactical simulations, and to mitigate the regiment's dearth of Arabic interpreters, he had sent dozens of Soldiers to Arabic immersion courses at a local college.¹⁷ Above all, he emphasized what he believed was the most important tenet of counterinsurgency: protecting the population. McMaster and his staff had designed their training programs with little help from the Army, which was still grappling with the question of whether the Iraq campaign would last long enough to disrupt the standard training and education of "core war fighting functions" and replace part of that instruction with preparations for counterinsurgency.

Once in Ninawa, McMaster assigned his 2d Squadron responsibility for the city of Tel Afar.¹⁸ The city as the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment found it in May 2005 was one of the most violent in Iraq, with 170 attacks per month driven by 500-1,000 foreign and Iraqi insurgents mainly from AQI, Ansar al-Islam, and other groups that had fled the coalition onslaught in Fallujah in November 2004.¹⁹ These fighters had terrorized the city's population for months with suicide bombs and car bombs against civilians. Some of the insurgent violence was simply depraved, as when insurgents murdered a young boy and then rigged his body cavities with explosives that killed his father when the man came to retrieve his son from the street.²⁰ As the insurgents had clamped down on the city before the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment's arrival, they had tortured and executed Tel Afaris who resisted them, while perversely conscripting local boys whom they systematically raped and trained to serve as assistants in executions.²¹

From May to August 2005, the regiment worked to isolate the city, cutting off insurgent lines of communications. West of Tel Afar, McMaster tasked his 1st Squadron with disrupting insurgent infiltration routes along the 280-kilometer Syrian border in the regiment's area of operations and reconstituting the local Iraqi border police brigade. The 1st Squadron's base was in Sinjar, a mixed-sect town containing Arabs, Kurds, and tens of thousands of Yazidis, a sect of ethnic Kurds who practiced an obscure ancient religion akin to Zoroastrianism.

The 1st Squadron found Sinjar, once a major stop on the ancient Silk Road, to be the major waypoint and safe haven for al-Qaeda and other militant foreign fighters making their way from Syria to the Tigris Valley. To understand its area of operations better, 1st Squadron conducted a zone reconnaissance that covered more than 340 kilometers of the border area, uncovering a vast network of "safe houses, weapons caches, transportation companies, [and] passport counterfeiters."²² The operation resulted in over 300 border interdictions of foreign fighters and other contraband, revealing both the depth of Syrian regime complicity and the degree to which the infiltration routes had been developed by AQI. On one mission, elements of an air cavalry troop found an insurgent-led convoy of 40 trucks crossing the border through uninhabited desert. When Apache helicopters



Source: U.S. Army photo by Sergeant 1st Class Donald Sparks (Released).

**Colonel Herbert Raymond McMaster,
Commander, 3d Armored Cavalry
Regiment.²⁴**

engaged with Hellfire missiles and cannons, the trucks fled back to Syria, but not before secondary explosions on several of the vehicles hit in the fusillade confirmed they were smuggling arms and ammunition.²³

With only two maneuver squadrons at his disposal, McMaster compensated for his dearth of infantry by partnering with the Iraqi 3d Division, a Kurdish-majority unit with three brigades arrayed across western Ninawa, and he formed a new light cavalry troop that was an equal mix of Iraqi and American Soldiers. The one-time surge of Special Forces for the Battalion Augmentation Training Team mission partnered an unprecedented nine operational detachment alphas (ODAs)—two full Special Forces companies—with his armored cavalry regiment and the 3d Division, enabling both an ODA and one of McMaster’s troops or companies to pair with each Iraqi battalion.²⁵ Some Iraqi battalions also benefited from partnered military transition teams (MiTT). To partner with the special operations forces (SOF) in his battle space, McMaster co-located headquarters and attached an air cavalry troop, logistics element, and light reconnaissance troop to beef up SOF capabilities.²⁶



Zaynal Hassan Wahab (left), Major General Mixon (center), and Najim Abed Jabouri (right).
Source: U.S. Army photo by Sergeant Amanda White (Released).

**Zaynal Hassan Wahab, Major General Benjamin R. Mixon,
and Najim Abed Jabouri.²⁷**

At an early stage, McMaster and his subordinates identified a number of drivers of instability, including government-sanctioned sectarian retaliation against the Sunni majority, low rates of education and literacy, high unemployment, and a negative view of U.S. forces based on earlier military operations.²⁸ Addressing these problems required not just security operations, but extensive engagement with local Sunni leaders to resolve local political differences. In this area, McMaster benefited greatly from the role of Major General Najim Abed Jabouri, a Sunni Arab from the Mosul area who had been assigned as Tel Afar's police chief in May after the firing of his insurgent-allied predecessor. Jabouri proved an able local diplomat, shuttling between Sunni and Shi'a Turkoman tribes with a 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment leader to broker cease-fires and organize opposition to AQI and other insurgent groups. Jabouri would later be appointed Tel Afar's mayor, a position he would hold from late 2005 until 2008. In June 2005, the Ministry of Defense announced that there would be a security operation to resolve the Tel Afar situation, and a group of about 30 Sunni sheikhs traveled to Baghdad in July for a peace conference that resulted in a temporary but significant decrease in violence.²⁹ At the same time, local Shi'a leaders lobbied their government contacts in Baghdad to request support for reestablishing stability in the city.

Operation RESTORING RIGHTS

Despite these political initiatives, by July McMaster and his commanders had decided that driving al-Qaeda in Iraq and other insurgents completely from Tel Afar would require a major operation. Recognizing the piece he was playing in MNF-I's plan to secure the October constitutional referendum and the December parliamentary elections, McMaster chose the name Operation RESTORING RIGHTS. However, he rejected the idea of a highly destructive clearing of the city similar to the assault on Fallujah or Operation BLACK TYPHOON the previous fall, both of which McMaster believed had heightened local resentment toward the coalition. Instead, he aimed to conduct an operation that would kill or drive off the insurgents, while having a much lighter impact on the civilian population and much less collateral damage. To affect this outcome, McMaster took steps to control and then displace Tel Afar's civilian population systematically, so that insurgents could not hide among the populace and precipitate collateral damage. As a way to offset potential ill will from any disruption caused by the operation, he ordered the construction of a center for displaced Iraqis, capable of supporting over 1,500 people, and the stocking of humanitarian relief supplies.³⁰ To buffer the impact of the operation further, McMaster planned post-combat activities in advance. Aiming to jump-start reconstruction efforts immediately after combat operations ceased, he purchased transformers to restore the city's electrical grid, contracted for teachers and instructional material to reopen schools, and marshaled material and designs for reconstruction projects.³¹

McMaster also physically isolated the city. At the recommendation of 3d Division Commander Major General Khorsheed Saleem al-Doski, McMaster's troops spent 3 weeks building a 12-foot-high berm around the city that enclosed 15 square kilometers.³² With the berm in place, Tel Afaris could only drive vehicles through one of the four checkpoints manned jointly by Iraqi and U.S. Soldiers, allowing for population control. Under the pressure of improved border security, the creation of the berm, and better

intelligence coming from a more friendly relationship with Tel Afari civilians, the insurgents who had virtually controlled the city since late 2004 began to lose their freedom of maneuver, falling back on their stronghold in the town's Sarai district.

For the actual clearance of the city, the regiment requested two additional U.S. infantry battalions and additional Iraqi security forces, but the troop-starved MNC-I was only able to provide one U.S. battalion (2d Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment), which would not arrive until several days after the operation had begun. To make up some of the shortfall, the Interior Ministry ordered a Special Police Commando brigade to join the operation. However, the commandos and their Badr Corps-affiliated commander quickly proved to be a liability.³³ When the poorly disciplined and ill-trained Commando Brigade arrived with empty trucks that its troops explained had been brought for "liberating the furniture of Tel Afar," McMaster ordered the Iraqi commander to withdraw his troops from the city immediately, and the brigade played no part in the ensuing operation.³⁴ Realizing he would not be receiving the reinforcements he needed, McMaster decided to accept risk on the Syrian border by splitting his 1st Squadron and sending half of it to help clear west Tel Afar.³⁵

In late August, the operation began with the displacement of almost all remaining civilians in the city. Constant messaging from the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment and Iraqi commanders explained that their intent was not to attack the city and its people, but to focus the assault against the "takfiri" insurgents (extremists who believed their doctrine of "takfir" obligated them to kill apostates) that had held the population in thrall.³⁶ At the beginning of September, judging there were still too many civilians inside the city to allow the attack to proceed without collateral damage, McMaster delayed the start of the operation by a day and told local Sunni leaders, "If you don't get your people out of there tomorrow, the blood is on your hands."³⁷ As nearly 150,000 civilians departed the city, Soldiers used screened informants at the four exits through the berm to identify and detain scores of fighters attempting to flee in disguise.³⁸

On September 2, 2d Squadron initiated a "three-day zone reconnaissance . . . of Tel Afar designed to force the enemy into the Sarai [District] and allow the AIF [insurgents] only one means of escape—a predetermined path to a location south of the city."³⁹ With 3,000 American troops and 5,500 Iraqis committed to the mission, McMaster aligned 2d Squadron to the east side of the city and 1st Squadron to the west side of the city.⁴⁰ Attacking from north to south, the regiment and its Iraqi partners intended to split the city, isolating the insurgent-held Sarai District. During the first few days, the fighting was intense, with tanks, Bradleys, and Hellfire missiles used in street-to-street fighting against insurgents.⁴¹ Over the course of a week, 2d Squadron conducted a methodical clearing operation, searching every building as they closed in on Sarai District.⁴² As fighting raged on one street, other elements of 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment would pause to evacuate civilians only blocks away. Sunni residents who were afraid to evacuate south through Shi'a areas were transported by Iraqi Army vehicles, and "screened, given humanitarian assistance, offered temporary shelter, and released."⁴³

The fight continued for more than a month. By the end of the operation in October, the regiment had killed over 150 insurgents and captured almost 600 at the cost of two Americans killed and 11 wounded, totals significantly lower than the operation in Fallujah the previous November.⁴⁴ The operation highlighted the progress of the Iraqi Army,

which, when paired with Special Forces ODAs, fought alongside McMaster's Soldiers. Unlike previous performances of the Iraqi security forces, the Iraqis stood, fought, and took casualties: eight were killed and 19 wounded, although the casualties again disproportionately came from the 1st Commando Battalion, previously known as the 36th Commando Battalion.

The operation was a milestone, as it was the first time since the fall of Saddam that Iraqi forces outnumbered U.S. forces in a major operation. As in the August 2004 Battle of Najaf, however, the Iraqi security forces' performance in Tel Afar was overstated by MNF-I and Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I), with both commands incorrectly declaring that regular Iraqi units had been "employed as independent maneuver elements" under the command and control of an Iraqi headquarters.⁴⁵ Other challenges became clear after the battle had concluded. Although the operation successfully won over much of Tel Afar's population, which had expected a repeat of BLACK TYPHOON, the operation had allowed a number of insurgents to flee to safe havens such as Lake Tharthar, north of Baghdad.

After clearing the city, McMaster pushed the regiment's combat power off the larger forward operating bases and into small combat outposts that were comprised of U.S. and Iraqi soldiers and arranged in a grid across the urban terrain, usually within sight of one another.⁴⁶ This establishment of combat outposts ran counter to MNF-I guidance to consolidate U.S. forces on forward operating bases, and it reflected the most important tenet of McMaster's strategy – protecting the population. It also meant the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment would no longer commute to the areas it was responsible for but instead maintain a constant presence within the community. Also unlike many coalition operations, once the mission was over, the combat outposts did not recede like the tide. They remained in place to build the trust between coalition forces and Iraqi civilians that was essential to providing intelligence, and to provide a venue to mentor Iraqi Army interactions with the population. Within a week after the battle ended, Tel Afar's electricity was restored, its schools reopened, and new construction had started. As the projects began to restore a sense of normality, McMaster moved to rebuild Tel Afar's local police force, which had disintegrated during the battle. Seeing the police as one of the most important components of counterinsurgency operations, he had obtained MNSTC-I's approval to fill three successive police academy classes with Tel Afaris carefully screened by local sheikhs, regimental counterintelligence personnel, and informants who could recognize insurgent supporters. After the recruits completed their training, regimental officers handpicked prospective police leaders and sent them to training, filling the police leadership cadre with trusted officers who had little inclination for corruption or sectarianism. When the police chief that succeeded Jabouri began using his force for personal vendettas, McMaster convinced senior Iraqi Parliamentarian Haider Abadi, later to become Iraq's Prime Minister, to have the police chief replaced immediately. The restructuring of the police also gave the regiment an opportunity to align boundaries for the Iraqi police, Iraqi Army, and coalition force units, creating a unity of effort that had not previously existed.⁴⁷

For a time, Tel Afar was an impressive example of what could be done when sufficient coalition forces employed proper counterinsurgency tactics with the full support of their higher headquarters. Yet Tel Afar's good fortune would not last long. Within months of

the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment's departure in February 2006, the city would again see a minimal coalition presence, and its security would deteriorate again.

The Battle for the Western Euphrates

As additional coalition forces concentrated in western Anbar, coalition leaders began to realize how badly the security situation had deteriorated in the western Euphrates region that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi aimed to make an al-Qaeda emirate. This proto-Islamic State, which had begun in Hit in the early summer, had expanded to Hadithah, Haqlaniyah, and Barwanah by late summer and early fall. As in Hit, with each new conquest, AQI established Sharia courts, command structures, and intelligence and security cells. This expansion of territory led to a growth in complexity and bureaucracy, with the jihadist emirate developing detailed recordkeeping, robust finances, and security infrastructure down to the city block level.⁴⁸ As AQI evolved from an insurgent organization to a quasi-government, its leaders became intensely interested in determining religious justification for their actions and in explaining the Sharia rationale for maintaining order in their new territories.⁴⁹

Coalition attempts to retake AQI-controlled territory led to heavy fighting. During an unexpected 4-day battle in Hadithah in early August, insurgents wiped out an entire six-man Marine sniper team in an ambush and later destroyed a Marine assault amphibious vehicle (LVTP-7) with an improvised explosive device (IED). The LVTP-7 attack killed 14 Marines and their Iraqi interpreter, making it the deadliest IED attack for U.S. troops since the start of the war.⁵⁰ The destruction of the lightly armored LVTP-7 highlighted the fact that the Marines and some other coalition units were fighting the war with force protection means that had fallen behind IED technology. The Army requirement for 8,186 up-armored High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWV) was 99 percent filled by November 2005. However, the Marine contingent in Iraq had only 33 percent of its 2,715-vehicle requirement, and in fall 2005, many Marine units were still maneuvering through the increasingly dangerous Euphrates Valley in basic model HMMWVs with armor plates welded on the vehicles.⁵¹ At the same time, an MNF-I initiative to add electronic countermeasures to vehicles was slow to develop, fielding just 17 percent of MNF-I's total requirement by November.⁵² These shortfalls added up to the costly fact that coalition units were struggling to keep up with the insurgency's advances in IED production and use.

Shortly after the Hadithah battle at the end of August, insurgent attacks in Qusaybah led to intense fighting that culminated in multiple air strikes. During 4 days of battle, coalition aircraft dropped a surprising amount of ordinance: four guided bomb unit (GBU)-38 500-pound Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAMs), 11 GBU-12 500-pound Paveway II laser-guided bombs, and 10 Maverick air-to-ground missiles, in addition to rockets and strafing runs.⁵³ Also in August, elements of the Iraqi Special Operations Forces Brigade, now comprising the 1st Commando Battalion and the Iraqi Counterterrorism Force, deployed to Anbar with their Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) advisers to reinforce the Marines. Paired with Marines from Regimental Combat Team 2, they assaulted Haqlaniyah, fighting block to block and discovering a seven-story hotel rigged to explode as coalition forces entered the building.⁵⁴

In an attempt to stem the flow of insurgents across the Euphrates River, in early September, MNF-W used Marine fixed-wing aircraft and Army M270A1 guided multiple-launch rocket systems to destroy two bridges outside Al Qa'im, near the Syrian border.⁵⁵ Demonstrating the challenges associated with the often short-term perspectives of a 1-year or 7-month rotational policy, the next Marine unit rotating into the area discovered that the destruction of the bridges had infuriated the local population because "the bridge served not only as a link to commerce and economic development but also a conduit to relationships, families, and a complex social network with far reaching effects."⁵⁶ Seven months after the two bridges were destroyed, an assault float bridge was installed as a replacement, which, in turn, was replaced by a permanent bridge 8 months later at the cost of \$6.5 million.

A series of indecisive smaller battles followed in October, including Operation IRON FIST, which amassed over 1,000 Marines against AQI fighters in the villages of Sadah and Karabilah; and Operation RIVER GATE, which pitted 2,500 Marines of Regimental Combat Team 2 against AQI in Hadithah, Haqlaniyah, and Barwanah. During these operations, MNF-W killed at least 41 insurgents, while losing five Soldiers and Marines.⁵⁷

The Western Euphrates River Valley (WERV) Campaign culminated in November with MNF-W's Operation STEEL CURTAIN, a 16-day clearing of Qusaybah, Karabilah, and Ubaydi, the towns outlying Al Qa'im. To further increase combat power for the operation, CENTCOM sent its theater reserve, the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, ashore in mid-October, after which the unit embarked on a 558-kilometer road march to Al Asad airbase.⁵⁸ With more than 4,500 Soldiers and Marines, Operation STEEL CURTAIN was the largest operation in MNF-W since the November 2004 Battle of Fallujah.⁵⁹ As they cleared the restive towns, U.S. troops killed 139 insurgents and detained 388 others, while losing 10 Marines killed and 59 Soldiers and Marines wounded, and while calling in no fewer than 67 air strikes.⁶⁰

At the operational level, the WERV would succeed in its clearest objective: ensuring the late 2005 elections would occur unhindered. Such an accomplishment was no easy feat, as al-Qaeda in Iraq and Zarqawi were determined to prevent other Sunnis, worn down by months of intense fighting, from reconciling with the coalition and choosing political engagement. During 2 months of brutal fighting, MNF-W reported killing 529 fighters and detaining another 1,584.⁶¹ This progress was fragile, for as the combat power that had been surged into Anbar receded yet again, tactical units would once more have to expand their footprint and cover larger swaths of territory.⁶² The impact of AQI's losses was also blunted somewhat by its leaders' ability to "melt away" during the fighting, only to reemerge later with additional domestic recruits and foreign fighters.

3d Battalion, 6th Marines, and Lieutenant Colonel Julian Alford in Al Qa'im

Most of the operations in the WERV followed a typical pattern: thinly stretched coalition forces cleared terrain in brutal battles, only to leave days or weeks later because insufficient forces existed to hold the vast expanses of Anbar. However, the 3d Battalion, 6th Marines in Al Qa'im were an exception, as their commander, Lieutenant Colonel Julian "Dale" Alford, had decided ahead of the operation to take a different approach. Arriving in Al Qa'im with his battalion in late August during a normally scheduled

Marine unit rotation, Alford had declared to his skeptical regimental commander that he intended to go into Al Qa'im and stay there. It was a difficult task in a city that was immediately adjacent to AQI's most active foreign fighter facilitation base in the town of Albu Kamal, a few dozen meters away on the Syrian side of the border. Like McMaster, Alford was a student of counterinsurgency theory who had spent considerable time preparing his battalion intellectually for its Iraq deployment by reading classic studies such as David Galula's *Pacification in Algeria*, Francis "Bing" West's *The Village*, and the 1940 Marine Corps *Small Wars Manual*.⁶³ He had also led his battalion in a 2004 combat deployment to Afghanistan, where the unit had tested and honed their tactics against an active insurgency.

As McMaster was doing simultaneously in Tel Afar, Alford emphasized the primacy of protecting the population in counterinsurgency operations, describing what he saw as the center of gravity in the simple epithet: "It's the people, stupid." He warned his troops to avoid creating more of what he called "POIs" (pissed off Iraqis) by carefully managing escalation of force incidents, indirect fire, and close air support.⁶⁴ Alford likened proper kinetic operations to bow hunting, which required tremendous patience, stealth, persistence, proper target selection, and close proximity to the target.⁶⁵ Alford later recalled, "I talked to the Marines about killing discreetly and selectively. I used the bow hunter mentality. You have to avoid complacency, you need patience, persistence, and presence at all times . . . to kill discreetly and selectively and without killing the wrong people, to kill the bad guy and not the 99 percent of Iraqis [who were] good people."⁶⁶ This latter point required living and operating closely among the Anbari population in a way MNF-W units were not used to doing. Instead of consolidating in large bases as MNF-I was instructing units across the theater to do, Alford expanded his battalion's footprint into dispersed battle positions. Upon its arrival in Al Qa'im in late August, Alford's six-company battalion held only three positions but used offensive operations in October to fight their way into several towns in the Al Qa'im district and create four new platoon outposts. In a change from most of the rest of the WERV operations, once Alford's men fought to gain a foothold in new areas, they did not withdraw, but instead looked to expand their local presence further. Throughout November, the unit grew its footprint to a total of 16 platoon positions in the Al Qa'im area.⁶⁷

Each platoon outpost was a bare-bones affair, consisting essentially of earth-filled Hesco barriers dropped in place in the outline of a platoon position. There were no showers, morale telephones, or internet, and the Marines had to resort to burning their own waste with diesel fuel. "You can't be in those big FOBs with [Kellogg, Brown & Root], the internet, and all the different things



Source: Photo by Marine Corps History Division (Released).

**Lieutenant Colonel Julian Alford,
Commander, 3d Battalion, 6th
Marines.⁶⁸**

we were doing,” Alford described after the operation. “You have got to split up and be where you can protect the population.”⁶⁹ As a result, the battalion’s positions were usually in the middle of a town, where the Marines had only to walk outside their position to be among Iraqis. Mindful of the impact that the Quartering Act had on pre-Revolutionary America, Alford eschewed the practice of commandeering Iraqi houses as coalition outposts, thereby avoiding the creation of more “pissed off Iraqis.”⁷⁰

To strengthen relationships between the Marine outposts and local Iraqi communities, Alford encouraged his Marines to eat on the local economy, a practice that produced a microeconomic boom as Iraqi merchants provided a takeout food service to the battle positions for cash. The principle extended to 3d Battalion, 6th Marines’ foot patrols, which Alford’s men nicknamed “eats on the streets” for the way in which they were conducted meal-to-meal, with Marines stopping at food vendors in Iraqi neighborhoods as they patrolled.⁷¹ To force the majority of his troops to patrol on foot and interact with Iraqis, Alford limited each patrol to a single accompanying vehicle. He also banned the concept of “presence patrols,” instead, requiring each patrol to have a specified mission. Many of these patrols were related to the counterinsurgency precept of population control, conducting censuses of the population and buildings near each battle position to enable Alford’s men to understand who and what was around them while compiling detailed records for follow-on forces.⁷²

Throughout 3d Battalion, 6th Marines’ rotation in Al Qa’im, Alford also aimed to recreate the successful model of the combined action platoons used during the Vietnam war.⁷³ Each of Alford’s battle positions included a platoon of Marines and a platoon of partnered Iraqi Army troops living, eating, and working in the same place, a rarity in the aftermath of the December 2004 Marez dining facility bombing. Throughout their deployment, Alford impressed on his units an enforced partnership approach: if ever discovering any of his units conducting a mission without an equally sized Iraqi force, Alford would send them back to the main forward operating base at Camp Al Qa’im in shame, replacing them with a unit that had better embraced his combined action concept.⁷⁴

By the end of the unit’s rotation in March 2006, Al Qa’im, an area that had been under Zarqawi and al-Qaeda in Iraq’s near-complete control in mid-2005, was well on its way to returning to coalition control, with the city itself firmly in Marine hands and with the insurgency slowly receding from outlying districts. When Casey visited Alford’s unit near the end of the battalion’s rotation, the stunned MNF-I commander told Alford and Colonel Stephen Davis, the Regimental Combat Team 2 commander, “I never thought you guys could take that [Al Qa’im] back.”⁷⁵

The Counterinsurgency Academy

The counterinsurgency techniques McMaster and Alford were putting into practice coincided with the creation of a theater-level venue for training U.S. commanders in similar tactics. Based on the results of the counterinsurgency survey in late summer, Casey approved Hix’s recommendation to create a “COIN [counterinsurgency] Academy” in Taji, just north of Baghdad, to ensure incoming leaders had a baseline understanding of counterinsurgency principles and their application in the Iraq operating environment.

Casey mandated that all leaders of incoming brigade combat teams, from company commander to brigade commander, would attend the 1-week course.

Casey had put significant pressure on the MNF-I staff to stand up the organization quickly, and it was teaching its first classes by November. Among its first lecturers were McMaster and Alford, whose respective successes Casey recognized by personally presenting each officer with a Bronze Star as their deployments ended. Alford was the only battalion commander that Casey honored with such a presentation. However, while Casey clearly recognized what successful COIN operations looked like, he had a greater challenge in communicating and implementing that vision across the force that was rotating into the Iraq theater. In some ways, the COIN Academy was a reflection of the continuing disconnect between the Army's institutional training base and the operational needs of the force in Iraq. Ideally, Hix noted, U.S. units should be learning the lessons of the COIN Academy much earlier in their training cycle, perhaps before conducting training at the Army's combat training centers, but the U.S. training base was lagging behind in accomplishing this task. The COIN Academy remained in operation in Taji well past Casey's tenure as commander and ultimately received mixed marks for achieving its purpose. To a degree, the COIN Academy epitomized Casey's response to Hix and Sepp's COIN survey by selecting a tactical solution to address the host of strategic and operational problems that the survey had laid bare.

Special Operations Forces in Anbar

To support Casey's operational-level effort to reestablish control of the Iraqi-Syrian border, other SOF also pushed west, establishing themselves at the remote base in Rawah. These SOF were deemed so important to the overall mission that for Operation SAYAID (Hunter), which ran from mid-July to August, they were MNC-I's main effort.⁷⁶ There they were paired with conventional forces to an unprecedented degree, and by October, two infantry companies along with their battalion headquarters were placed under the SOF headquarters' tactical control. It was the first time since the invasion that SOF were locally made the main effort and given conventional forces to support them. The model was successful enough that by November an entire infantry battalion was placed under SOF control.

The intensity of the fight in Anbar was unlike anything the special operations elements had previously experienced. Their assault forces frequently faced well-trained foreign fighters dug in with sandbagged defensive positions, crew-served weapons, night-vision goggles, and quick reaction forces. Many foreign fighters expected to die and either wore suicide vests or wired the entire structure they occupied with explosives to be detonated when the special operators entered the building. Demonstrating the level of insurgent resolve, a handful of SOF raids had to be extracted under pressure with the support of AC-130 and rotary wing fires. This resulted in the increased use, on some missions, of a "call out," in which a megaphone was used to instruct noncombatants to leave a surrounded building. If the fighters inside did not surrender, or if they opened fire, the building would then be reduced with an air strike rather than risk troops' lives.

The SOF participation in the WERV Campaign was a large-scale effort, focusing on the insurgent sanctuaries of Al Qa'im and Hadithah. Raid after raid eliminated IED factories

and killed or captured al-Qaeda in Iraq senior leaders. A series of operations in September 2005 by a Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) included the rescue of a U.S. hostage, partly based on intelligence and leads from the 3d Infantry Division in Baghdad.

By November, the commander of the JSOTF decided to keep three battalion-level task forces in Iraq, a measure that required shifting additional forces from external locations, and created significant stress on the force. In the same month, the command captured senior terrorist bomb maker Ali al-Fadhil in Anbar. Fadhil had returned to his native London in September 2003 after being seriously injured by his own bombs in Iraq. In the United Kingdom (UK), he received prosthetic limbs, and then returned to his chosen profession, building bombs that were used in the July 7, 2005, attacks against London before escaping back to Iraq.

THE EARLY ROOTS OF THE AWAKENING: THE DESERT PROTECTORS

The coalition's experimentation with more nuanced counterinsurgency approaches among Iraqi Sunni communities coincided with an increasingly heavy hand of al-Qaeda in Iraq in those same locations. By summer 2005, AQI's brutal behavior had caused the group to wear out its welcome with some Anbari tribes. AQI had upset tribal sheikhs by forcibly taking over the cross-border smuggling trade, traditionally a tribal venture, and by enforcing its puritanical interpretation of Islam. In Al Qa'im, Hit, and other western areas, AQI commanders enforced prohibitions on music, gambling, and other licentious activities while forcing some Anbaris to give their daughters in marriage to AQI foreign fighters—ironically, the same behaviors Ayman al-Zawahiri had warned Zarqawi about, and with the same effects Zawahiri had predicted. The situation came to a head when AQI, which banned secular law enforcement in territory that it claimed, murdered and then beheaded Al Qa'im's police chief, a well-respected Albu Mahal tribal member. Incensed by these actions, the Albu Mahal and other tribal elements collaborated with Mohammed Mahmoud Latif and the Association of Muslim Scholars in the preparation of a fatwa that authorized the tribes to fight AQI's foreign fighters. Other tribes soon joined the Albu Mahal in its fight against AQI. In Hit, seeking revenge for a killing of a tribesman, the Albu Nimr allied with Jaysh Muhammad and the Albu Mahal against AQI and Ansar al Sunna in intense fighting that left at least 32 dead. In June, the Albu Mahal and its allies were able to recapture Qusaybah, and by July, they had expanded their footprint to include old Ubaydi and Sadah.⁷⁷ With its own tribal unit, the Hamza Battalion, not aligned with coalition efforts the Albu Mahal tribe fought al-Qaeda in Iraq until August when AQI cut the battalion's supply line, divided the forces, and defeated it piecemeal. In the aftermath of the uprising, AQI was particularly brutal in its revenge against the Albu Mahal, hoping to make an example that would discourage other tribes. In Qusaybah, AQI went house-to-house, identifying members of the tribe and executing them publicly.⁷⁸ With nowhere left to turn, the splintered Albu Mahal tribe fled to Jordan and deep into the Iraqi desert, making an important decision to request coalition assistance in its fight against AQI.⁷⁹ Sheikh Kurdi Rafee Farhan al-Mahalawi, one of the Albu Mahal's tribal leaders, later recalled:

A lot changed when al-Qaeda started its terrorism against the Iraqi people. When that began, a lot of people wanted to fight with the Americans against al-Qaeda, because al-Qaeda cut off a lot of

heads, destroyed a lot of houses, destroyed infrastructure. Not a single city was without dozens of bodies thrown everywhere, whether in the street or elsewhere. . . . Speaking for myself, . . . I said, I will cooperate with the Americans, even with the devil, if it means kicking al-Qaeda out of the area.⁸⁰

While al-Qaeda in Iraq's activities were the primary reason for the tribe's actions, the change in the coalition's posture in Anbar also contributed to the tribe's decision. The increased U.S. combat power that had flowed into Anbar as part of Casey's border campaign, along with new outreach from units such as Alford's Marines, had helped to persuade some tribal leaders that the coalition could be a counterbalance to AQI.

The intensity of the tribal uprisings, as well as the decisions of insurgent groups such as the Ramadi Shura Council to seek reconciliation with the Iraqi Government, alarmed al-Qaeda's senior leadership in Pakistan into sending one of its senior leaders, Abdul Hadi al-Iraqi, to Iraq on a fact-finding mission.⁸¹ Its alarm had been magnified by exaggerated warnings from the insurgent group Ansar al Sunna, which had long resented Zarqawi and believed it—rather than AQI—should be in charge of al-Qaeda's franchise in Iraq. Ansar al Sunna held Zarqawi personally responsible for the destruction of its parent organization, Ansar al-Islam, in northern Iraq in 2003, and, like some other insurgent groups, opposed Zarqawi's targeting of Iraqi civilians and brutal beheadings. Moreover, Ansar al Sunna's leaders believed that AQI and Zarqawi frequently took credit for attacks that Ansar al Sunna launched, and poached members from among their ranks.⁸² Relations between the two insurgent groups were bad enough that al-Qaeda's senior leaders received reports that open fighting might break out.⁸³ To resolve this dispute and get a better grasp of the situation in Iraq, Abdul Hadi, part of Osama Bin Laden's inner circle, twice requested Zarqawi's help to infiltrate Iraq, but Zarqawi claimed the security situation would not permit it.⁸⁴ Abdul Hadi's visit to mediate between the two groups was delayed 7 months because of Zarqawi's intransigence, and the AQI-Ansar al Sunna feud festered in the meantime.

The disputes between insurgent groups and the uprising of Anbari tribes against AQI reached MNF-I's attention by September when an MNF-I assessment noted, "since May [2005] select western Sunni tribes . . . have been in armed conflict with AQI for the town of Qusaybah in the Western Euphrates River Valley area. . . . Intelligence reports indicate Sunni tribal members—as many as 1,000—are increasingly disillusioned with AQI and are formulating plans to expel Foreign Fighters."⁸⁵ Sensing an opportunity to extend his Sunni outreach efforts, Casey authorized meetings with the exiled Albu Mahal tribe in Jordan and later sent an aircraft to bring the tribe's senior leader, Sheikh Sabah, to Baghdad to negotiate a formal alliance, though Casey was wary of providing too much assistance and creating another local militia for his units to handle.⁸⁶

As Casey's diplomatic initiative with the Albu Mahal was developing, CJSOTF units were returning to Anbar for the first time in a year and were eager to reenergize the irregular force they had tried to create in 2004. Because of the CJSOTF's relatively low personnel turnover, many of the same troops who had led the 2004 effort now returned to the same locations in Anbar. Master Sergeant Andy Marchal and other special operators who had worked with the Albu Nimr tribe in 2004 returned to Hit and quickly reestablished contact with the tribe. At the same time, Major Adam Such, who had helped pioneer the 2004 effort, was now the battalion operations officer responsible for planning the new

initiative, which called for an even larger irregular tribal force named the Desert Protectors. The CJSOTF's plan was a pragmatic one that recognized the sheikhs' goals would simply be to "get the shooting [with AQI] to stop" so they could rebuild their neighborhoods and restore their influence over the local economy.⁸⁷ The CJSOTF leaders fully accepted that their partner sheikhs would skim a percentage of money from whatever the coalition provided, so long as it was carefully managed and the tribal elements accomplished what was expected of them. Recognizing the process of standing up a tribal force capable of defending itself and maintaining law and order could take up to 2 years, the CJSOTF plan also counseled patience. Accepting these stipulations, Casey – with Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad's support – approved the plan and began to steer MNF-I and MNSTC-I resources to it.⁸⁸

The transformation of the tribal elements into a force that supported the coalition began first with the Albu Mahal tribesmen who were eager to take revenge against al-Qaeda and return to Al Qa'im. The CJSOTF initially organized and trained a platoon of tribal irregulars whose pay would come from Iraqi Army coffers, but who, unlike the army, would not be required to deploy anywhere outside of their immediate tribal areas. Marine units in MNF-W quickly supported the effort because the tribesmen effectively served as scouts who could identify AQI fighters and leaders during the battles of the WERV Campaign. As the effort began having tactical effects, leaders in the Albu Nimr tribe petitioned to join the initiative, partly out of rivalry with the Albu Mahal and partly because of rekindled contacts with the CJSOTF.⁸⁹ The Albu Nimr offered more than 500 fighters to Iraqi Minister of Defense Sadoon Dulaimi, an Anbari Sunni who had helped broker the initial agreement between Casey and the Albu Mahal. Dulaimi was forced to downsize the request, telling the Albu Nimr that "neither Prime Minister Ja'afari nor SCIRI leader Hakim wanted a Sunni army division created even [though] they feigned support for Sunni political inclusion."⁹⁰ Ultimately, only a platoon's worth of Albu Nimr volunteers completed training in Fallujah, but with this modest addition, the Desert Protectors spread east to Hit, and the conglomerated tribal force grew to company size.⁹¹ Though they did not have a decisive impact in 2005, the Desert Protectors demonstrated that, under the right conditions, local irregular forces could partner with coalition units against AQI to great effect, a concept that would be important during the Awakening in 2006.

Recognizing the potentially strategic implications of these tribal realignments, AQI violently struck back to intimidate other tribes from joining the movement. Prominent Albu Issa members, who had worked with the coalition in 2004 and banned their tribesmen from joining the insurgency, were targeted in June by car bombs and assassination attempts, resulting in the deaths of two tribal leaders and the flight of another to Jordan.⁹² With many of its leaders gone, the Albu Issa tribe fractured, with some members joining AQI. Fighting also broke out between al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Jaghayfi tribe in May after AQI burned down houses of tribesmen in Hadithah and beat local civilians. By midsummer, AQI and local tribes were in open conflict in Hadithah, Hit, and Qusaybah.⁹³

In Ramadi, Mohammed Mahmoud Latif, seeing the disruptive effect that tribal forces were having on AQI, proposed to local sheikhs that they create their own tribal force.⁹⁴ The proposal progressed over the summer. In mid-August, Anbar's Governor Ma'moun Sami Rashid Latif al-Alwani agreed to hold a meeting with 50 imams to discuss the details

of setting up such a force against AQI. When AQI learned of the meeting, it launched an attack against the meeting place, doing little damage but emboldening Latif, Governor Ma'moun, and the restive tribal leaders.⁹⁵ Ultimately, however, the Iraqi Government in Baghdad did not act on their proposal, and the Ramadi tribal force would not materialize in 2005.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES TRANSFORMATIONS

The return to the tribal engagement effort was only one of several significant changes that SOF was undertaking in 2004 and 2005. Like McMaster and Alford, SOF leaders were also introducing sweeping innovations, many of which reflected tactical lessons they had learned in their shorter but more frequent rotations in Iraq. Perhaps the most significant innovation was a near-revolution in the special operations targeting cycle. Doctrinally, SOF had emphasized extensive preparations that usually involved sequestering or isolating detachments for 96 hours or more, during which they received targeting packages and intelligence from higher headquarters. These detachments would then perform detailed planning, conduct multiple briefings to obtain mission approval, and then rehearse plans exhaustively. Such deliberate tactics were mismatched to Iraq, where intelligence usually came from the bottom up, and where targets were usually fleeting. In order to adapt to this type of warfare, the CJSOTF pushed intelligence analysts down to the company level and below and developed procedures to operate against time-sensitive targets, establishing "playbooks" of battle drills that ODAs could execute on short notice, without extensive planning and with minimal rehearsals.⁹⁶

Another significant change for special operations forces was the new need to operate in the battle space of conventional units. Doctrinally, special operators prepared for most of their careers to work in their own joint special operations area located far behind enemy lines or in denied territory where there were no conventional forces. However, in Iraq, any action they took, whether lethal or nonlethal, could affect the campaign plan of the conventional unit who owned the battle space. Operating among conventional units created some frictions, but also some significant advantages. Special operations forces were smaller in size and flatter in organization and decision-making authority, but they lacked the combat power and logistics to conduct sustained operations that conventional units could provide.⁹⁷ Additionally, special operations forces were able to collect human intelligence far more effectively than conventional forces could.⁹⁸ When this symbiotic relationship worked well, often the special operators would gather intelligence, synchronize an operation with the local conventional units to ensure it had the desired impact, and then conduct missions with the battle space owner providing a quick reaction force. Colonel Stephen Davis, the commander for Regimental Combat Team 2 in Anbar from 2005 to 2006, later explained his perspective on the value of synergy between special operations and conventional forces and his lack of concern about doctrinal command relationships. "RCT-2 forces were QRFing [Quick Reaction Force] every assault they [SOF] did. . . . Was it SOF in support of general purpose forces? Was it general purpose forces in support of SOF? Who really cares? The bottom line is you need to . . . focus on the mission. Don't worry about who gets credit. Leave your ego at the door."⁹⁹

The special operations–conventional relationship was not smooth everywhere. In some instances, the same disputes over unity of command and unity of effort that had prevailed in the 2003 invasion resurfaced, especially when new units rotated into Iraq. In northern Iraq, the relationship frayed when the 1st Infantry Division took over MND-NC in 2004. From the perspective of 1st Infantry Division Commander Major General John Batiste, the issue was one of unity of command, telling Army historians in 2005, “When you put a Special Forces outfit, at whatever level, inside a division commander’s battle space, and they’re [essentially] autonomous, with theoretical coordination relationships . . . it’s a recipe for disaster. . . . [T]hose Special Forces units need to be task organized appropriately with the divisions, either attached or in direct support. And there’s no other way to do it.”¹⁰⁰ In some cases, poor junior leadership among special operators had resulted in special operations units not consulting with battle-space owners, so there was some truth to Batiste’s complaint. However, by early 2005, such “procedural fouls” were becoming rarer, especially after the CJSOTF issued an order requiring all missions to obtain battle space owner approval in advance except in rare circumstances.¹⁰¹ The CJSOTF, which was officially under MNC-I’s tactical control, was loath to accept the command relationship Batiste proposed, partly because special operations units had previously been asked by other conventional commanders to perform inappropriate missions such as serving as scout platoons, long-range surveillance detachments, or basic-training-style platform trainers for the Iraqi security forces. CJSOTF leaders who were responsible for operations across the entire country also wanted to remain free to reposition their forces to match the insurgency’s main effort, as they did when moving an entire company from Kirkuk to Anbar to support the WERV Campaign.¹⁰² As a result, CJSOTF leaders generally believed the joint doctrinal command relationship of “supported element” and “supporting element” better allowed the CJSTOF to meet the MNC-I and multinational division commanders’ needs. Nevertheless, the dispute between Batiste and CJSOTF leaders grew fractious enough that the CJSOTF limited its missions within the MND-NC area of operations, an unfortunate development from which other multinational divisions nonetheless benefited.¹⁰³

By the time of the third major rotation of forces for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in early 2005, relationships between special operations and conventional commanders had matured enough that some CJSOTF units began participating in the predeployment exercises of the conventional units they expected to support. However, turbulent unit moves, such as the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment’s multiple moves in country and the CJSOTF’s short notice Battalion Augmentation Training Team mission, disrupted this beneficial pre-mission training.¹⁰⁴ The rotation of forces also accented a trend which would continue to progress through the war: that Marine and Army commanders who returned to Iraq often had already worked with special operations forces on prior rotations, and had come to understand better their roles and capabilities.

During 2005, other special operations forces were also experiencing transformative changes similar to conventional forces and the CJSOTF. Like the CJSOTF, other special operations forces learned that the entire intelligence cycle had to be revolutionized from top to bottom, with intelligence collection, exploitation, and analysis pushed to the lowest level possible. Some of the most important enablers in this revolutionized intelligence cycle were intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, which,

when paired with other capabilities, created the ability to establish a “pattern of life” for an intended target. Unfortunately, early in 2005 it became clear that other special operations forces did not have enough ISR platforms to have the operational effects that they desired. On February 20, 2005, other special operations forces were following Zarqawi’s movements with one ISR platform. Just as Zarqawi’s location appeared to be confirmed, the video camera on the ISR platform malfunctioned and needed to be reset, a process that took only 23 seconds. In that short time, Zarqawi himself was able to disappear from sight, escaping capture from an assault force that arrived seconds later. While the team’s main prize was gone, it did capture Zarqawi’s vehicle and many of his personal possessions, including his laptop, seven thumb drives, and 50,000 euros. The near miss resulted in a redoubling of efforts to increase the number of ISR platforms to allow for backups in the case of malfunctions and to permit the coverage of more targets. Starting the war with only two helicopters equipped with full-motion video cameras, by April 2005, the addition of Predator unmanned aerial vehicles and manned aircraft enabled the number of dedicated orbits for other special operations forces to reach 4.21 (each orbit is defined as the ability to cover a single target continuously for a 24-hour time period). By March 2006, the total had reached 6.25 orbits, and imagery-related intelligence had come to be considered as important as signal-related intelligence.



Source: U.S. Air Force photo by Tech Sergeant Efrain Lopez (Released).

Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicle.¹⁰⁵

Over time, other special operations forces brought exploitation capabilities, operators, and analysts together under one roof, preventing institutional myopia that would slow down the processing and analysis of raw intelligence. The in-theater exploitation of documents found on objectives, which previously had to be sent back to the United States for translation and analysis, became an especially crucial capability that enabled

quicker follow-on targeting of AQI leaders. Likewise, the human intelligence garnered from detainee interrogations was deemed so important and effective that a temporary screening facility was established, which was authorized to hold detainees for exploitation until transferred to the theater facility.

The new paradigm in intelligence was matched by a revolutionized perspective in operations that led to missions being conducted to gather intelligence—a reversal of prewar special operations doctrine in which intelligence guided operations. In almost a reconnaissance-in-force methodology, operations were launched to stir up enemy groups to see “reflections,” or how the enemy reacted, as well as to gather information from an objective in order to assemble pieces of a larger intelligence picture that would lead to follow-on missions. While this approach was sometimes criticized for its similarity to a whack-a-mole arcade game that lacked decisive focus, it reflected the belief that success against AQI would come not from a decisive blow, but from constant pressure that put AQI into a reaction mode, unable to respond to attacks and unable to repair itself as fast as it was being hurt. If AQI could be dealt enough body blows in rapid succession, SOF leaders believed, the network, like an organism, would go into shock and collapse. To that end, raid after raid was launched during the same night. Bolstered by the additional battalion that arrived earlier in 2005, the number of missions conducted each month hit nearly 300 by the end of the year. As the operations multiplied, special operations forces shifted many of the targets from top-tier AQI leaders to mid-level managers of the organization, reflecting yet another transformational perspective that mid-level leaders were the guts of an organization and the most difficult to replace.

This industrialization of special operations was best seen in Mosul over the summer of 2005, when Abu Talha and Abu Zubayr, AQI’s regional emir and his replacement, were killed along with numerous subordinate AQI leaders. By November 7, four more replacement leaders, including the sixth emir of Mosul, Abu Sayf, had also been killed, and AQI’s Mosul branch began to grind to a halt. Conventional forces also contributed to the destruction of the group in Mosul, raiding terrorist safe houses and killing scores of AQI’s rank-and-file. During one such raid on November 19, a platoon from the 172d Stryker Brigade Combat Team found itself pinned down and outnumbered by AQI fighters. Although the platoon leader, platoon sergeant, and several other Soldiers were wounded in the fighting, the unit rallied and defeated the insurgents with grenades and rifle fire. The platoon’s tenacity earned its members two Silver Stars as well as a Distinguished Service Cross for Private First Class Stephen Sanford, who, despite being wounded five times, shielded wounded Soldiers with his body and performed first aid until he passed out from blood loss.¹⁰⁶ While these efforts significantly damaged AQI in Mosul, it proved a challenging opponent to destroy, and over time, would slowly reestablish itself in the city.

CASEY AND KHALILZAD BRING PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS TO IRAQ

In the aftermath of the operation in Tel Afar, McMaster tried to resolve some of the underlying causes of instability in the city by pressing the MNF-I and embassy systems to use a combination of Commanders’ Emergency Response Program (CERP) money and

funds from MNSTC-I to create jobs and improve education. With this money, Iraqi contractors began to rebuild police stations, refurbish schools, and provide potable water and electricity to the entire city.¹⁰⁷ The Iraqi Government committed \$44 million for longer-term projects, but after an initial \$4–5 million, it never followed through with the remainder of the funds.¹⁰⁸ What happened in Tel Afar was similar to what had happened in Fallujah and other Sunni enclaves. According to MNC-I Commander Lieutenant General John Vines, “Even though the money was available in the Iraqi Government, and part of it was probably from U.S. origin, you couldn’t get them to allocate it. . . . The central government probably didn’t want to see . . . money flowing through primarily a Sunni area.”¹⁰⁹ The problem of trying to get the Shi’a-led Iraqi Government to reconstruct Sunni-majority areas was never effectively resolved.

To compensate for these shortcomings in Iraqi governance, during late 2005 another innovation was transplanted, with modifications, from Afghanistan to Iraq. By the summer, Casey had become concerned that the development of the Iraqi Government was not keeping pace with perceived improvements in security and the Iraqi security forces. He worried that the progress of the Iraqi Government was being hampered by multiple transitions caused by the decision to hold three elections in one calendar year, and worried that the U.S. military simply did not have the skills necessary to help Iraq’s political sphere develop properly. Without a concerted effort to improve Iraqi governance, Casey judged, one of the critical legs of the MNF-I campaign plan could falter.

This line of effort fell primarily within the State Department’s bureaucratic purview, yet Casey believed the State Department was not structured or funded to accomplish the mission. He, therefore, sought a way to fuse State Department expertise with DoD capability. Together with Abizaid, and with the endorsement of Ambassador James Jeffrey, Casey decided to stand up provincial support teams, modeled on the provincial reconstruction teams already operating in Afghanistan, which would be organized from resources already present in Iraq. Casey explained later, “They had elected a provincial council and governors, but they had no revenue stream coming out of Baghdad, and the people had no way of penetrating the bureaucracy. We needed to get something on the civilian side going, and it seemed like [the PRT] was working in Afghanistan.”¹¹⁰ Even so, the initial provincial support teams had negligible effects. Despite Jeffrey’s endorsement, embassy support for the project was lukewarm, and the teams were too small to make a difference. Many were comprised of only four or five military officers and a State Department representative, and some members had additional duties unrelated to the support team mission.

The arrival of Ambassador Khalilzad in July brought an immediate change. Khalilzad, having seen firsthand the impact the provincial reconstruction teams had on governance, the rule of law, and economic development efforts in Afghanistan was determined to replicate them in Iraq. He threw his weight behind efforts to establish the teams and recognized they needed to be much more robust in personnel and capabilities than the provincial support teams. “What really got it [PRTs] going was the fact that Ambassador Khalilzad showed up . . . and said, ‘How come we don’t have PRT’s in Iraq?’” one MNF-I officer recounted.¹¹¹ Given the significant differences between Iraq and Afghanistan, the Iraqi teams would focus more on developing provincial governance in order to improve the connection between the central government and its constituents.

Implementing provincial reconstruction teams, however, meant overcoming the reluctance not just of the State Department, but also of Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld, who regarded the teams as a sign of mission creep that would result in DoD paying to accomplish a State Department function. Only after pressure from Casey, Abizaid, and Khalilzad did Rumsfeld acquiesce in the initiative.¹¹² By November, the first three reconstruction teams opened in Ninawa, Tamim, and Babil Provinces, with an additional 13 planned to follow in other provinces in 2006.¹¹³ At the same time, MNF-I began planning for 14 teams to directly assist Iraq's ministries at the national level and focus on core governmental functions.

Like all the other ad hoc organizations created for the Iraq mission, provincial reconstruction teams were slow to reach full capacity due to delays in the arrival of personnel, though many of the teams ultimately grew to 30 to 45 representatives from across the U.S. interagency, with most teams led by a foreign service officer and a military deputy. For the military component, a civil affairs element ranging from a team to company size would pair with an engineer officer to work on reconstruction, while MNC-I would provide a liaison from the multinational division and MNSTC-I would provide a police partnership program coordinator. With the Army's civil affairs units stretched to the breaking point, Navy personnel were hastily assigned to fill reconstruction team billets, even though they had little or no civil affairs experience.¹¹⁴ While the State Department provided a majority of the civilian personnel, most teams also had a rule of law expert from the Department of Justice and representatives from the United States Agency for International Development.¹¹⁵ The teams had almost as many contractors as government personnel because they depended on private companies such as Blackwater or Triple Canopy for security, and on contractors such as the Research Triangle Institute to run local governance programs.

Despite their potential, the reconstruction teams faced considerable challenges. Manning was a continuous problem, as personnel from civilian agencies could not be forcibly detailed into the positions. The lack of combined pre-mission training meant that the teams had to work through differences in organizational culture, identity, and ethos while conducting a new mission. Allied forces in MND-CS and MND-SE were reluctant to invest their own resources in the program but were also reluctant to allow American-led teams into their sectors. Many of the commanders within the U.S. sectors were unhappy with the command relationship of the provincial reconstruction teams to the multinational divisions, preferring to have direct control of the teams themselves rather than having them controlled by coalition officials in Baghdad.¹¹⁶

SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ISF DEVELOPMENT MISSION

MNSTC-I Takes over the Interior Ministry Mission

By early 2005, coalition leaders concluded that the development of the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, begun under the short-lived tenure of Bernard Kerik in 2003, was falling further behind the development of the Ministry of Defense as time passed, so much so that the coalition's plan to establish police primacy in Iraq's internal security affairs was at risk. To speed up the Interior Ministry's development, Lieutenant General David

Petraeus put in place plans to improve the Iraqis' performance at both ministerial and tactical levels. One problem was that coalition advisers had far less access to the Interior Ministry in east Baghdad than they did to the Ministry of Defense inside the Green Zone. Thus in April 2005, Petraeus's command expanded Forward Operating Base Shield, a coalition base adjacent to the Interior Ministry, so that advisers could maximize contact hours with their Interior Ministry counterparts.¹¹⁷

Petraeus also pressed coalition leaders to consolidate the police training mission under MNSTC-I, a measure that Ambassador John Negroponte and the State Department opposed because it would make Iraq the only country in which DoD, rather than State, had authority to organize, train, and equip a civilian police force. With the arrival of Khalilzad in July 2005, however, the U.S. Embassy changed its position and acknowledged that the civilian agencies had not been able to resource the police mission with the people or money required. Accordingly, in October 2005, a month after Lieutenant General Martin Dempsey took command of MNSTC-I from Petraeus, the police training mission was transferred in its entirety from the State Department to MNSTC-I. All elements of the U.S. Embassy's Iraq Reconstruction Management Office that had been working on Ministry of Interior affairs came under Dempsey's operational control.¹¹⁹ The decision finally created unity of effort within the security force assistance mission, giving MNSTC-I, in Dempsey's words, "responsibility for the entire enterprise, from individual [Iraqi] soldier to Minister of Defense or individual policeman to Minister of Interior," and providing for the first time "one organization, one commander, with the resources to accomplish the mission."¹²⁰

With full control over the Iraqi police training and advisory effort for the first time, MNSTC-I and MNF-I made plans to accelerate police development dramatically, which they assessed to be lagging about a year behind that of the Iraqi Army.¹²¹ Casey and Dempsey announced that 2006 would be the "Year of the Police," in which the coalition would increase capability at the ministerial level while speeding up the development of tactical units. Nearly 700 new international police liaison officers (IPLO) were contracted to mentor local police units, which had had no coalition advisers since Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's objections to the creation of local police transition teams in 2004. The arrival of the IPLOs in 2006 would mirror the use of external military transition teams already underway in 2005. In order to increase the output of the Ministry of the Interior's police training programs and put more police officers on the beat quickly, MNSTC-I would also recruit 700 additional Iraqi police instructors and contract 185 additional international police trainers.¹²² The coalition would also help Ministry of the Interior forces field more



Source: DoD photo by Staff Sergeant Curt Cashour, Defense Imagery Management Operations Center (Released).

Lieutenant General Martin Dempsey, Commanding General, Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I).¹¹⁸

capable vehicles, starting with a battalion of 30 armored security vehicles issued to the Special Police in the fall.¹²³ Coalition leaders hoped the combination of these changes would enable the ministry to shoulder a greater share of security responsibility and lighten the demands on the Iraqi Army, which, in turn, would allow the coalition to accelerate its transition of security responsibilities to Iraqi authorities.

These optimistic plans for police development, however, did not foresee the severe difficulties the rising tide of sectarian warfare would bring to Iraq's Interior Ministry. The transfer of the Interior Ministry advisory mission to MNSTC-I increased coalition commanders' visibility on the ministry's inner workings, about which MNF-I leaders were receiving increasing warnings of sectarian influence and violence.¹²⁴ Under MNSTC-I, the coalition quickly increased the number of advisers in the ministry headquarters from 40 to 106 personnel, an expansion made possible by the growth of Forward Operating Base Shield.¹²⁵ As these MNSTC-I and MNF-I advisers were making preparations for a reenergized police development effort, several thousand recruits were already entering new "public order battalions" created by Prime Minister Ja'afari and Interior Minister Bayan Jabr. Though coalition officials initially took Ja'afari and Jabr's initiatives at face value as a sign that Iraqi leaders wanted to act more self-sufficiently, they quickly realized that Iraqi leaders were keeping the 3,000-man force out of the normal coalition-supervised vetting processes to ensure they were "nearly 100 percent Shi'a," as Dempsey later recalled.¹²⁶

Elsewhere in the Interior Ministry, the Iraqi border forces lagged just as far behind coalition expectations as did the police. The disconnect between Casey and Vines over shifting the coalition's main effort from Baghdad to the Syrian border had been mirrored in a disconnect between MNSTC-I and MNF-I over support to the border forces. Although border transition teams, designed to help Iraq's Department of Border Enforcement, had been part of the transition team plan since its inception, by fall 2005 only 11 10-man teams were present on Iraq's entire western border, and not until mid-October did MNSTC-I operationalize Casey's instructions to enable Iraqi border forces to reestablish control.¹²⁷ With the border forces' operating at just 70 percent, MNSTC-I assisted the Department of Border Enforcement in a recruiting campaign to bring in nearly 2,500 new guards by the end of the year.¹²⁸ In order to advise the larger organization, which by all accounts was in worse shape than the police force, Casey requested additional U.S. forces from CENTCOM to increase the total number of border transition teams from 15 to 26. Given the slow nature of the deployment process, these new forces would not arrive until spring 2006.¹²⁹ In the meantime, MNSTC-I contracted for the completion of 91 additional border forts, many of which at the time existed only as intermittent border-crossing locations with berms and tents.¹³⁰ MNSTC-I also coordinated with the Department of Homeland Security to pay for approximately 20 customs and border patrol agents to deploy to advise the Iraqi Department of Border Security.¹³¹

Unfortunately, all of MNSTC-I's extensive efforts were on the Syrian border. At the same time that the Iranian regime was increasing its infiltration of weapons and operatives into Iraq, not a single team had been assigned to the Iranian border.

The Iraqi Army

As MNSTC-I was putting renewed effort into the police force, it reviewed its plans for building the Iraqi Army and shifted its main effort from the generation of tactical units to the development of institutional capacity, especially mentoring the Ministry of Defense and the Joint Forces Headquarters on their roles in organizing, training, and equipping the Iraqi military. The most acute need was to accelerate the generation of Iraqi officers and noncommissioned officers (NCO), which transition readiness assessment reports for December 2005 showed at a 66 percent and 60 percent fill, respectively.¹³² MNSTC-I also began to reexamine the organization of the Iraqi logistics system to increase its internal capacity. Under new MNSTC-I plans, each Iraqi battalion would gain a headquarters and services company with maintenance, supply, medical, and transport capabilities; each division would gain a motor transport regiment; and the Ministry of Defense would receive a national depot with 10 regional base support units.¹³³ However, Iraqi brigades would gain no logistics capability, and all life-support functions such as food, fuel, and laundry would remain in the hands of private contractors. Finally, MNSTC-I's new plans also envisioned that three infantry brigades would be converted to motorized brigades to serve as an operational reserve; four new strategic infrastructure battalions would guard oil pipelines and other infrastructure; and each division would gain a signal company, a bomb disposal company, an engineer company, and an intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance company.¹³⁴ Despite the shift in MNSTC-I plans, however, the combat service support changes to the Iraqi Army were slow in coming, as the coalition's de facto main effort for Iraqi force generation continued to be combat units, and recruitment for the specialized fields of mechanics, medics, doctors, and logisticians was challenging in Iraq in any case.

MNSTC-I's review of plans for the Iraqi Army also led to a reassessment of the viability of Iraqi Army's force protection requirements. Realizing that the pickup trucks the coalition had initially purchased for Iraqi units were becoming increasingly unsafe in the IED-laden environment, MNSTC-I officials and their Iraqi counterparts procured 2,073 up-armored HMMWVs of the same model used by U.S. forces. By November 2005, 267 had been delivered to the Iraqi security forces, with the remainder scheduled to arrive by August 2006.¹³⁵

At the same time, MNSTC-I began fielding Iraqi armor units. On November 12, Iraq received 77 T-72 tanks from Hungary and 36 BMP-1 armored fighting vehicles from Greece.¹³⁶ While these units would not be operational for more than a year, the return of tanks to the Iraqi Army was a significant milestone, finally overturning Walter Slocombe's 2003 design for an Iraqi military of light infantry that would lack any offensive capability that might be used against its neighbors.

Rocky Start for the Military Transition Teams

In May 2005, the first external military and special police transition teams began to arrive in Iraq for a transition mission that was already falling behind schedule. Although Casey had directed the multinational divisions to stand up internal transition teams while the external MiTTs were being organized in the United States, the results were

uneven. Some units had supported the new mission fervently, but some overburdened commanders who lacked the means to control their areas properly were reluctant to reduce their combat power further by setting aside officers, NCOs, and equipment for the military transition team mission. Nevertheless, by September 2005, 174 internal and external transition teams were in place, including some within allied sectors, and the program continued to grow.¹³⁷

Unfortunately, by the fall of 2005, it was clear the external transition teams that made up the majority of the program faced considerable systemic obstacles, especially personnel issues caused at least in part by the institutional Army's reluctance to embrace fully the military transition team concept. Rather than providing incentives for officers and NCOs to serve on the transition teams that were theoretically the main effort of the war in Iraq, many in the Army saw service on a transition team as a career-harming move. This judgment was seemingly validated by the fact that the Army in 2005 did not categorize transition team assignments among the "key developmental or branch qualifying" jobs officers required for promotion. At a managerial level, some Army personnel officials advised their top-performing officers to avoid assignment on the transition teams.¹³⁸ They also often selected MiTT members haphazardly, at times even using the criteria of finding personnel who had not yet deployed to combat. These dynamics resulted in significant skill mismatches for the transition team mission, such as the inclusion of artillery and engineer Soldiers as battalion-level advisers even though Iraqi Army battalions had no fire support and no engineer assets except at the division level.¹³⁹

Some MiTT members also were not prepared for the rigors of living as a small element in an austere environment outside of the normal Army logistical footprint. The fact that the teams were so small, officially 10 or 11 people at full strength, but often 8 or 9 in reality, magnified the impact of having poorly matched or qualified personnel. One special police transition team leader related later:

If a person doesn't want to be there, it's different on an 8-man team than it would be in a 120-man company, because everybody counts. We had an NCO who absolutely hated all Iraqis based on his previous war experience and refused to eat with them, refused to socialize with them. He said, 'I'll only do what I'm ordered to do and required to do. I'm not eating their food, I'm not socializing, and I'm not playing soccer with them.' That creates a poison in a small-team environment.¹⁴⁰

The motley nature of the transition teams resulted in some MiTTs, in a play on words, calling themselves Mutts instead.¹⁴¹

Another structural challenge of the external transition teams was that their command relationship created unity of effort problems with local commanders. The transition teams were only under the tactical control of commanders in the multinational divisions and, as such, the battle-space owners could not restructure the military transition teams or rate their leaders.¹⁴² Instead, the rating chain ran through the various layers of MiTTs (battalion, brigade, and division) up to the Iraq Assistance Group, a one-star headquarters formed under MNC-I to ensure the teams were properly supported across the country. Keeping the teams' rating chain separate from the brigades and divisions in Iraq was a decision made out of concern that MiTT officers senior rated by division or brigade commanders would wind up competing — at a disadvantage — against battalion commanders or other peers in those divisions, with the result that MiTT members could

end up with career-harming evaluation reports. It was an arrangement that irritated many battle-space owners, who believed the initial MiTTs tended not to take into sufficient account the objectives of the units responsible for the territory in which the MiTTs were operating. The requirement to support the transition teams without the ability to control their day-to-day activities or evaluate their personnel bred resentment toward the program among many battle-space owners. The quality of individuals on some of the first transition teams, a result of the haphazard selection process, only magnified the resentment. Although in many cases the transition teams and battle-space owners worked through these challenges, doing so resulted in lost time and misdirected efforts for the overall campaign.¹⁴³ The after action review of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment in Operation RESTORE RIGHTS captured many of these concerns:

Many of the MiTT teams . . . had not been adequately trained to the MiTT role. . . . Because of this, [Special Forces] ODA teams and partnership Squadrons would pick up the slack and crossover into the role of the MiTTs. This caused the MiTTs to no longer perform their understood functions because the ODA teams were doing it for them. . . . The Army needs to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of these different combat multipliers in terms of their relationships and responsibilities to the ISF [Iraqi security forces]. . . . ODAs or the partnership Squadrons need to have the MiTTs attached to them and have OPCON [operational control] of their teams IOT [in order to] allow these clearly defined roles to exist.¹⁴⁴

In Baghdad, 3d Infantry Division Commander Major General William Webster echoed similar concerns among senior U.S. commanders:

I think the [transition teams] ought to be attached to divisions and the division commanders ought to be made responsible for the success or failure of the Iraqi units. I don't think they ought to be deployed as a separate organization. . . . We need those combat commanders, at the division and brigade and battalion level, responsible for counterparts in the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police forces to make them better and they would invest a hell of a lot more. We have invested a lot in them and they have a lot to do; but, they also have a staff and a whole huge organization for getting it done.¹⁴⁵

In advocating that unit commanders, rather than small transition teams, should be responsible for developing the Iraqi units with which their units were partnered, Webster was also echoing the similar argument put forward by General Peter Schoomaker in the initial debate over the transition teams the previous year.

For their first several cycles, the transition team deployment timelines were not synchronized with the units they were meant to work with in Iraq, so that the teams generally arrived midway through a unit deployment without having participated in any of the unit's pre-mission training. It was a crucial missed opportunity to form cohesive teams. "In retrospect, the externally-sourced MiTTs should have been given to the BCTs stateside or in Europe as augmentees," observed Brigadier General Daniel Bolger, who had served as Coalition Military Assistance Training Team (CMATT) commander in 2005. "Most of the angst among MiTTs came from externally sourced teams glued onto cohesive BCTs. They felt like outsiders, they were on a different rotation cycle, and it was not easy for either the advisers or the partner units."¹⁴⁶



Source: U.S. Army photo by Staff Sergeant Teddy Wade (Released).

**Major General William Webster,
Commanding General, 3d Infantry
Division.¹⁴⁷**

The size of the teams also limited their basic effectiveness. With 11 people at most on a team and a countrywide force protection rule that convoys could consist of no fewer than three vehicles, no military transition team could conduct split operations without external assistance or security, and they often resorted to using field grade officers as either drivers or turret gunners to move from place to place. Webster recalled later, “We knew that these SPTTs and MiTTs were going to be 10-man elements, and we knew then that what that meant in an insurgency was that they either all had to stay in one place or they all had to move, because it took ten guys to secure ten guys all the time.”¹⁴⁸

A September assessment of the MiTTs by the Iraq Assistance Group minced words diplomatically, noting, “Transition teams that are larger and who have strong partnership support do better, faster.”¹⁴⁹ In many cases, the additional requirement to provide security for the transition teams became a tax on battle-space owners’ already thinly stretched forces. Equipment problems also hampered the military transition teams’ effectiveness, especially for the first yearlong rotation. By September, the teams only possessed 46 percent of their equipment, with the worst shortages in communications equipment and night-vision devices.¹⁵⁰ While these supply shortages were generally resolved by the time the second group of teams arrived in 2006, they hamstrung the teams’ effectiveness in 2005—a critical period in which the rapid development of Iraqi security forces was the centerpiece of MNF-I’s plan.

Most transition teams went through a short training period in the United States, followed by 10 days of Iraq-specific training in Kuwait (including vehicle rollover drills, convoy procedures, IED battle drills, and live-fire exercises). However, in after action reviews, few transition team members had positive comments about the utility or applicability of their training.¹⁵¹ To further complicate the predeployment preparations, the Army initially conducted pre-mission training at Fort Carson, CO, but over the span of a year moved the location first to Fort Hood, TX, and then to Fort Riley, KS, causing a reboot of the program with each move.¹⁵² Upon arriving in Iraq, the teams finally had 8 days of focused transition team training at the Phoenix Academy in Taji, created by Casey because of his concern that the Army’s institutional preparatory training would be insufficient.¹⁵³ Much of the training prepared the transition teams to teach the military decision-making process and other staff functions to the Iraqi battalion and brigade staffs, rather than to build warfighting units at platoon and company level.¹⁵⁴

The arrival of the transition teams also revealed more clearly the challenges of the Transition Readiness Assessment, the tool that MNSTC-I had set up in coordination with MNF-I to evaluate the performance of Iraqi units and to inform U.S. troop withdrawal decisions. Many transition teams expressed frustration that the majority of the ratings were only focused on staffing and equipping statistics, and ignored the intangible, more

subjective determinations of whether an Iraqi unit was cohesive and actually ready for combat. In addition, as Iraqi units were passed from one transition team to the next, the perils of the perspective of a 1-year rotation became apparent. Frequently, as a transition team worked with an Iraqi unit, they would chart the unit's steady progress, showing its development over the length of their deployment. When the next team arrived, with little basis to judge unit capabilities other than their experiences with the U.S. Army, they would be appalled at the state of the Iraqi Army, and the Iraqi unit's ratings would plummet overnight. Casey himself had observed these challenges, recalling later, "What would happen is that the guys [in MiTTs] would get them [Iraqi partners] and they would work with them and miraculously, as they got to the end of their tenure, [the Iraqis] looked better and better. Well then, the next guys would come in and say, 'What the Hell is this?'"¹⁵⁵

Challenges of Iraqi Military Culture

The military transition teams' organizational challenges were matched by those of the Iraqis they were meant to advise. The true scale of the teams' task was revealed after they began working with the Iraqi security forces and realized that they would have to overcome pervasive corruption and anachronistic military practices. Corruption in the Iraqi security forces was endemic. Its clearest manifestation was the problem of "ghost soldiers" listed on the Iraqi Army and police rolls by corrupt commanders who had considerable incentives to overstate the size of their units and pocket the excess pay, which the Iraqi Government doled out in cash. At a May 2005 conference for MNSTC-I, MNC-I, and transition team leaders, coalition officials conservatively estimated the number of ghost soldiers to be between 15,000 and 30,000, a figure representing between 10 and 20 percent of the entire Iraqi security forces at the time, though anecdotal reports indicated the actual numbers could be even higher.¹⁵⁶ MNSTC-I and MNF-I's 2004 decision to use contracts for Iraqi units' life support such as food, fuel, and laundry exacerbated the situation, as the cash for the contracts went to unit commanders on a per-soldier basis. Some corrupt officers also skimmed money off the life support contracts themselves, a practice that sometimes resulted in rotten or insufficient food, or in soldiers having to pay for their own uniforms. One special police transition team member recalled:

When we started reviewing who was there, trying to get a personnel status report from these guys was crazy. . . . We were just looking for numbers, let alone names, but a couple of reviews of the names came up that they had guys on their books who were not there anymore. They were still collecting their paychecks, so the question was, 'Where's the money going to?'¹⁵⁷

The worst corruption came at the highest ministerial level. In September and October 2005, the Iraqi Government issued arrest warrants for Hazem Shaalan, who had served as Minister of Defense under the Allawi government, and 23 other defense officials.¹⁵⁸ Shaalan and other senior members of the Ministry of Defense had set up a vast scheme of overpayments, kickbacks, shell companies, and other ploys to steal an estimated \$1.3-2.3 billion from defense contracts in the space of barely a year.¹⁵⁹ Shaalan and many of his co-conspirators were eventually tried and convicted in absentia for the enormous theft because they had fled to other countries before the warrants were issued. The looting of

the Iraqi defense budget by its own minister left lasting effects on the security forces by draining the treasury and delaying the proper equipping of the force.

In Iraqi tactical units, absenteeism was a serious problem, as it had been in Saddam's army. One cause was the Iraqi Army's leave policy, which promised soldiers 1 week of home leave out of every 4 weeks. This policy, in existence since the Iran-Iraq war, had been instituted because of Iraq's lack of a modern banking system. In a country that functioned on cash-and-carry arrangements, soldiers received their pay in cash, with no system to transfer funds electronically to their families, and thus most Iraqi troops carried the cash home by hand. Low pay also contributed to the absentee problem, creating a situation in which some Iraqi troops found it more economical to desert their posts than to stay. "In 2005, Iraq paid a rifleman about \$300 a month," CMATT Commander General Bolger noted. "The [mujahideen] would pay him \$300 on one night to plant a roadside bomb."¹⁶⁰ According to Brigadier General John McLaren, the Iraq Assistance Group commander from 2005–2006, these factors resulted in a 30 percent annual turnover rate for the Iraqi Army.¹⁶¹ Iraqi commanders' ability to discipline deserters was low because Iraq had no uniform code of military justice and therefore had no enforceable law requiring the all-volunteer force to stay on duty.

Sectarianism was also prevalent within the ranks, and many units had effectively become ethnically "pure." The near-exponential growth of the Iraqi security forces, paired with increased Iraqi sovereignty that gave the Iraqis the lead in managing that growth, made the detailed tracking of ethnic composition within security force units difficult. In a memorandum written after his tenure of command in MNF-NW, Major General David Rodriguez noted:

The 2d Iraqi Army Division leadership is 100 percent Kurdish and its subordinate brigade level leaders are 80 percent Kurdish. Overall the 2d Iraqi Army Division's ethnic composition is 29 percent Arab and 61 percent Kurdish. . . . The 3d Iraqi Army Division senior leadership is 75 percent Kurdish and the brigade level leaders are 65 percent Kurdish. The 3d Iraqi Army Division ethnic composition is 69 percent Arab and 31 percent Kurdish. This situation does not lend itself to building cohesive teams that are representative of the people of Iraq. The high percentage of Kurdish leaders makes those Iraqi Divisions vulnerable to political pressure from Kurdish leadership whose agenda is not always in line with Iraq's national interest.¹⁶²

Similar situations existed across the country, with the Iraqi Army units in Baghdad and the south being predominantly Shi'a. Despite MNSTC-I's noble objectives of creating an Army that was a truly national force, Iraq's ethno-sectarian forces had essentially carved it up, much as they had done with Iraq's political spoils after the elections. This sectarian streak in the security forces, especially in the Interior Ministry, created a fragility that could be exploited, either in preventing units from deploying and fighting to act in the national best interest, or in some cases, convincing the units to carry out sectarian violence themselves.

Coalition advisers also found that the new Iraqi units retained some of the less desirable traits of the old Iraqi military. "Talking to Iraqi officers had some echoes of talking to Germans after World War II. Saddam's heavy hand crushed professional instincts," Bolger recalled.¹⁶³ The average senior officer in the Iraqi security forces had grown up in a police state in which multiple military organizations had competed with one another for influence, while regime leaders had aimed to ensure no one organization became

effective enough to launch a coup. In such an environment, there was little incentive to share information because information represented a potential advantage over rivals. The most capable officers were those most likely to be purged because they represented a potential threat to the regime. Because of these dynamics, the pre-2003 Iraqi military culture valued the blind following of orders, loyalty, micromanagement, and the avoidance of initiative. When many of the officers and soldiers of the pre-2003 military returned to serve in the new Iraqi security forces, they brought with them some of these same dysfunctional values and group norms. One military transition team leader described some of the absurd practices that resulted, "When we arrived, the [Iraqi] chief of staff had all the paper in the headquarters locked up in his office. He would literally count out sheets and only give them to the primary staff officers of the sections. If they came in and asked for five pieces of paper, he would ask why they needed it. He would then unlock the cabinet and pull out what they needed."¹⁶⁴

In many ways, the transition teams had been tasked to rebuild the very sinews of the Iraqi military, including its ethos, a task that was sweeping, slow, and unlikely to meet MNF-I's deadlines. Yet it was on the shoulders of these transition teams, ad hoc organizations comprised of a mismatched group of personnel with only eight days of adviser-specific training, that the MNF-I campaign plan rested.

As MNF-I approached the crucial elections of fall 2005, Casey and other leaders were buoyed by the successes of McMaster at Tel Afar and the growing success of Marines such as Lieutenant Colonel Julian Alford in Anbar. The operational shift of forces to the border had led to successful operations at the tactical level. MNF-I's counterinsurgency survey had led to the creation of the COIN Academy, which, in turn, gradually shifted the tactical focus of new units as they arrived in Iraq. Casey's Sunni outreach was bearing fruit, and Anbari tribesmen were beginning to shift sides, a marked contrast to the outright rejectionism and resistance that marked much of 2004. Provincial reconstruction teams and transition teams, critical to the handover of security and governance responsibility to the Iraqis, were finally coming online. The Iraqi security forces were growing rapidly, and the initial transition readiness assessments showed some Iraqi units would soon be able to assume control of battle space from the coalition. AQI, for the first time in the war, was under considerable pressure from rival Sunni insurgent groups, restive Anbari tribesmen, and even from al-Qaeda senior leaders who worried about the direction in which Zarqawi was taking their Iraqi franchise.¹⁶⁵

However, the seemingly improving enemy picture and the hard-won tactical victories in Tel Afar and Al Qa'im obscured the reality that, at the operational level, the campaign was heading in the wrong direction. The successes in western Ninawa and the western Euphrates had come by pulling critical combat power away from Baghdad and removing the most effective brake on sectarian violence that would soon begin to spin out of control. The October constitutional referendum and December parliamentary election, elections the coalition expected to be national compacts that would lead to reconciliation, would instead become divisive, identity-driven events that sparked further conflict.

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CHAPTER 18

DEFEATED BY DEMOCRACY, WINTER 2005-2006

As the coalition entered the fall of 2005, many senior leaders wanted to believe they were approaching the crescendo of their effort. General George W. Casey, Jr., and others hoped that the October constitutional referendum and December parliamentary election would serve to tamp down the insurgency and put Iraq on a new, positive trajectory. Many assumed that democracy would serve as a vehicle for reconciliation and provide a viable alternative to violence that would drive a wedge among different factions in the Sunni insurgency. Successful elections, they hoped, might end the wave of violence that had begun with the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime and gained momentum ever since. Many insisted it would restore Iraq to equilibrium, which would make it possible for the coalition to accelerate transitions to the government of Iraq, draw down military forces, and plan for withdrawal.

Yet a sense of fragility permeated the optimism. Many challenges remained, even if democratic elections went smoothly. Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) had expanded its campaign of brutality. Sectarian tensions simmered across the country, ready to boil over at the slightest provocation. Death squads from all confessionals, some wearing the uniforms of the Iraqi state, stalked the streets in a quiet campaign of ethnic cleansing. All the while, influential neighboring states attempted to manipulate Iraq's internal processes. Faced with all of these dangers, Iraq was on the brink of civil war, not peace, and elections held in this context would serve as the spark, not the damper.

THE IRAQI CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM

One of the most notable political consequences of the Sunni boycott of the January 2005 election was that Sunni leaders found themselves frozen out of the writing of the Iraqi constitution. On May 10, 2005, the newly elected Iraqi National Assembly nominated a constitutional drafting committee that had only two Sunni Arabs out of 55 total members.¹ Fearful of the prospect of a new constitution written by the Kurdish and Shi'a Islamist parties, nearly 1,000 Sunni Arab notables met in Baghdad in late May and demanded a say in the drafting process.² Recognizing the danger of another Sunni rejection of the political process, U.S. diplomats pressed Shi'a and Kurdish leaders to make the process inclusive of Sunni Arabs, so the resulting constitution would be a national compact, not a document subordinating one community to the rest.³ In early July, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad and other U.S. officials persuaded Iraqi leaders to add 15 Sunnis as voting members of the committee and another 13 as nonvoting experts, but the addition made little difference to the process.⁴ On July 19, two of the new Sunni members were assassinated, which seemed to underscore the message that their participation had not been wanted.⁵

During drafting committee conferences, the other Sunni members received similar signals. "When the Sunni walked in, the Shi'a said, 'you sit over there. You are only here because the Americans made us let you come,'" Casey recollected in 2008. As the committee did its work, Khalilzad pushed for the inclusion of Sunni Arab views, but few

were incorporated into the final document.⁶ Most significantly, the Kurdish parties and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) representatives leading the committee included articles making Iraq a federal state whose provinces retained the right to form autonomous regions. Those regions would also have the power to form their own regional governments, create their own internal security forces, and control revenues from new energy discoveries.⁷ The three Kurdish-majority Provinces of Erbil, Dahuk, and Sulaymaniyah were already deemed to be their own region, administered by the Kurdistan Regional Government, and allowed to have their own elected President and Parliament. Concerning the thorny issue of who would govern oil-rich Kirkuk, the draft constitution set a December 31, 2007, deadline for a referendum to determine whether the province would join the Kurdistan region.⁸ The Sunni Arabs bitterly opposed these measures, but Sunni representatives on the constitutional committee had little power to resist them. On August 28, the Iraqi Government approved the first draft constitution without consensus support from the drafting committee.⁹

As Iraq edged closer to its dual fall elections, Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) concerned itself less with the elections' political implications than with the necessity to protect the important voting process physically. As with the January elections, Casey feared that AQI and other Sunni insurgents might launch mass attacks in the days before the vote, in a Vietnam war Tet-like offensive that would derail any political gains made.¹⁰ To secure the October and December elections, MNF-I chose to use much of the same playbook from the January elections, including a temporary surge of additional U.S. forces to disrupt insurgent activities and protect polling sites. To this end, Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) arranged the timing of the transition between the 101st Airborne Division and 42d Infantry Division in Multi-National Division-North Central (MND-NC) so that both units would be in Iraq in October, temporarily boosting the number of brigade combat teams (BCT) during the critical period of the referendum. Additionally, two battalions from the 82d Airborne Division's division-ready brigade, Task Force (TF) 2-325 (2d Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment) and TF 3-504 (3d Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment), deployed to Iraq in September for a 120-day period that would encompass both electoral events.¹¹ The 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), U.S. Central Command's (CENTCOM) operational reserve, also deployed to Iraq from October to December 2005.¹² For their part, Iraqi leaders agreed to put in place many of the same protective measures as in the January elections, including declaring nationwide curfews, closing international borders and the Baghdad International Airport, curtailing vehicle movement, and canceling all leave for the Iraqi security forces (ISF).¹³

As the fall elections approached, many native Sunni insurgent groups, having concluded that the boycott of the January election equated to a political disaster for Sunni interests, changed course and actively advocated participation in the electoral process. Many of these groups, such as the 1920 Revolutionary Brigades, Jaysh Muhammad, and Jaysh al-Islami, erroneously believed that Sunnis were the majority sect in Iraq, which would mean they could easily win a fair election without a boycott. In Fallujah, this new direction took the form of a July 2005 fatwa, or religious edict, issued by 15 clerics who urged residents to participate in both the constitutional referendum and the parliamentary elections.¹⁴

Mohammed Mahmoud Latif took this new direction even further by attempting to negotiate a cease-fire in Ramadi and announcing his intention to run as a candidate in the December elections. Latif's announcement split the Ramadi Shura Council, with most of the council's top leaders siding with him, but many of the groups' rank and file broke away to formally join with AQI.¹⁵ By the end of July, Latif had to break off cease-fire negotiations with the coalition as a result of AQI assassination plots and pressure from the splintering of the Shura Council, but he did not abandon his support for the electoral process.¹⁶

Over the same period, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi had grown increasingly concerned with Latif's and other Iraqi insurgent groups' decisions to enter the political process. On August 13, AQI declared those who would write or support the constitution to be "apostates," and that the "judicial court of the Organization of al-Qaeda in Iraq has ruled that it is a duty to uphold God's law and kill those who have declared themselves God's partners in drafting this void constitution."¹⁷ In response to AQI's declaration, militants attacked poll workers, election officials, and even election sites used in January in the hopes of causing enough carnage to forestall the elections. In one brutal incident on August 18, insurgents kidnapped three election workers who were hanging voting posters in Mosul and publicly executed them in front of a crowded mosque the next day.¹⁸

The Sunni groups that supported political participation resisted AQI's violent efforts to discourage voting. By late September, support among Anbaris for changing course had grown to the point that Sunni leaders in the province were confident enough to form the Anbar General Conference, which lobbied for a unified political front to represent Sunni equities in the upcoming elections. Even prominent Sunni insurgent leaders joined the conference, including Harith al-Dhari, Mohammed Mahmoud Latif, and one of Abdullah Janabi's senior lieutenants.¹⁹ The insurgent group Jaysh Muhammad went so far as to finance anti-AQI sermons in mosques, post flyers with names and photos of AQI members, and threaten merchants against distributing AQI propaganda.²⁰ To counter Zarqawi's claim that participation in the electoral process amounted to apostasy, Latif and the Association of Muslim Scholars declared that participating in the referendum to vote against the constitution was equivalent to jihad – the duty of every Muslim.²¹

On October 15, the day on which the constitutional referendum was held, insurgents managed only 88 attacks nationwide, down significantly from the 299 reported attacks during the January 2005 election. Attacks against election sites were also down, from 89 in January to only 19 in October, as were the total number of casualties, from 213 to 49.²² With several insurgent groups actively encouraging voting, and near-universal participation by Sunni political leaders, turnout increased dramatically during the referendum, as virtually all the Sunni community hoped to reject the draft constitution and its federal articles. But their unrealistic hopes were quickly dashed. When the final votes were tallied after the October 15 vote, overall turnout had jumped to 66 percent. The vote included near-universal Sunni rejection of the draft constitution in the Sunni-majority provinces: in Anbar, 97 percent of voters voted against the constitution; and in Salahadin and Ninawa, the "no" votes were 82 percent and 55 percent, respectively.²³ In the ethnically mixed Diyala Province, where Sunnis were a plurality, 49 percent of the population voted against the constitution. Despite the strong opposition in these provinces, Iraqi voters nationwide approved the constitution by a clear majority of 78.6 percent.²⁴ Sunni

opposition fell just short of the referendum requirement that two-thirds of the voters in three provinces had to reject the draft constitution to block its adoption. The constitution drafted mainly by Shi'a and Kurdish political parties in the late summer became Iraq's new foundational law.

The results in Anbar, in particular, gave a window into the state of the insurgency. In areas where the more nationalistic insurgent groups still had sway, election participation was high. In Fallujah and its environs, 69 percent of the population voted, a high enough percentage that electoral officials had to request additional ballots.²⁵ In the AQI-controlled territory that included Al Qa'im, Qusaybah, and Hadithah, voting did not occur at all because it was unsafe even to establish polling sites. Across the province, 32 percent of eligible voters participated, a sharp increase from the 2 percent that voted in the January election.²⁶

However, the increase in participation obscured a sober truth: that while many Sunnis had decided to join the electoral process, they were rejecting wholesale the political changes proposed in that process. The vast majority of those Sunnis who cast votes were voting against a constitution they believed would forever transform Iraq and cement their marginalization in society.²⁷ Yet, their opposition to the constitution would ultimately prove to be an act of futility and a further sectarian irritant. That some Sunni parties had left the insurgency to join the political process, likewise, was not a signal of future stability, since those parties generally stressed Sunni identity politics, opposed federalism, and demanded the reconstitution of the old Iraqi Army—all factors that the major Shi'a and Kurdish parties vehemently opposed.²⁸

Ultimately, the identity-driven election would only serve to drive a deeper wedge between Iraq's ethno-sectarian groups. Casey, in retrospect, concluded that the constitutional referendum "was not a national compact . . . 70 percent of the Sunni went out and voted against it. You had this document that was written by Iraqis but it was not a national compact of the whole of the country together. In fact, it was probably more divisive."²⁹

Exploiting "Success": The Bridging Strategy and the Plan to Reduce U.S. Troops

Coalition leaders took the adoption of the constitution as an indication that a turning point had arrived, despite the fact that Iraqi Sunnis had largely voted against the charter. One week after the voting, MNF-I's October 22 campaign assessment pronounced, "Bottom Line: The successful referendum period was a strategic victory for the political process in Iraq and dealt a considerable blow to the enemy providing us with a unique opportunity to exploit success."³⁰ With a new democratically elected Iraqi Government expectedly in the offing, MNF-I began to revise its campaign plan. "We recognized that the campaign plan ran out in December," Casey later recalled. "So we knew we were going to need another campaign plan; but I knew we wouldn't get it done until we saw what the heck it looked like after the elections."³¹ Having experienced a nearly 6-month delay in the formation of the Ja'afari government, the MNF-I commander was concerned that the coalition would face a similar delay in the wake of the December elections and therefore aimed to create a temporary strategy to "bridge" MNF-I from the election to

the formation of a new government. After the bridge, the new government would have a 4-year term, enabling MNF-I to generate new, long-term plans in partnership with it.

MNF-I's new bridging strategy, published on October 30, was built on the same guiding principles as the original August 2004 campaign plan: preventing Iraqi dependency and avoiding the creation of antibodies in Iraqi society by continuing to shrink the coalition footprint as quickly as conditions would allow. However, the new version also emphasized Casey's desire to reconcile with the Sunni population and to accelerate transition of responsibility to the Iraqi Government and Iraqi security forces, new priorities that Casey encapsulated in the phrase, "Al Qaeda Out, Sunni In, ISF Increasingly in the Lead, and Bridge the Gap."³²

For the objective of driving al-Qaeda out, Casey's planners judged that the successful conclusion of the border campaign in the Western Euphrates River Valley (WERV) and Tel Afar had done much of the work, but a shift in effort to Ramadi was required to finish the job. "AQI presence and pressure [in Ramadi] remains strong. Removal of this threat . . . may be the key to unlocking the insurgency in al Anbar province," Casey wrote in a strategic planning directive on October 30.³³ To assist in this effort against AQI, Casey judged that information operations could be an important tool in driving a wedge between AQI and the Iraqi population. He ordered MNF-I to take action to exploit AQI's blunders in Anbar as evinced in the Ayman Zawahiri letter.³⁴

Casey's objective of "ISF in the Lead" effectively meant an acceleration of his policy to transfer responsibility to Iraqis. On October 30, he wrote, "We are approaching the point in the campaign where the work of the past two years with the ISF is beginning to pay off . . . [t]he pace of transitions should pick up in the next months."³⁵ Casey also wanted to accelerate the development of Ministry of the Interior (MOI) forces, calling on Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq (MNSTC-I) to "develop an action plan to operationalize 2006 as the 'Year of the Police,' with a goal of having the MOI capable of leading border security efforts by June 06 and beginning to assume the lead in the counterinsurgency effort [from the Army] by the end of 2006."³⁶ This effort would include a request for additional forces to create transition teams with local police.

"Bridging the Gap," meanwhile, meant accelerating the transition of responsibility to the new Iraqi Government, which Casey eagerly awaited in the belief that the coalition would finally have a long-term partner government and that Iraqis would create a government of national unity. Accordingly, the October 30 directive called for the creation of ministerial assistance teams to bolster key Iraqi governmental functions and for expanding the provincial reconstruction teams from the original three cities to nine. As Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld had long wished, Casey's directive also sped up detainee transfers to Iraqi control. Finally, the directive emphasized "leveraging reductions in Coalition Forces to demonstrate the results of improving ISF, and [demonstrate] that the coalition presence is finite." Coalition units were instructed to "prepare for the next off-ramp decision."³⁷

The one component of Casey's directive that took the coalition in a significantly new direction was his "Sunni In" provision, which aimed to create "an environment where the Sunni population sees the coalition as the guarantor of its participation in the political process and the rejectionists find the military option too costly to pursue."³⁸ Accordingly, MNF-I would press for the reconstruction of the predominantly Sunni cities damaged by

fighting in 2004 and 2005: Fallujah, Samarra, and Tel Afar. Casey stressed the importance of increasing voter turnout in the Sunni provinces, and he ordered an expansion of the Desert Protector program. Lastly, he called on his staff to develop a Sunni amnesty plan that would include sizable detainee releases.³⁹

One major component of Casey's "ISF in the Lead" effort was a reduction in coalition troops and a shrinking of the footprint of those that remained. Both Casey and General John P. Abizaid maintained, as they had done at the time of the first MNF-I campaign plan in August 2004, that, with a new democratic Iraqi Government in the offing, the gradual reduction of the coalition military presence was vital to ensuring the new government's popular legitimacy. Even before the October referendum, the coalition had steadily reduced the footprint of its bases in 2005. By October 2005, XVIII Airborne Corps had closed 31 forward operating bases since assuming responsibility as the MNC-I headquarters in February, turning most of the bases over to Iraqi security forces.⁴⁰ The base closures were part of MNF-I's effort to move as many forces as possible out of Iraq's cities, partly to force political transition with the Iraqis, as U.S. forces had done by leaving their bases in Najaf in September 2005 and transferring responsibility for the entire city to the Iraqi Government, the first such transfer of the war.⁴¹

The reduction in the coalition footprint was also the implementation of Abizaid's guidance to decrease the number of antibodies created through friction with the local population. Like Abizaid, Casey believed that no matter how much good coalition troops might do, they were operating on borrowed time because Iraqis universally viewed them as occupiers. By October 2005, MNF-I leaders noted that 80 percent of recorded insurgent attacks took place in just four provinces: Baghdad, Anbar, Salahadin, and Ninawa.⁴² Though those four contained a majority of Iraq's population, Casey and MNF-I leaders believed the statistic meant that the insurgency was localized and could be contained—but only if the coalition sapped the insurgency of its motivation to fight against the coalition presence. A further MNF-I statistic that showed 80 percent of all insurgent attacks were directed against coalition forces—and not against Iraqis—seemed to reinforce the belief that coalition forces were part of the problem, not the solution.⁴³ In a September MNF-I poll taken in Baghdad, 79 percent of respondents had expressed no confidence in coalition forces to improve security, 90 percent had reported feeling very unsafe in the presence of coalition troops, and 53 percent had supported attacks against coalition forces in order to hasten their withdrawal. Conversely, 78 percent had expressed confidence in the Iraqi Army and 79 percent confidence in the Iraqi police.⁴⁴ The poll, like many others during that period, failed to break out Iraqi opinions by ethno-sectarian groups, thereby masking Sunni resentment and sectarian tensions, and it did not consider the validity of polling results in such a war-torn, traumatized society in the first place. Nevertheless, the poll's results reinforced MNF-I leaders' strong impression that opposition to the coalition was a major motivator among Iraqis. In October 2005 briefings to Rumsfeld and then-President George W. Bush, Casey argued in favor of "off-ramping," or canceling the deployment of a few Iraq-bound U.S. units, thereby reducing the coalition's military presence in order "to remove [the] central motivation attracting foreign fighter[s] and drawing Iraqis to the insurgency."⁴⁵ Time was fleeting to make such a reduction, Casey warned, because Iraqis' "tolerance for coalition presence is diminishing."⁴⁶

Beyond Baghdad, however, not all coalition commanders concurred with Casey's off-ramp recommendations. In September, when MNC-I asked both the current and incoming multinational divisions for input on the question, the soon-to-depart 42d Infantry Division and 3d Infantry Division supported the off-ramp proposal, with the latter judging that "[Iraqi Army] assumption of battle space will help mitigate the PAX [personnel] delta between 3ID and 4ID."⁴⁷ The soon-to-arrive 4th Infantry Division and 101st Airborne Division, however, opposed the off-ramp, with the 4th Infantry Division voicing the strongest opposition: "This [course of action] placed 4ID into the medium-high risk category for mission success . . . [and] reflects the growing impression that MNC-I is willing to assume risk in Baghdad during a critical phase of the Campaign Plan."⁴⁸ In Multi-National Force-West (MNF-W), meanwhile, Marine commanders warned that they did not have sufficient troops for their mission and requested a reallocation of some of the off-ramped forces to Anbar.⁴⁹ Finally, in October, Casey's own MNF-I Red Cell also recommended against its commander's idea for a two BCTs off-ramp, advising that the situation was too uncertain for the loss of two brigades before spring 2006.⁵⁰ The Red Cell's assessment matched precisely the draft recommendation in the August 2005 counterinsurgency survey, which had also recommended postponing any off-ramp decision until spring 2006, but these recommendations were forgotten once coalition leaders judged the October referendum a strategic success.

Iraqi Attempts to Participate in the Planning Process

For a document that emphasized Iraqi independence, Casey's October 30 directive reflected little actual input from Iraqis, a fact not lost on Iraqi leaders. While MNF-I and the U.S. Embassy were developing these new plans, Iraqi National Security Adviser Mowaffaq Rubaie wrote Casey and Khalilzad on November 6 to ask them to allow Iraqis into the strategic planning process. Rubaie noted:

I can see there is a tendency, especially on the U.S. side, to prepare far-reaching plans for all aspects of Iraq's future . . . with minimal involvement from Iraqi stakeholders. . . . I am fully aware that both of you are wedded to the idea of Iraqi ownership, but I am concerned that this is not always acted upon when the idea goes down the line.⁵¹

Rubaie then critiqued the existing campaign plan, which, in his view, amounted to little more than holding off the insurgency long enough to allow a coalition withdrawal. "People can see the writing on the wall that MNF-I's focus has essentially been to keep a lid on the insurgency, transfer security responsibilities to the ISF and lay the groundwork for the eventual withdrawal of Coalition forces. Obviously those objectives do not address defeating the insurgency."⁵² Instead of "hunting down and killing insurgents," Rubaie argued, the coalition and the ISF should focus on protecting the population from attacks and creating secure areas that would last even "after clearing operations have concluded." Rubaie acknowledged that such a strategy would require "many more troops on foot patrol," but was also "aware that calling for additional forces in Iraq is politically unacceptable to Washington."⁵³

In Rubaie's proposal, instead of American troops, the massive number of additional forces required to protect the population and create secure areas would come from Iraqi

irregular forces. "This approach must somehow find a way to leverage personnel from the tribes and local areas," Rubaie wrote, presaging the approach the U.S.-led coalition would eventually adopt in 2007. Rubaie added, "Native, indigenous forces like these could be attached to the ISF with specific tasks and timelines. These tribal and local forces may be trained as a form of 'public safety guards' authorized by the MOI [Ministry of the Interior] or MOD [Ministry of Defense]." ⁵⁴ Dealing with irregular forces was complicated, Rubaie conceded, but the benefits outweighed the problems of hidden agendas and eventual questions of demobilization, and in any case, the dire security situation called for taking risks. Casey forwarded Rubaie's proposal for comment to his Strategy, Plans, and Assessment directorate, where it had a negligible impact on the ongoing development of the new campaign plan.

The National Strategy for Victory in Iraq

At the same time that Americans and Iraqis in Baghdad were wrestling with how to adjust the campaign plan in Iraq, senior leaders in Washington were examining Casey's transition strategy and questioning how it fit into U.S. national objectives. At the White House, National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley asked Rumsfeld to have Casey explain the details of the campaign plan. What followed was a series of videoconferences in which Casey, joined by Abizaid, explained how the mission in Iraq had evolved and where MNF-I envisioned the campaign headed. At the conclusion of this interrogative process in the early fall, the National Security Council (NSC) gave Casey no significant course corrections to his strategy, but instead in November, catching MNF-I somewhat off guard, published a document optimistically titled "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq," the first publicly released, national-level strategy for the war in Iraq. The national strategy identified Iraq as "the central front in the global war on terror," and it noted that an American failure there would create a safe haven for terrorists, cause the United States to lose the trust of Middle East reformers, and leave Iraq to slide into tribal and sectarian chaos. ⁵⁵ The enemy opposing U.S. efforts was loosely defined as Sunni Arab rejectionists, former regime loyalists, and terrorists associated with al-Qaeda. Like Casey's campaign plan, the national strategy did not consider Shi'a militants a viable threat to coalition goals, and assumed that "such elements can be handled by Iraqi forces alone and/or assimilated into the political process in the short term." ⁵⁶

The national strategy laid out a conditions-based, integrated approach along political, security, and economic lines. The political track—Isolate-Engage-Build—involved isolation of enemy elements and engagement of potential partners willing to "turn away from violence" while building "stable, pluralistic, and effective national institutions." The security track—Clear-Hold-Build—focused on clearing "areas of enemy control," holding "areas freed from enemy control," and building "Iraqi Security Forces and the capacity of local institutions." The economic track—Restore-Reform-Build—consisted of the restoration of Iraq's infrastructure, reform of Iraq's economy to make it self-sustaining, and building "the capacity of Iraqi institutions to maintain infrastructure, rejoin the international economic community, and improve the general welfare of all Iraqis." ⁵⁷

From Casey's perspective, Hadley and the NSC had slightly tweaked the MNF-I campaign plan and made it into the national strategy document. ⁵⁸ Khalilzad agreed, later

commenting that, “if you look at the document and you look at what we were doing on the ground, you will find that it was more a reflection of what was [already] happening,” a process exactly backward from the common military expectation that policymakers would issue explicit wartime guidance that the military would, in turn, use to write military plans.⁵⁹ “Someone once told me that the decision-making process at the national level is ‘idiosyncratic’ at best,” Casey later wrote. “That is an important lesson for future leaders when providing military advice. Do not look for the military decision-making process at the national level.”⁶⁰

Despite their increased interaction with Hadley and the NSC, Casey and Abizaid were frustrated by their seeming inability to explain the character of the Iraq conflict to counterparts in Washington. “I would get asked, ‘why are guys going off post? They are just driving around and getting hit by Improvised Explosive Devices,’” Casey recalled later.⁶¹ The day-to-day nuances of counterinsurgency warfare, combined with complicated metrics for showing progress, were difficult for many senior political decision makers to comprehend, Casey concluded. Bush and his senior advisers had understood the high-intensity battles of late 2004 in Fallujah, Najaf, and Samarra much more easily than the 2005 counterinsurgency campaign that was largely devoid of such decisive action, Casey told military historians years later.⁶² In their near-daily phone conversations, he and Abizaid frequently commiserated on the issue, asking each other after videoconferences with NSC principals, “Do you think we got through [to them] today?”⁶³

Casey’s struggles in communicating with Washington had come to a head when the general, who had long desired to reduce the U.S. footprint as part of his 2004 campaign plan, told reporters in early August 2005 that the United States was on track to make “some fairly substantial reductions,” in the period after the October and December elections. The pronouncement was ahead of official U.S. policy and was corrected publicly a few days later by Bush, who noted that talk of troop reduction was “speculation” and that “pulling the troops out now would send a terrible signal to the enemy.”⁶⁴ While the incident was quickly overshadowed by larger issues related to the two Iraqi elections, it highlighted the difficulties an operational commander faced in trying to stay synchronized with U.S. national strategy.

With the publication of the national strategy, Casey and Khalilzad together produced a new joint U.S. Embassy and MNF-I mission statement, a significant change from the August 2004 mission statement that had been created by MNF-I and merely endorsed by the U.S. Embassy. Even so, the new objectives were only slightly modified from the original, calling for:

[a]n Iraq at peace with its neighbors and an ally in the War on Terror, with a representative government that respects the human rights of all Iraqis, security forces sufficient to maintain domestic order and to deny Iraq as a safe haven for terrorists, and effective national, regional, and provincial institutions capable of meeting the needs of the Iraqi people and creating conditions for rule of law and prosperity.⁶⁵

The only additions were that Iraq would be an ally in the War on Terrorism and its institutions would be capable of establishing the rule of law. These new goals would be overcome quickly by events, as at the end of 2005, Iraq would not have a truly representative government that respected the rights of all Iraqis.

PREAMBLE TO CIVIL WAR: SHI'A SECTARIANS INSIDE THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT

The Interior Ministry and the Jadriyah Bunker

Despite MNF-I's optimism that the fall 2005 elections would be uniformly positive events, the underlying tensions between the Shi'a and Sunni communities ultimately made the elections even more partisan than those in January. In retrospect, the elections served as an accelerant to sectarianism, as factions postured themselves for what they rightly expected would be a violent power struggle after the election outcome. For its part, al-Qaeda in Iraq continued its car-bomb campaign against Shi'a targets, and while the overall effectiveness of AQI attacks diminished after early summer 2005, they continued to target Shi'a neighborhoods and exhaust Shi'a patience. On September 14, Zarqawi's men struck Baghdad with 12 coordinated car bombs, killing 167 and wounding nearly 600. On September 16, they hit Shi'a worshippers at a shrine in Tuz Khormato, 209 kilometers north of Baghdad, killing a dozen and wounding 23.⁶⁶ In one horrific incident south of Baghdad on September 26, Sunni extremists dressed as Iraqi police entered a school and executed five Shi'a teachers and their driver in a classroom.⁶⁷ Near-simultaneous car bombs in Balad on September 29 resulted in 95 casualties.⁶⁸ Large-scale attacks against predominantly Shi'a areas a few weeks later on November 18-19 resulted in another 324 civilian casualties.

As AQI did its murderous work, various government ministries dominated by Shi'a militant groups who were part of the Ja'afari government began to withhold basic services in many Sunni areas, forcing Sunnis to cross into other, more dangerous neighborhoods. Along the routes to these neighborhoods stood several checkpoints, which had become dangerous places where Sunnis were subject to intimidation or abduction from militia-allied police or even from militias in government uniforms. Caught between two militant sides, many civilians of both sects found themselves facing a choice between seeking protection from sectarian militias or succumbing to sectarian cleansing, as Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM), Badr Corps, and al-Qaeda in Iraq each began to take control of various neighborhoods in Baghdad. In some areas, JAM attempted to emulate Lebanese Hizballah's model of gaining popular legitimacy by providing public services. The militia gave cash to civilians affected by the violence in Baghdad and provided lodging, usually in abandoned Sunni houses, to Shi'a refugees displaced by the fighting.⁶⁹

In October, Iraq's Sunni deputy Prime Minister and nine other Sunni ministers wrote Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'afari demanding action against Shi'a militants who carried out acts of violence against Sunnis with what appeared to be government sanction.⁷⁰ The six-page letter cataloged alleged abuses by the Ministry of the Interior, including systemic torture, underground detention facilities, executions, and abductions of Sunnis. The ministers charged that the killers often used Interior Ministry uniforms and vehicles and even claimed to be from the Interior Ministry's public order and special commando units. According to the letter, many of the victims were tortured, with eyes poked out, noses cut off, and hands drilled. Those who were killed were nearly always found bound

or handcuffed. “Our people are being executed under the official or semi-official cover of the law,” the Sunni ministers wrote, with the result that:

[t]hese acts have transferred Iraqis from living under the fear of terrorism to living under governmental terror. It is unsafe for an Iraqi to be detained. Most [Iraqis] have come to think it better to resist and die in his home rather than having his head pierced or body burned or parts cut off and his body thrown on the road to be eaten by the hungry animals.⁷¹

The Ja’afari government made little effort to investigate the accusations. The extent to which Sunni complaints were ignored in the Interior Ministry was made clear on November 13, 2005, when U.S. Soldiers inspected a central Baghdad facility known as the Jadriyah bunker, run by the ministry’s Special Interrogations Unit. After hearing a parent’s complaint that his son had been detained illegally at the facility, Brigadier General Karl Horst, assistant commander of the 3d Infantry Division in Baghdad, led a team of Soldiers to search the bunker. Acting on his intuition, Horst demanded access to an area behind a locked door that Iraqi guides purposely avoided. There he discovered 169 malnourished



Source: U.S. Army photo by Matthew Webster, 100th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment (Released).

**Brigadier General Karl Horst,
Assistant Commander,
3d Infantry Division.⁷⁴**

prisoners, 166 of them Sunnis, all showing signs of torture.⁷² The bunker and the organization that ran it had been kept off the Interior Ministry’s books and not officially sanctioned, likely because they were being run by senior Badr Corps officer Bashir Nasser al-Wandi, also known as Engineer Ahmed, whom Bayan Jabr had appointed as deputy director of the Interior Ministry’s intelligence directorate. When Khalilzad questioned Interior Minister Jabr about Engineer Ahmed’s facility, Jabr described the detainees as terrorists and downplayed the abuse by saying that the prisoners “weren’t beheaded; they weren’t killed; there was no torture.”⁷³

An MNF-I investigation of the incident uncovered additional evidence of sectarian activities by the Ja’afari government. Investigators found that Engineer Ahmed led an organization known as the Special Investigations Directorate (SID) that since its formation in July 2005 had “illegally detained, abused, tortured, and murdered Iraqi citizens.” Many of the SID’s victims were allegedly “former regime personnel, former Ba’th Party members, or former military officers who had participated in the Iran-Iraq War.”⁷⁵ The SID’s Jadriyah bunker was

just a part of a larger sectarian machinery, a holding area where SID members exacted confessions through torture before the victims were executed, ransomed, or tried in the Iraqi courts. The SID men had plenty of political top cover. Jabr, the MNF-I investigation found, “had knowledge of illicit activities taking place in the bunker,” and “failed to act on multiple reports of abuse and torture in the Bunker.”⁷⁶ In addition, when complaints of the bunker reached Iraq’s nascent judicial system, “investigative judges who objected

to the illegal procedures were reassigned," some of them by order of Chief Justice Medhat al-Mahmood. Others were threatened by Engineer Ahmed. One investigative judge who opened an inquiry became the victim of an unsolved murder.⁷⁷ MNF-I concluded that the investigation had been "constrained by the non-permissive environment, the lack of Iraqi Government cooperation, reluctance of witnesses to come forward, and the perception of official complicity or complacency."⁷⁸

Public news of the facility heightened the tension between Iraq's Sunni and Shi'a communities before the December elections. The bunker was the first indisputable evidence that sectarian violence had been institutionalized, originating within the government and its police forces, and was not just the work of rogue Shi'a militias. It also confirmed Sunni leaders' worst fears, fueling the Sunni rejectionists' argument that the only way to survive was to continue resistance against the Shi'a government and the coalition. The discovery also compounded Sunni frustrations with the coalition, as Casey previously received no fewer than 40 letters from senior political and religious leaders alleging government abuse of detainees, but was unable to produce a tangible change in Jabr's behavior.⁷⁹ The coalition's reluctance to hold Jabr and Prime Minister Ja'afari accountable played into Sunni rejectionist claims that the United States was not to be trusted because its actions only served to protect the Shi'a.

As notorious as the Jadriyah bunker became, it represented a mere fraction of the sectarian infiltration of the Interior Ministry and other security offices in 2005. MNF-I estimated that the various Iraqi security ministries ran at least 8 to 10 more unauthorized facilities that held between 2,000 and 10,000 prisoners.⁸⁰ Further accentuating the Interior Ministry's problems, in October MNSTC-I had discovered that the ministry's public affairs had issued a public service announcement video depicting Iraqi police dancing over dead bodies and chanting praise for Moqtada Sadr. MNSTC-I offered to retrain the ministry's public affairs personnel, but Jabr had promised to fire those responsible instead.⁸¹

Sectarian moves were not limited to the Interior Ministry. In the first week of December, Prime Minister Ja'afari issued orders that would have eliminated the Iraqi Joint Headquarters and replaced 10 Sunni senior leaders with Shi'a officers.⁸² Among the purged would be three division commanders and the respected secular Shi'a officer Lieutenant General Nasier Abadi, the deputy commander of the Iraqi Joint Forces. Replacing Abadi would be Lieutenant General Mohan al-Furayji, an officer whom Lieutenant General Martin Dempsey described as "a bad piece of work."⁸³ Sensing the danger in Ja'afari's changes, Casey's British deputy MNF-I commander, Lieutenant General John Nicholas Houghton, warned that "the overpowering importance of the proposed changes is the political impact they would have in marginalizing the Sunnis at a critical time and in placing the Ministry of Defense at the mercy of an extremist Shi'a agenda. The political motivation behind the proposed moves is self-evident."⁸⁴ Ja'afari had issued his decrees without notifying Sadoun Dulaimi, the Sunni Minister of Defense, who, when learning of the proposed actions, begged the coalition to fight the changes, which Casey quickly did. MNF-I's timely intervention stopped the purge, but the fact that Ja'afari had attempted the move added to Sunni leaders' perceptions of organized wrongdoing by the Shi'a parties in the government.

As coalition leaders in Baghdad responded to the Jadriyah bunker incident and Ja'afari's power play, coalition units throughout central Iraq were beginning to report similar instances of quasi-official sectarian killing. The clearest perspective on the matter came from the 3d Infantry Division, whose commander, Major General William Webster, later recalled that during the winter of 2005:

I kept telling General Casey and Lieutenant General Vines . . . that in spite of the fact that the election had been held, sectarian violence, to include inside the Iraqi Security Forces, was becoming the foremost problem that we had to deal with. . . . We found people murdered, beheaded, ripped apart, dumped into rivers and we found that the majority of attacks were taking place at the mixed margins of the neighborhoods.⁸⁵

Reports from the Baghdad morgue in December showed that 780 murdered bodies, 400 of which had torture or execution wounds, seemed to confirm Webster's warnings.⁸⁶ Webster believed most of the trouble came from the Interior Ministry's police forces, which according to his units' reports were not just complicit with sectarian violence, but directly involved in it. "The Ministry of the Interior, absolutely, from top to bottom, could not be trusted, with very minor exception[s]," Webster reiterated later.⁸⁷ "You could not trust them, they lied every day, they tortured people, and they had hidden detention facilities and prisons."⁸⁸ The worst, Webster judged, were the Special Police, which did not have unit boundaries, allowing them to operate across Baghdad with impunity and providing them a convenient excuse to operate in Sunni areas far from their bases. In an attempt to rein in some of their illicit activity, Webster forced Special Police units in Baghdad to accept unit boundaries and, to signal his seriousness, "promised them we would kill them from their leader on down if they came across their boundary and conducted operations in an adjacent unit [area]."⁸⁹

Webster's threat slowed the Special Police's activities for a time, but the problem of sectarianism in the Ministry of the Interior remained widespread. In Baqubah in MND-NC, Colonel Steven Salazar and his 3d Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, shared Webster's conclusion about the Special Police. When Salazar learned in November 2005 that seven battalions of Special Police would descend on the predominantly Sunni Baqubah for an MOI-initiated operation, he formally objected in an e-mail that the operation "would be a disaster of Biblical proportions . . . and the worst possible thing that could happen to Baqubah."⁹⁰ Though MND-NC Commander Major General Thomas Turner and MNC-I Commander Lieutenant General John R. Vines concurred with Salazar's request to stop the operation, MNF-I was unwilling to shut down a rare example of an Iraqi-planned and Iraqi-led mission. As the Special Police arrived, Salazar ordered his units to scrutinize their every move to prevent gross abuses, but the operation was still little more than a thinly veiled roundup of nearly 400 Sunni military-aged males. Only Salazar's personal intervention prevented Interior Ministry units from detaining the Sunni mayor of Baqubah without any evidence. Nevertheless, MNSTC-I's November assessment to MNF-I touted the mission as "the Special Police force's first independent division-level operation. The Special Police planned and executed this operation with minimal support from Coalition Forces. This operation will serve as a model for future Special Police operations."⁹¹

Warnings similar to Webster's and Salazar's had already gone directly to the Pentagon. On September 19, 2005, James Steele, a retired Special Forces officer, who had served as a civilian adviser to the Special Police Commandos in 2004 and was a trusted confidant of Rumsfeld, wrote the secretary about his observations of the Interior Ministry during an official visit to Iraq. "There is a systematic effort by SCIRI and its Badr militia to take control of the high-end units within MOI," Steele reported, adding that:

[t]his effort ranges from assigning Badr officers to command units to protecting thugs like the commander of the Wolf Brigade who had been involved in death squad activities, extortion of detainees and a general pattern of corruption. Nearly all of the new recruits within the commandos are Shi'a, many of them are Badr members. . . . [This effort] also contributes to the possibility of a Lebanon-type scenario where a civil war ensues with the Sunnis being driven into the arms of the insurgents as their militia. This would put us in an untenable position.⁹²

Rumsfeld, in turn, shared Steele's assessment with Bush and Vice President Richard Cheney in a short memorandum a few days later.

Malign Iranian Influence

The sectarian activity that U.S. officials were seeing at the tactical level went hand in hand with an increase in destabilizing activity inside Iraq by the Iranian regime and its proxies. By fall 2005, Colonel Kevin McDonnell, the commander of the 5th Special Forces Group and the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Arabian Peninsula (CJSOTF-AP), concluded that Iran was conducting a full-scale unconventional warfare campaign in Iraq to dominate the emerging Iraqi Government while keeping the U.S.-led coalition off balance by supplying deadly explosively formed penetrators (EFP) to Shi'a militias. First introduced by Lebanese Hizballah against the Israelis, EFPs were complex shaped-charge explosives that required careful milling of a concave copper plate that transformed into a molten slug when detonated. The copper slug offered significant advantages over a regular improvised explosive device (IED) because it could penetrate the armor of almost all coalition vehicles, including the M1 tank, and because it could fly a reasonable distance and hit a target at a standoff range. MNF-I statistics from the time showed that the weapon was becoming more prevalent: EFP attacks nearly tripled in just 4 months in mid-2005, from about 20 in June to 58 in October.⁹³ By comparison, EFPs averaged only five per month through April 2005.⁹⁴



Source: U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sergeant Dennis J. Henry, Jr. (Released).

A U.S. Army Soldier Empties a Massive Weapons Cache of EFPs.⁹⁵

Drawing on their extensive human intelligence network, McDonnell's troops discovered that, in addition to providing EFPs to Shi'a militias, Iranian intelligence services and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran (IRGC) were creating front companies in Iraq to facilitate their covert activities, as well as funneling extensive financial support to the Badr Corps.⁹⁶ In an effort to convince MNF-I of the scope of Iranian subversive activity, the CJSOTF-AP held a briefing in October for Casey, Vines, Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) commander Brigadier General Francis Kearney, and Major General Richard P. Zahner, Casey's G-2. Casey and Zahner were skeptical and wanted concrete forensic evidence that corroborated the CJSOTF-AP's analysis before taking action. Though McDonnell's human sources were adamant about Iranian intervention, MNF-I's technical sources were not picking up the same indicators, making MNF-I leaders cautious about the implications. To some at the meeting, it seemed as if technical capabilities had a halo effect, and Zahner and Casey put less stock in the CJSOTF-AP's human intelligence network, even though the allies in southeast Iraq had limited technical capabilities.⁹⁷ For his part, it is likely Casey's caution stemmed from the fact that U.S. national policy toward Iranian meddling in Iraq had not yet been set, and Casey understood that he was to avoid a regional expansion of the conflict. However, CJSOTF-AP reports concerned Casey enough that in late October 2005, he ordered his staff to draw up contingency plans for a possible conflict with the IRGC and other Iranian operatives in Iraq, and tasked his staff judge advocate to determine whether the IRGC-Qods Force (IRGC-QF) could legally be declared a hostile force. Such a declaration would make Qods Force operatives enemy combatants, allowing coalition forces to kill them on sight no matter if they demonstrated hostile intent first. The legal review found that not only had the Qods Force provided guidance, training, logistics, and financial support to Shi'a militants, it had also "support[ed] two separate Iraqi EFP networks by sponsoring EFP IED training in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, and facilitating movement of EFP network personnel and equipment between Iran and Iraq. . . . Such activities are clearly hostile and constitute a direct threat to the security and stability of Iraq."⁹⁸ Despite the clarity of Iranian culpability in the deaths of Americans, the memorandum cautioned against the action, noting: "a sweeping hostile force declaration against the IRGC-QF could result in an increase in Iranian support to Iraqi insurgents and lead to open confrontation with Iran."⁹⁹ The memorandum also noted that most Qods Force members operated mainly in Multi-National Division-Southeast (MND-SE), and the British were not required to honor an American hostile force declaration.

Getting British support for such a project undoubtedly would have been difficult. McDonnell's information about Iranian activity, including the infiltration of EFPs across the southeastern Iraqi border, was sharply at odds with reporting from Multi-National Division-South East (MND-SE), which reflected little malign Iranian activity. To resolve this incoherence, McDonnell hoped to position a Special Forces company and a partnered Iraqi commando battalion in Basrah, where they could capture hard evidence or potentially push some of the EFP smuggling farther north into areas with a greater concentration of American forces. Enlisting the aid of Major General Nicholas R. Parker, the British deputy commander of MNC-I, McDonnell traveled to Basrah in December to convince MND-SE leaders to allow American special operations forces into the province.¹⁰⁰ British commanders, however, quietly declined the offer out of concern that CJSOTF operations

could spark violence with Iran's local proxies, potentially disrupting MND-SE's fragile equilibrium and making a British withdrawal more difficult.¹⁰¹

Unable to get British consent, McDonnell focused his troops in MND-CS on the mission, and they soon delivered the evidence Casey and Zahner had required. Six months after being rebuffed by MND-SE, CJSOTF-AP Operational Detachment Alphas (ODAs) intercepted crates of the copper plates that went into making EFPs, and all were turned on the same lathe in Iran. The FBI traced several Nokia phones captured in the same shipment back to their origin in Japan, where they found the purchase order that had shipped them to Iran.¹⁰²

Problems in Basrah

McDonnell's difficulties in dealing with MND-SE leaders illustrated that after the havoc of the brutal Sadrist uprisings of April and summer of 2004, the British effort in MND-SE had become disconnected from the coalition command in Baghdad, eventually reaching a point where the British were pursuing different objectives than the MNF-I campaign plan. The problem originated in London. The British public and even some within the British Government questioned the legality of continuing the conflict beyond the invasion and expressed a great aversion to British casualties. Increasingly, British officials began to view the war as a political risk that needed to be minimized by limiting the British military's exposure.¹⁰³ At the Ministry of Defense, the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ), and MND-SE headquarters, these pressures translated into policies of casualty avoidance and a view of the conflict as an internal Iraqi dispute in which British military forces and funds were of little relevance. Additional pressures on the British mission in Iraq came because of the U.K. Ministry of Defence's 2004 restructuring plans, which called for steep cuts in the British Army. Four infantry battalions were eliminated — 10 percent of the British infantry force — as well as seven tank squadrons and six artillery batteries.¹⁰⁴ Managing these sizable reductions while simultaneously deploying troops to Iraq and Afghanistan created considerable pressure to decrease the British presence in Iraq. For the British Government, Operation TELIC — the name of Britain's national operation in Iraq — by 2005 had become an economy of force effort in which the level of military resources was dictated by domestic policy rather than by the situation in theater.¹⁰⁵

Organizational factors worsened the divergence in the allies' objectives. Although the deputy MNF-I commander in Baghdad was a British three-star general, PJHQ had designated the two-star MND-SE commander in Basrah as the United Kingdom's national contingent commander to give the British Government greater awareness of the area where nearly all British troops were based, rather than having information filtered through a higher headquarters. As a result, British commanders in Basrah came to see PJHQ rather than MNC-I as their next higher headquarters, and British leaders in London often bypassed the MNF-I headquarters.¹⁰⁶ One MND-SE commander later commented, British defense leaders "jumped through the theater/operational level and concentrated directly on what was going on in the Multi-National Division in Basrah: Baghdad was a distraction."¹⁰⁷ As the British Government and public became more casualty-averse, the result of this reporting chain was a heavy emphasis on force protection from London.¹⁰⁸

The British rotational policy did not help the divergence in national objectives. In a period of 18 months in 2004 and 2005, five British brigade commanders rotated through Basrah.¹⁰⁹ The high turnover among the senior British commanders in MND-SE made it difficult for MNF-I and MNC-I leaders to detect the changes occurring in British policy because they were camouflaged by the frequent change of personalities in British leadership. In addition, with each new commander came new priorities that disrupted continuity in planning and operations. The short command tours also hindered MND-SE leaders from establishing strong working relationships with their coalition counterparts, as well as with Iraqi military and civilian leaders.¹¹⁰ One British Ministry of Defence study later concluded that “the short-term horizon and rapid turnover of UK in-theatre commanders made it more likely that the significance of key events would be missed.”¹¹¹

As UK leaders in London began to signal to MND-SE in 2005 the importance of gradually disengaging from security operations in southern Iraq, the British efforts to improve governance and security at MND-SE collided with the intra-Shi’a political conflict emerging in the far south. With the formation of new provincial governments after the January 2005 elections, Shi’a militias associated with local governments, especially the Sadrists, stepped up attacks against British troops and against each other. When the Staffordshire Regiment began to round up suspected JAM militia members led by Ahmed al-Gharrawi in Amarah in mid-May 2005, the Sadrist provincial governor, Adel Muhoder al-Maliki, threatened to cut all ties between the British and Maysan’s provincial council if the operation was not halted. A few days later on May 29, a British patrol near Amarah was hit by an EFP, killing one soldier.¹¹² EFPs had been used in the south as early as August 2004, but when the remnants of this one were sent to Baghdad, U.S. analysts determined it was of the same design used by Lebanese Hizballah and likely of Iranian origin.¹¹³ A short time later, another EFP in Amarah killed three soldiers in a Land Rover patrol, after which British commanders decided that all British patrols would be conducted in Warrior infantry fighting vehicles.¹¹⁴

Intra-Shi’a violence, meanwhile, worsened in the summer of 2005 as the various parties jostled for position ahead of the December 2005 elections. On August 24, tensions exploded when the Sadrists tried to reopen an office in Najaf a year after it had been closed during the August 2004 uprising. They were prevented from finishing their task by members of the Badr Corps, leading to fighting between the two groups that lasted for 2 days. Once again showing their ability to mobilize their forces across the country on short notice, the Sadrists responded with attacks against the Badr Corps in Basrah, Hillah, Diwaniya, Amarah, and Baghdad. When the fighting finally stopped, 100 had been killed, and the Sadrist office in Najaf had been burned to the ground.¹¹⁵

The Jamiat Police Station Crisis

The late August clashes showed that the Sadrists had regained their footing a year after their defeat in Najaf, and their resurgence quickly became a threat to the British strategy of transitioning security responsibility to local Iraqi forces. By spring 2005, Basrah’s police force was increasingly falling under the control of the JAM militia. In April, British forces discovered evidence of torture at Basrah’s Jamiat police station while investigating the death of a detainee that had been turned over to the Iraqi police’s infamous

Serious Crimes Unit commanded by a Sadr loyalist named Captain Jaffar.¹¹⁶ Basrah police chief General Hassan al-Sade admitted publicly to the press in May that he could not control three-quarters of his force due to its infiltration by militias, particularly the JAM and Badr Corps. Officers loyal to the militias, Sade said, used their positions as cover to carry out executions against rivals and mostly Sunni former regime loyalists.¹¹⁷ As was happening in Baghdad, local Basrah civilians began observing police checkpoints jointly manned by Iraqi police and JAM militiamen. At the same time, British officials in Basrah began receiving reports of Jaffar's close ties to Basrah JAM leader Ahmed al-Fartusi and his militia.¹¹⁸

Despite this growing body of evidence, British commanders were cautious about confronting the militias' expanding influence within the Iraqi police and throughout the city. Clashing with the militias could have several consequences: it could undermine key relationships with members of Basrah's security and governance teams, increase British casualties, and set back British efforts to draw down troops.¹¹⁹ Seeking to resolve the problem by political means, the senior British police adviser in Baghdad presented Interior Minister Bayan Jabr with a list of police officers in Basrah that MND-SE recommended for dismissal, but Jabr ignored the recommendation.¹²⁰ Rebuffed, MND-SE developed a list of 200 individuals, 180 of them police officers, for arrest in an attempt to bring the militia to heel. Included on the list was Fartusi, though British leaders found they could not arrest him because of his presence on Prime Minister Ja'afari's "no-strike" list.¹²¹ But when three British soldiers were killed within the same week by EFPs linked to Fartusi, Brigadier John Lorimer, commander of the 12th Mechanized Brigade, decided to arrest the JAM leader with or without Iraqi Government approval. On September 17, a Special Air Service (SAS) detachment supported by the Coldstream Guards and 1st Battalion, the Royal Anglican Regiment, seized Fartusi at his Basrah home in a nighttime raid.¹²²

Two days later, in likely retribution for the capture of Fartusi, plainclothes Iraqi police ambushed two SAS operators as they were trailing Jaffar, who had become a suspect in the April detainee murder.¹²³ In the ensuing gunfight, the SAS men killed one of their police attackers and wounded another, but were eventually captured by another Iraqi police element while trying to return to their unit. The SAS operators, who had been dressed as Iraqi civilians, identified themselves as British personnel but were taken to the Jamiat station and badly beaten.¹²⁴ MND-SE responded by dispatching reinforcements from the Coldstream Guards and the Royal Regiment of Wales to seal off the city and surround the Jamiat station while flying a negotiating team in to secure the release of the SAS men. Lorimer met with Basrah's governor at the same time British Ambassador William Patey met with Jabr. Both demanded the British soldiers' immediate release, but neither the governor nor the minister could, or would, secure the men's freedom.¹²⁵

Back inside the station, Iraqi police officers, including Serious Crimes Unit head Jaffar, accused the SAS soldiers of being Israeli spies. The British negotiating team, meanwhile, found itself trapped inside the station. Outside, the Coldstream Guards fended off an unruly crowd and other police, while taking fire from militiamen that destroyed two Warrior infantry fighting vehicles and damaged seven others.¹²⁶ In the confusion, Iraqi police moved the two SAS detainees to a JAM stronghold on the western outskirts of the city, but British surveillance tracked the movement, laying the groundwork for a rescue mission.¹²⁷ That evening, an SAS squadron, flown from Baghdad, with support from 2d

Battalion, The Royal Welsh, smashed into the Jamiat station and rescued the negotiating team before moving on to the JAM stronghold and rescuing the two SAS soldiers.¹²⁸ The incident was highly embarrassing for the British, who had long contended that Basrah was stable, that ISF training was progressing on target, and that ordinary crime rather than nefarious militia activities was responsible for most security problems. As recently as July, the MND-SE commander reported to Casey that Basrah had “insurgents but no insurgency,” and that the province would be able to revert to provincial Iraqi control by early October.¹²⁹ After the Jamiat incident, however, Chief of the General Staff General Sir Michael D. Jackson visited Basrah and wrote to General Richard Dannatt, the commander of Land Command, “Though there was no sense of defeatism in theatre, the possibility of strategic failure was mentioned in earnest on this visit more than on any before.”¹³⁰ The raid on the Jamiat station had exposed the truth that militia influence in MND-SE was destabilizing security and undermining coalition efforts to strengthen Iraqi governance. The week after the fiasco, coalition leaders canceled Basrah Province’s scheduled September 22 return to provincial Iraqi control, a decision that meant the de facto abandonment of the British plan to withdraw nearly 5,500 soldiers by April 2006.¹³¹

The Jamiat operation also showed that the British forces in Basrah had no credible Iraqi force with which they could partner. While training of Iraqi forces had been ongoing since the fall of Saddam, there had been no embedded advisers until early in 2005, when Major General Jonathan Riley, the sixth MND-SE commander, embedded members of an entire UK battle group with Iraqi Army units, mirroring the U.S. military transition team program. Unfortunately, the plan came with the Whitehall-imposed caveat that British troops could only embed at the brigade level or above, since officials in London judged that embedding at lower levels would expose British troops to more risk than the United Kingdom was willing to accept. Such restrictions had proved to be onerous and impeded progress at the battalion and company levels, organizations that critically needed mentoring. The progress of the Iraqi police in Basrah had been even worse since British police advisers did not embed with their counterparts at all. These choices had significant long-term consequences, as they made it difficult for British commanders to judge the true capabilities of Iraqi units and so limited their ability to shape Iraqi forces positively that British leaders expected to shoulder the responsibility for security as British forces withdrew.¹³²

Nonetheless, the incident did not cause the British Government to abandon its overall strategy. Back in London, an interdepartmental review 2 weeks after the Jamiat operation recognized that stability was being threatened by the intense rivalries among political parties and their militias. However, it argued that negative media portrayals overstated the depth of the problem, that militia influence within the Iraqi police was minor, and that the governor and provincial council’s refusal to work with the British was “awkward” but “not significant.” Rather than taking a more direct approach to confront the militias with clearing operations, reforming the police, embedding with the ISF, and exerting more influence in MND-SE to establish security, the review recommended that UK forces take action only against militias who directly threatened them. The review also recommended that Iraqi leaders in Baghdad should exert more control in the south and should replace Basrah’s police chief.¹³³ The British Government’s reluctance to take a

more direct approach and increase its own involvement would set the stage for Basrah's eventual tailspin.

AQI AND THE AMMAN, JORDAN, BOMBINGS

Elsewhere, the threat from Zarqawi's al-Qaeda in Iraq was broadening. In a bid to expand the war in Iraq into a regional battle, AQI initiated attacks outside of Iraq and publicly declared its true sectarian intentions for the first time, two moves that ran counter to the advice of al-Qaeda's senior leaders. On September 14, Zarqawi issued a statement, announcing that "al Qaeda . . . is declaring all-out war on the Rafidha [a derogatory term for Shi'a] wherever they are in Iraq." He exhorted Sunnis to "wake up from your slumber . . . [because] the war to exterminate Sunnis will never end."¹³⁴ It was a significant message from the AQI leader who previously had been publicly coy about his intentions toward the Shi'a, often claiming the attacks he launched were aimed to force a coalition withdrawal instead of sectarian mayhem.

On November 9, al-Qaeda in Iraq took another step toward expanding the war when it attacked three hotels in Amman with four Iraqi suicide bombers, leaving 67 dead and more than 150 injured.¹³⁵ Taking responsibility for the attacks, Zarqawi preposterously claimed that the attack had targeted establishments harboring Western and Israeli spies, calling the hotels "playgrounds for Jewish terrorists." In reality, however, only one American was killed, and almost all of the casualties were Jordanian, the largest concentration of them coming at a wedding attended by a number of Jordanian notables in the Radisson Hotel.¹³⁶ The death toll could have been even worse had one of the attackers, a rare female suicide bomber, not failed to detonate her explosive vest successfully. The woman, an Iraqi from Anbar named Sajida Rishawi, was captured after her suicide-bomber husband successfully detonated his own belt. Under questioning, Rishawi revealed that one of her fellow bombers had once been detained by U.S. forces but had been released when U.S. officials no longer deemed him a threat. She also confessed that she had joined the mission because three of her brothers were killed while fighting for AQI against U.S. troops in Anbar.¹³⁷

Zarqawi's actual goal was likely to destabilize the monarchy in his native Jordan and, in fact, the bombing was not the first attack Zarqawi launched inside the kingdom in 2005. In August, AQI had carried out an unsuccessful rocket attack against two U.S. Navy amphibious warfare ships, the USS *Kearsarge* and the USS *Ashland*, in the port of Aqaba.¹³⁸ Instead of destabilizing the regime, the Aqaba and Amman attacks produced a backlash against AQI, with thousands of Jordanians taking to the streets to support King Abdullah and denounce Zarqawi.¹³⁹ Representatives of Zarqawi's Khalayleh tribe, including his own brother and cousin, publicly disowned him by taking out half-page advertisements in all three of Jordan's major newspapers, declaring, "We sever links with him until doomsday."¹⁴⁰ Days after the attack, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas visited the bombing site and declared that the perpetrators "do not belong to any human race, Arab, or Islam. May God curse them from this day until Judgment Day."¹⁴¹ Subsequent reactions in the Arab media in Syria, London, Lebanon, and Kuwait, as well as Sunni communities in Jordan, Iraq, and throughout the Middle East, would long haunt Zarqawi and his organization.¹⁴²

The Atiyah Letter

In the aftermath of the Amman attack and its repercussions throughout the Arab world, al-Qaeda's senior leaders again tried to rein in their wayward Iraqi franchise. Atiyah Abd ar-Rahman, a top lieutenant of Osama Bin Laden, wrote Zarqawi a highly critical letter, urging him to cease his more violent attacks and follow orders from al-Qaeda's leadership on strategy.¹⁴³ In the letter, likely sent in December 2005 just after the Amman attacks, Atiyah compared Zarqawi's extreme tactics in Iraq to the massacres conducted by the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria that had destroyed popular support, implying that al-Qaeda in Iraq was on course to bring about its own downfall as well. Atiyah warned:

We are against all acts that alienate from killing to any sort of other treatment. Even insofar as the corrupt ones and traitors from among the Sunnis, we shouldn't kill them unless the people would understand and think that it was a good thing due to the obviousness of their corruption, their treason, and their evil. . . . If we come and kill some people whom we know to be corrupt and treasonous, but who are respected and beloved by the people, then this leads to great trouble and it is an act against all of the fundamentals of politics and leadership.¹⁴⁴

Atiyah singled out Zarqawi's attacks against religious scholars and tribal leaders, warning him that such attacks were corrosive to their efforts and that Zarqawi's movement was too weak to fight fellow Sunnis, the Shi'a, and coalition forces at the same time. Channeling Mao Zedong, Atiyah warned Zarqawi that the popular support that their movement enjoyed would be fleeting if Zarqawi did not change his tactics:

The Muslim nation is with us, loving us, harboring us, supporting us, sympathizing with us, and concurring with us. Also among these are our mettle and the mettle of our soldiers, which are the waters that our fish inhabit . . . if we waste this great foundation, then we would be remiss, profligate, and liable to fail.¹⁴⁵

Atiyah also criticized Zarqawi's unilateral decisions to expand the war, urging him to "abstain from making any decision on a comprehensive issue (one with broad reach), and on substantial matters until you have turned to your leadership; Shaykh Usamah and the Doctor [Zawahiri] and their brothers."¹⁴⁶ Atiyah stressed that "announcing a war against the Shi'ite turncoats and killing them . . . expanding the arena of war to the neighboring countries, and undertaking large scale operations whose impact is great" should not have been conducted without the approval of al-Qaeda's senior leadership.¹⁴⁷

Atiyah was not the only Salafist who was alarmed by Zarqawi's excesses. Zarqawi's own Jordanian mentor, Sheikh Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi, publicly broke with his former protégé in July, denouncing Zarqawi's killing of innocent Iraqis. Other prominent Sunni clerics followed suit, and Egypt's Sheikh Mohammed Sayyid Tantawi and Saudi Arabia's Mohsen Al Awaji joined the chorus of voices denouncing Zarqawi's tactics.¹⁴⁸

NATIONAL GUARD CHALLENGES

As the threats from Zarqawi, the Shi'a militants, and the Iranian regime began to mount in the crucial election season of 2005, inside MNF-I a few signs of trouble emerged among some of the National Guard units that had arrived as part of the third major

rotation of forces. The 2004 decision to operationalize the National Guard had resulted in an abnormally high number of National Guard units in Iraq during most of 2005. Most of these units performed well at the company level and below, such as the troops of the Kentucky-based 617th Military Police Company. When ambushed near Salman Pak on March 20, 2005, the 617th Military Police Company responded so ferociously that it routed its attackers, killing 27 insurgents and wounding or capturing 7 others in intense fighting that required the guardsmen to clear two enemy trenches in close combat. One Soldier, Staff Sergeant Timothy Nein, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and two others were awarded the Silver Star. One of the Silver Stars was awarded to Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester, who became the first woman to earn the award since World War II and the first woman to earn the medal for close combat.¹⁴⁹

Some other National Guard units at higher echelons, however, did not perform as well under the intensifying pressure of the summer and fall of 2005. While many of the Guard units around Baghdad performed admirably—as well or better than their active counterparts—several Guard units had problems operating in the difficult Iraq environment. The first signs of trouble appeared in the 1st Battalion, 184th Infantry Regiment from the California National Guard, which had been assigned to the 4th BCT, 3d Infantry Division in Baghdad. The battalion had been given responsibility for the Karada District, just south of the Green Zone, in February 2005. By summer, accusations surfaced that the battalion's leaders had condoned illegal activities with prisoners, and U.S. officers found a video of unit noncommissioned officers abusing seven prisoners by kicking them in their genitals and shocking them with a taser.¹⁵⁰ The initial investigation into detainee abuse uncovered systemic problems with the battalion, leading to at least 10 other investigations that revealed a negative command climate.¹⁵¹ The battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Frey, was an eccentric officer who had first fought in Vietnam before fighting as a mercenary in Rhodesia; in Iraq, he carried a tomahawk that he “cleared” at clearing barrels and used to “knight” Soldiers during promotion ceremonies.¹⁵² Frey tolerated similar eccentric behavior in his subordinates such as allowing Soldiers to carry Samurai swords on patrol. As the investigations expanded, investigators discovered that Frey had almost been relieved of command during the battalion's predeployment training, and one of the generals responsible for training the unit had predicted Frey would “get Soldiers killed.”¹⁵³ Frey had also been accused of mistreating his own troops during mobilization training, placing some of them in a survival school-style isolation to toughen them and causing a near-mutiny that came to the attention of *The Los Angeles Times*.¹⁵⁴ The pattern of abuses and poor leadership had continued in Iraq. Battalion leaders had interpreted the rules of engagement aggressively, leading one investigator to describe Frey and his men as “trying to fight World War III. . . . It was them against the world.”¹⁵⁵ The investigations also revealed that the unit was falsifying patrol reports, as in one case in which a lieutenant sat in his HMMWV inside a forward operating base and called in reports over the radio so his platoon could sleep.¹⁵⁶ In another case, a company first sergeant was found to be extorting money from his Soldiers. The investigations found enough wrong within the battalion that Webster, the 3d Infantry Division commander, chose to relieve Frey and several company commanders, replacing them with new commanders drawn from the 3d Infantry Division staff. Webster was forced to use his own personnel because the U.S. Army's Personnel Command and National Guard Bureau were unable

to provide replacement commanders from the United States on short notice.¹⁵⁷ In a tragic turn of events, Frey's replacement and a replacement company commander died in a double-IED attack less than 2 months later.

Meanwhile, MNC-I leaders began to suspect by fall 2005 that just south of Baghdad, Georgia Guardsmen were having problems as well. On June 22, the 48th BCT had taken control of the infamous Triangle of Death, an area south of Baghdad around the towns of Yusufiyah, Mahmudiyah, and Lutufiyah. The 48th BCT was filling the gap created by the reassignment of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment from the area to Ninawa. The 48th BCT had been dealt a difficult hand, taking over violent districts that no coalition unit had held for longer than 3 months, and some unit leaders believed there were areas that had never seen coalition forces.¹⁵⁸

The 3d Infantry Division, which managed the inspector general and legal complaints for the brigade, began to notice patterns similar to those of the 1st Battalion, 184th Infantry Regiment. Soon after arriving in Iraq, the 48th BCT was racked by so many disciplinary issues that division leaders judged the brigade's problems were diverting its attention from fighting the war.¹⁵⁹ One investigation led senior 3d Infantry Division leaders to conclude that the brigade command sergeant major was sexually harassing the women in his unit.¹⁶⁰ Multi-National Division-Baghdad (MND-B) and MNC-I leaders also assessed the brigade was struggling tactically, and that confronting the well-developed insurgent sanctuary south of Baghdad exceeded the brigade's capabilities.¹⁶¹ By the end of October, the 3d Infantry Division and MNC-I leadership lost confidence in the 48th BCT's leaders and relieved the unit of its duties in its battle space, redirecting it to the mission of escorting logistics convoys as the theater security force. In its place, the 2d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, took control of the Triangle of Death. As the 2d BCT assumed the battle space in October, the number of U.S. casualties and combat engagements spiked. On the 2d BCT's first day, an IED killed five of its Soldiers, following a considerable period in which the 48th BCT had reported no attacks of any significance.¹⁶² Over its first 47 days in the Triangle of Death, the 2d BCT's units found themselves engaged in battles merely to leave their forward operating bases, and 22 of the brigade's Soldiers were killed or evacuated.¹⁶³ During one of the brigade's first offensive operations, it found 14 IEDs daisy-chained together over a roughly 100-meter area and another 23 IEDs in a 500-meter area.¹⁶⁴ The brigade's area of operations apparently was patrolled so lightly that insurgents had had time to build some of the IEDs with 500 to 700 pounds of explosives and cover the bombs with concrete to conceal them from metal detectors. Other missions in the brigade's sector uncovered several car-bomb factories, likely for use in AQI's car-bomb attacks in Baghdad.

While many National Guard units were facing the difficulties of the worsening security situation in Iraq, back in the United States, a crisis arose in which the National Guard units were sorely missed. On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall, creating a swath of destruction in the Gulf states. With so many National Guard units deployed to Iraq, some of the Gulf states lacked the troops they would normally call up to perform disaster response missions. Mississippi and Louisiana, the two hardest-hit states, each had a brigade combat team in Iraq when Katrina struck, meaning that 35 percent of the Louisiana National Guard and 40 percent of the Mississippi Guard could only watch the disaster unfold on television from 7,000 miles away.¹⁶⁵ The residual Guard forces in

the United States faced an equipment shortage as well because a substantial amount of their equipment had been harvested by Coalition Joint Task Force-7 (CJTF-7) and MNF-I over the 2 years of conflict. Harvested equipment remained in Iraq to equip the next unit in the rotational cycle and save the Army the cost of shipping equipment each time units changed. Lieutenant General Steven Blum, the chief of the National Guard Bureau, argued that the shortages “left troops at home without modern communications and night-vision equipment, as well as the vehicles necessary for Guard troops to traverse neighborhoods flooded in the wake of Katrina.”¹⁶⁶

The situation resulted in a strange role reversal as more than 20,000 stateside active duty Soldiers rushed to the Gulf states to perform disaster response missions in place of the absent National Guard troops. Of the 65,000-man relief effort for Katrina, nearly one-third were active forces, including a Marine expeditionary unit and the division-ready brigade of the 82d Airborne Division.¹⁶⁷ The reversal of roles seemed to validate some state governors’ criticism of what they considered the overuse of the National Guard outside of the United States. “Is it really the best use to take a first responder from home and put him in to guard an airport in Saudi Arabia?” Virginia Governor Mark Warner had asked at a gathering of governors in July.¹⁶⁸ National Guard brigades that mobilized were unavailable for emergencies for at least 18 months, given the 6-month preparatory training for units headed into combat. The concern was particularly acute in states with smaller National Guard forces such as Montana, where Governor Brian Schweitzer had requested earlier in 2005 that the Department of Defense (DoD) immediately redeploy all 1,500 guardsmen from Iraq – almost half the state’s total force – so they could respond to state emergencies.¹⁶⁹ Because of the challenges of 2005, Guard units would not be brought back to Iraq in force until 2009.

ELECTIONS AND OFF-RAMPS

The December Parliamentary Elections

In an electoral whirlwind, Iraqis went to the polls again on December 15 to elect their first government under the newly ratified constitution. As with the October referendum, Sunni insurgents had little effect on the actual voting, carrying out just 80 attacks and causing 14 casualties nationwide.¹⁷⁰ The surprisingly peaceful election day capped a 2-month drop in violence: from the October 15 referendum to the parliamentary elections, MNF-I assessed that attacks had dropped by 26 percent and casualties by 29 percent.¹⁷¹

One likely reason for the drop in election-day violence was MNF-I’s outreach to Sunni leaders ahead of the vote. Casey’s interactions with Sunni notables since the summer of 2005 had led him to the realization that Sunni political and tribal leaders not only interacted with the insurgency, but also exerted influence over it, a fact that Casey believed presented an opportunity to drive a wedge between insurgent factions.¹⁷² Accordingly, in November he had authorized Minister of Defense Sadoun Dulaimi to engage 18 key Sunni leaders as a way to expedite the “Sunni In” component of Casey’s bridging strategy. By December, the talks seemed to show progress, and the Sunni leaders had asked that MNF-I pause offensive operations as a confidence-building measure. Unwilling to cease offensive operations fully as AQI and other groups tried to disrupt the elections,

Casey had instead agreed on December 11 to pause offensive operations at the battalion level and above until after the election and to consider releasing specific detainees.¹⁷³

The drop in election violence was also driven by Sunni opposition to al-Qaeda in Iraq. By November, the Anbar General Conference—the Sunni political organization formed in September—had expanded and renamed itself the Anbar People’s Conference. The group, now claiming nearly 100 politicians, tribal sheikhs, technocrats, and insurgent leaders, began organizing municipal security committees to protect and facilitate the December parliamentary elections.¹⁷⁴ In Ramadi, for example, Mohammed Mahmoud Latif’s followers in the 1920 Revolutionary Brigades forcibly drove AQI from several neighborhoods to protect the electoral process, and in one district, Latif’s ally Sheikh Nasser abd al-Karim Mukhlif al-Fahdawi raised a tribal militia to guard polling sites against AQI attacks.¹⁷⁵

To a degree, emboldened by AQI’s failure to disrupt the constitutional referendum, Sunni Arabs had doubled down on their efforts to jump-start the political process, hoping that they could eventually return to their dominant position in Iraqi politics and reestablish control of the Iraqi state. These efforts culminated in the merging of Sunni political parties into the Iraqi Tawafuq Front, as Sunni leaders believed they could garner more seats in the National Assembly by pooling their resources and running together.¹⁷⁶ The Tawafuq Front ran on a platform that called for insurgent disarmament and coalition withdrawal, and many of the group’s expatriate leaders were having covert discussions with coalition representatives to begin the process.¹⁷⁷ All of these moves were hailed by Casey and MNF-I as evidence that important elements of the Sunni Arab resistance were interested in reconciling and joining the political process.

Voter turnout for the election seemed to be promising as well. Over the year, voter participation increased significantly, from 58 percent in January to 66 percent in October and 75 percent in December.¹⁷⁸ More importantly, the long-sought Sunni participation seemed to have materialized on December 15. In Anbar, overall voter turnout increased from 2 percent in January, to 38 percent in October, to a whopping 86 percent in December. In Ninawa, participation jumped from 16 percent, to 53 percent, to 70 percent across the three elections, and Salahadin’s reported turnout grew from 29 percent, to 90 percent, to 98 percent.¹⁷⁹

Because of a 75 percent overall voter turnout and significant Sunni participation, the makeup of Iraq’s governing body shifted.¹⁸⁰ Across the country, Iraqi voters overwhelmingly cast their votes along sectarian lines, leading one Iraqi commentator to pronounce that Iraq had held “not an election, but a census.”¹⁸¹ The Shi’a United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) dropped from 140 to 128 seats, the Kurdistan Alliance decreased from 75 to 53 seats, and Ayad Allawi’s secular Iraqi National Accord decreased from 40 to 25 seats.¹⁸² The Tawafuq Front and another new Sunni party, the Iraqi National Dialogue Front, obtained 44 and 11 seats, respectively. The expanded Sunni parliamentary bloc was led by Tariq Hashimi, the former Muslim Brotherhood leader Adnan Dulaimi, the former Ba’athist Saleh Mutlaq, and Jaysh al-Islami insurgent leader Khalaf Ulayan.¹⁸³ With a total of 275 seats in the Council of Representatives, Iraq’s new Parliament, no bloc achieved an outright majority, meaning that Iraq’s next government would be a coalition of parties from different sects and ethnicities.

However, the election was not completely unmarred by sectarian violence as SCIRI's militant wing, the Badr Corps, had carried out an intimidation campaign during the parliamentary electoral cycle. In Basrah, Maysan, and Muthanna Provinces, Badr members, some in police uniform, tore down rival parties' campaign posters, burned down Allawi's campaign office in Samawah, and threatened supporters of other political parties.¹⁸⁴ In Basrah and Amarah, Badr members tampered with the vote by removing ballots for Allawi's list and filling in blank ballots for the Shi'a UIA.¹⁸⁵

The Off-Ramp Continues

The surprisingly high turnout figures, particularly in the Sunni areas that had boycotted the January voting and had been strongholds of the insurgency, indicated to Casey and MNF-I that their plan to bring the Sunnis into the political process had worked. In the days after the election, Casey concluded that the time was right to signal to Iraqis that the reward for turning from violence to politics was the beginning of an end to the U.S. military occupation. Security and political conditions in the country, Casey believed, warranted going ahead with the off-ramp of two BCTs that MNF-I had been exploring since before the October referendum. Violence had continued to decrease over time, MNF-I analysts noted. Car-bomb attacks had decreased by 62 percent between the January and December elections, while the casualties caused by those attacks had fallen by 97 percent.¹⁸⁶ Numerically, suicide car bombs had decreased from more than 60 in June to 26 in November and just 12 by mid-December.¹⁸⁷ The drop in attacks seemed to indicate that the coalition's operations in the western Euphrates and Tel Afar had succeeded in shutting down the foreign fighter pipelines and stemming al-Qaeda in Iraq's devastating wave of car-bomb attacks. The increased voter participation also reflected Sunnis' rejection of AQI's calls to boycott the elections, Casey and MNF-I judged. "Improved Sunni Arab participation in the political process helped drive a wedge between Sunni rejectionists and terrorists and foreign fighters," MNF-I analysts concluded in a report, "2005: The Insurgency Year in Review," issued on election day.¹⁸⁸ With security rapidly improving and former insurgents apparently choosing the ballot box over violence, the coalition was in a "better position vs. AQI than at any time in the previous 18 months," Casey reported to Bush the following day, adding that "recent coalition and ISF operations have restored Iraqi control to the Syrian border, disrupted AQI facilitation networks, and set conditions for future success" (see Chart 6).¹⁸⁹

The state of the Iraqi security forces was improving enough, Casey believed, that the time had come to use the drawdown of coalition troops as a forcing function to make the ISF perform more security tasks. (See Charts 6-8.) In terms of raw numbers, the ISF had grown considerably in 2005, reaching 214,000 members by December and marking a turning point at which ISF strength exceeded that of coalition troops for the first time in the war.¹⁹⁰ More importantly, ISF units seemed to be reaching a level at which they could operate independently. The metric used to reflect Iraqi unit capabilities, the Transition Readiness Assessment (TRA) for December 2005, showed one Iraqi Army battalion already operating fully independently (TRA level 1), another 44 in the lead with coalition forces acting in a supporting role (TRA level 2), and another 55 operating side by side with coalition forces (TRA level 3).¹⁹¹ Another eight battalions of Iraqi Special Police were

also in the lead, according to their TRA ratings. By MNF-I's calculations, 10 Iraqi battalions at TRA 1 or TRA 2 could be considered the equivalent of one U.S. brigade, meaning that the ISF of December 2005 was more than capable, in MNF-I's view, of making up for the two U.S. brigade combat teams that Casey was considering off-ramping.¹⁹²

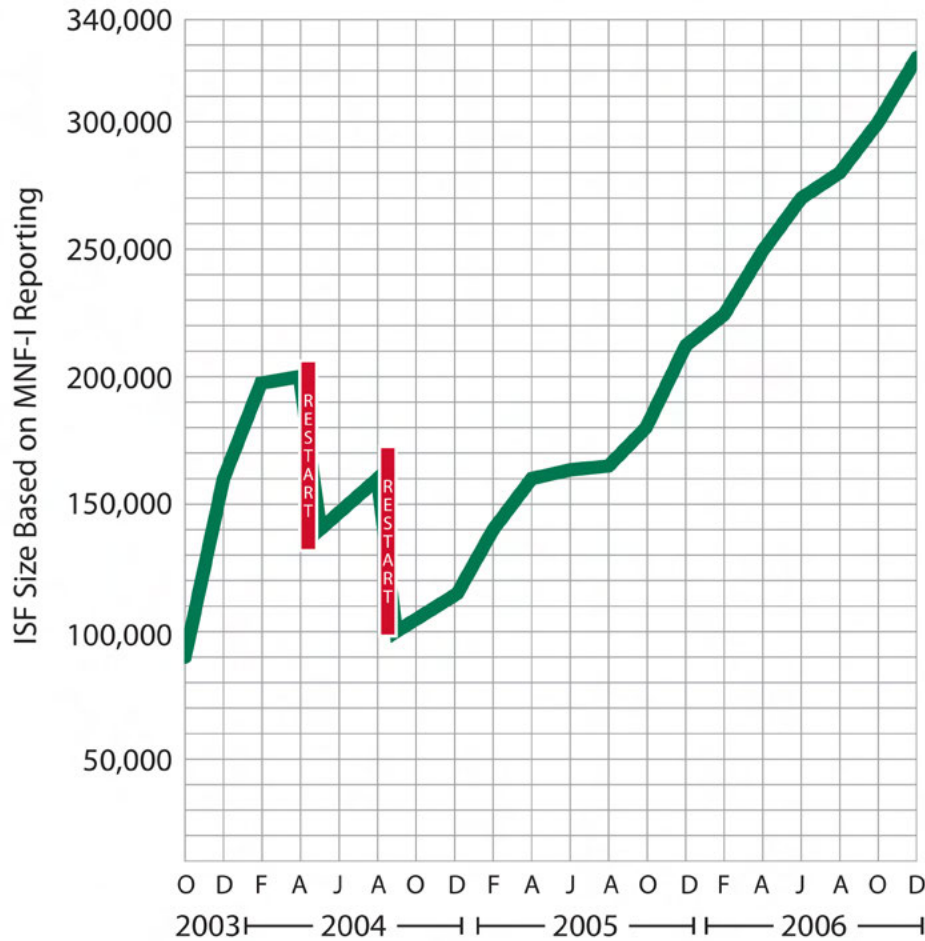


Chart 6. MNF-I Assessment of Aggregate ISF Size.

Off-ramping two BCTs would incur some tactical risk, Casey acknowledged: there could be a “reduction in tactical and operational effectiveness and flexibility,” as well as a “misperception of the U.S. ‘running away,’” the “creation of expectation for continuous drawdown,” and the danger that the insurgency could increase in size and effectiveness.¹⁹³ Violence was likely to surge in the period immediately following the elections, Casey expected, but he believed it would be the last breath of a dying insurgency extinguished by the democratic process and a new government with popular legitimacy. Deciding not to off-ramp the BCTs in the wake of a successful election, meanwhile, could incur strategic risk. In addition to the political implications of such a decision, refusing to off-ramp U.S. troops now that the Iraqi battalions were approaching full readiness could “[increase] the potential for Iraqi dependency on coalition forces,” Casey warned

Rumsfeld on December 19.¹⁹⁴ For all of these reasons, the coalition “had to draw down to win,” the MNF-I commander argued.¹⁹⁵

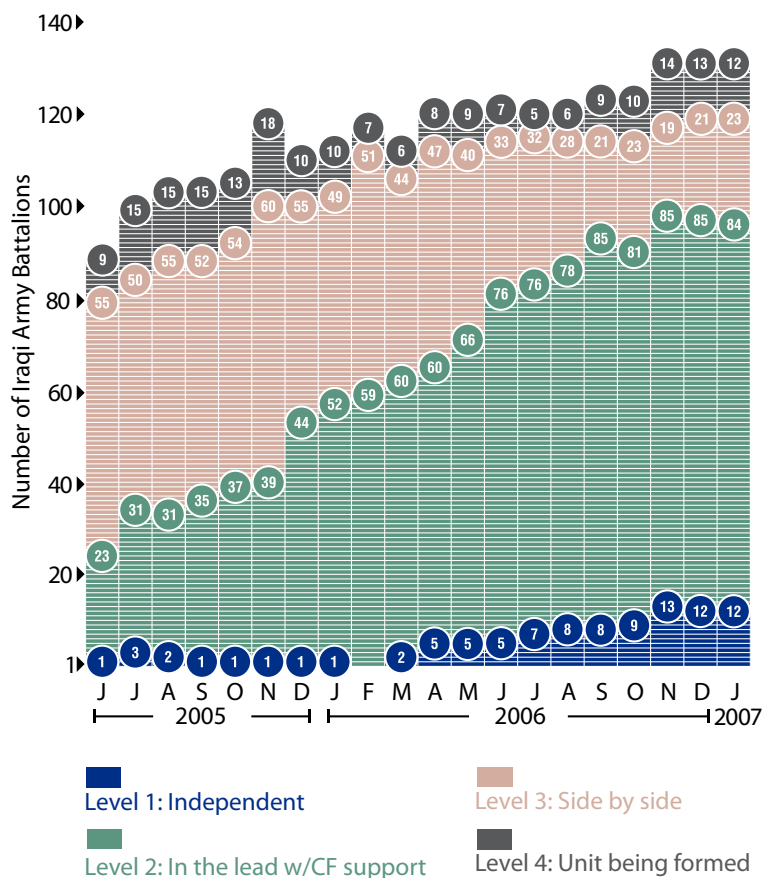


Chart 7. MNF-I Transition Readiness Assessment Ratings for Iraqi Army Battalions.

Taking Casey’s recommendation, Bush announced on December 23, 8 days after the elections, that the United States would off-ramp the two BCTs Casey had designated.¹⁹⁶ The president’s decision would mean the reduction of U.S. BCTs in Iraq from 17 to 15 by January 2006 as units in Iraq redeployed.¹⁹⁷ To hedge his bet, Casey had agreed with CENTCOM that one of the off-ramped brigade combat teams—the 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division—would deploy to Kuwait and serve as a “call forward force,” essentially an operational reserve for MNF-I. However, inside Iraq, the off-ramp would mean a reduction of 6,700 U.S. combat troops, along with about 3,000 additional troops in U.S. support units that also would not be needed. Because almost all of the BCTs deploying to Iraq in 2006 would be transformed modular units with fewer troops than the legacy brigades they were replacing, MNF-I expected an additional net reduction of 2,700 troops from “modularity savings.”¹⁹⁸ The overall reduction of the coalition footprint would come in other areas as well. From late 2005 to fall 2006, MNF-I planned to replace 5,922 support Soldiers with contractors gradually, at a cost of \$866 million, while the MNF-I headquarters itself would shrink from 999 personnel to 864.¹⁹⁹

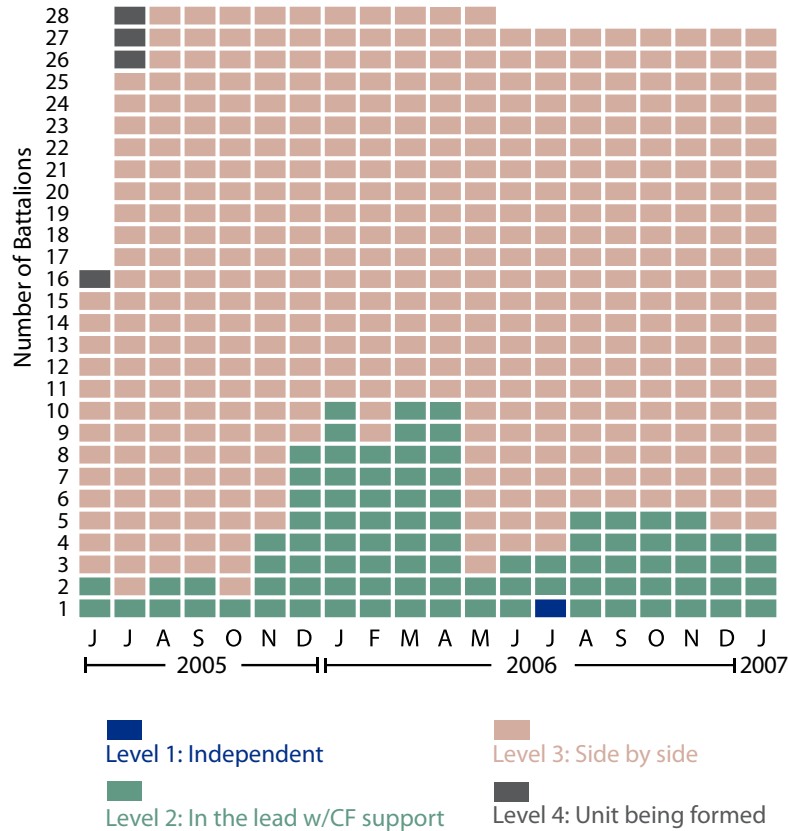


Chart 8. MNF-I Transition Readiness Assessment Ratings for Special Police Battalions.

The Consequences of Flawed Data

Casey’s recommendation and Bush’s decision rested on data that both men believed indicated an improving situation in Iraq. Attacks had dropped significantly with each electoral cycle. Electoral participation had increased, and polls indicated that those who were participating in the political process were ready for the coalition to withdraw as soon as possible. The Iraqi security forces, at least based on the Transition Readiness Assessment, seemed to be reaching the point at which they could replace coalition units.

However, each of these metrics was fraught with problems. Modern polling methods were incapable of accurately gauging Iraqi public opinion in 2005. The challenging security environment prevented balanced access to all of Iraq’s communities, and pollsters almost never broke down their respondents along sectarian lines. Polling results like those of the October and December elections masked Sunnis’ growing anger with a political system they perceived as intended to subjugate them permanently. After 35 years of Ba’athist rule, Iraqis’ long-standing fear of responding truthfully to queries also skewed polling results. While most Iraqis told pollsters they wanted coalition forces to withdraw, many Sunnis also noted that nothing created greater fear than Iraqi security forces arriving in their neighborhoods without American troops in tow.

MNF-I's significant activities (SIGACT) data, used to calculate attack trends over time, also tended to cloud the coalition's understanding of the situation. MNF-I considered attacks against coalition forces to be significant activities and used them as the principal indicator of the insurgency's strength and of the security situation. Attacks against Iraqi security forces were sometimes included in MNF-I's significant activities data as well. Rarely, however, were attacks against Iraqi civilians included, and when they were, they were usually not broken down along sectarian lines. They were also not usually categorized by scale so that an attack that killed over 100 civilians might be treated the same as an attack that killed one coalition soldier. Thus, the U.S. military's post-Vietnam war aversion to maintaining body counts reached its logical conclusion and produced unintended consequences in the Iraq War.

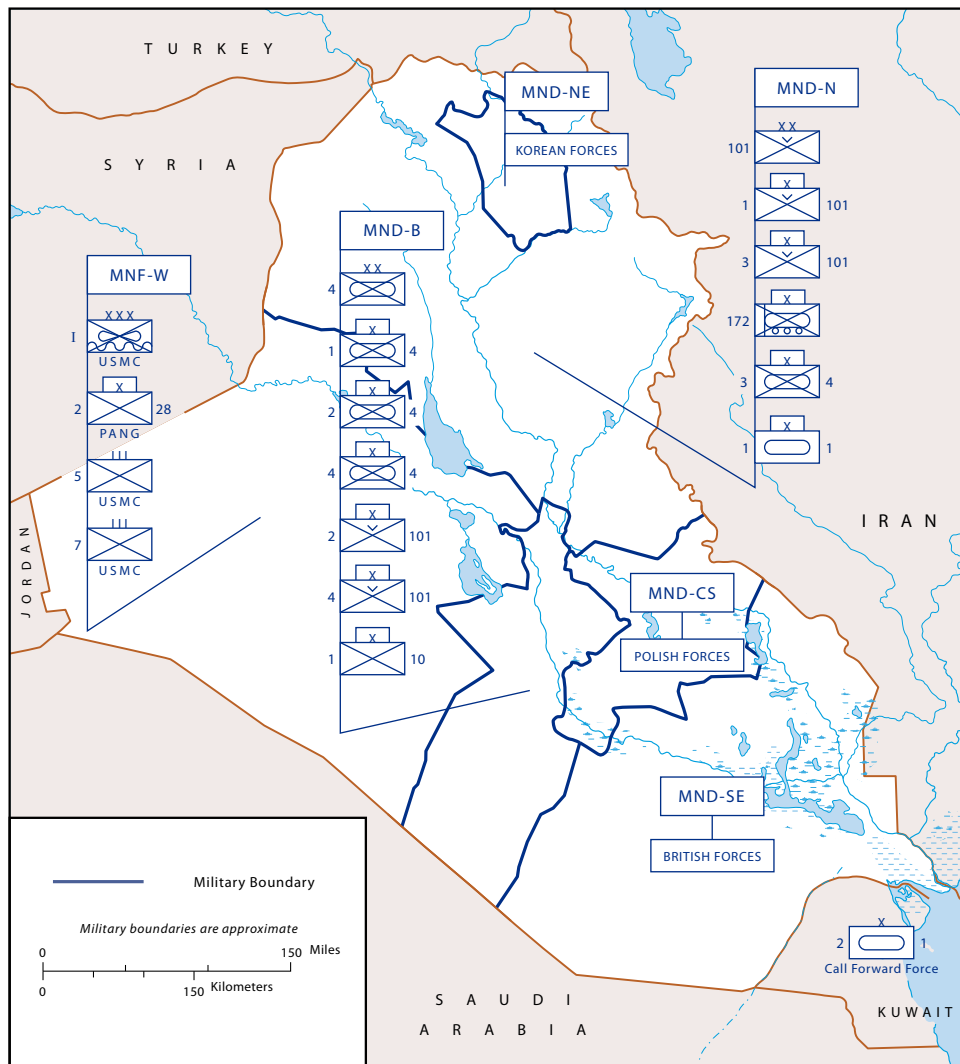
The oft-cited statistics showing increased participation in the democratic process also were deceptive. While Sunnis voted in greater numbers with each successive election, they were participating to register their dissatisfaction with the new political system rather than their support of it. Similarly, the Transition Readiness Assessment, which produced results showing that Iraqi units were ready to assume security responsibility from coalition forces, belied the Iraqis' real capabilities. While Iraqi units might be fully equipped and manned, they were far from ready to face insurgents and sectarian forces on their own. Many units had become ethnically pure and unwilling to respond to orders that would threaten their own faction, while others who might have been willing to fight lacked the proper training and logistics functions to make them effective. These problems with the metrics that guided MNF-I's decision-making were little recognized in 2005, but they had far-reaching consequences.²⁰⁰

Geographic Impacts of the Off-Ramp

In geographical terms, MNF-I planners intended to absorb the troop deficit created by the off-ramp in Baghdad and Diyala, two of the most violent areas in Iraq.²⁰¹ For Baghdad, the loss of one off-ramped brigade in 2006 would mean a precipitous drop in troops that was the continuation of a multiyear trend. The number of U.S. troops in Baghdad had dropped from 35,000 in 2004 to 30,000 in 2005 and to 24,000 in 2006. These changes were ostensibly balanced by a parallel growth of the Iraqi security forces, which, in Baghdad, went from 22,000 to 36,000 to 56,000 over the same time period.²⁰² As MND-B was losing significant combat power, its area of operations was expanding 10-fold, partially as a result of the departure of the 1,600-strong Ukrainian contingent from MND-CS in December 2005, but also because MNC-I had decided to shift Najaf from Multi-National Force-West's (MNF-W) area of operations to MND-B to allow the MEF to focus solely on the challenging situation in Anbar.²⁰³ By early January 2006, the greatly expanded MND-B area included all of Babil, Karbala, and Najaf Provinces, creating a gerrymandered sector that stretched from Baghdad all the way to the Saudi border.²⁰⁴ With the Ukrainian departure, meanwhile, the adjacent shrunken MND-CS was effectively one BCT strong (see Map 18).²⁰⁵

U.S. troops in the north were about to be similarly stretched. In MND-NC, the off-ramp would decrease the number of U.S. BCTs from four to three, a sharp difference from late 2003, when two full U.S. divisions had held the restive northern Iraq. With the off-ramp, Multi-National Division-North Central (MND-NC) contained 12 battalions spread

over only 18 forward operating bases in 2006, down from 17 battalions and 28 forward operating bases in 2005.²⁰⁶ Like MND-B, MND-NC expanded its area while losing troop strength. In January 2006, Major General Thomas Turner and his 101st Airborne Division, having taken over MND-NC in November, assumed responsibility for MNF-NW from departing Major General David M. Rodriguez and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, forming a new division area called MND-N. The 101st took charge of the 172d BCT in Mosul as well as the Kurdish provinces of Dahuk and Erbil, where the South Korean MND-NE had begun to reduce its presence.²⁰⁷ While the two Kurdish provinces were generally quiet, they still required a troop commitment to help develop the ISF, governance, and the rule of law. These changes greatly taxed the capacity of the 101st Airborne Division's headquarters, which had shrunk significantly as a by-product of transformation.



Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 18. 2006 Transitions, January-March 2006.

In both MND-N and MND-B, the drawdown of bases and personnel paralleled accelerated efforts to reduce the coalition presence in Iraq's cities. In the days immediately following the December 2005 election, Casey issued new planning guidance for MNF-I basing that represented the fruition of his and Abizaid's concern with coalition troops creating antibodies among the population. "As part of the strategy of reducing our visibility and profile, we will reduce our presence and operating profile in cities, where practical and operational requirements permit," Casey's order noted. "Where we need to retain the ability to monitor or influence events within cities, [coalition forces] should relocate to bases, initially on the outskirts of the urban areas where necessary, and later to more distant locations."²⁰⁸ As part of this effort to downsize the coalition footprint from 81 bases to four, the order directed the multinational divisions to plan to move out of Baghdad, Basrah, Mosul, Ramadi, Fallujah, north Babil, Najaf, Kirkuk, Samarra, and Baqubah by the end of 2006.²⁰⁹

Political Warning Signs

In the aftermath of the December 15 election, Iraqis did not share the optimistic outlook that had led Casey and MNF-I to launch the plans for the reduction of coalition troops. The election results were far from conclusive. While the UIA had secured a plurality of votes, it needed to forge a complex coalition in order to govern. Far from being a unified bloc itself, the UIA had become a fractious Islamist Shi'a alliance composed of SCIRI, the Da'wa Party, the Sadrists, the Fadhila Party, and some Shi'a independents.²¹⁰ Moqtada Sadr, who, like the Sunni Arabs, had realized that opposition to elections was counterproductive, had sponsored a Sadrist party that secured 32 seats, giving Sadr significant leverage in the forming of a governing coalition.²¹¹ The election had essentially legitimized Sadr and his movement and given them an advantage in their long-standing battle with coalition forces. Any coalition military action against Sadr's followers was more difficult now that they were certain to be part of the government. "Moving [against Sadr] would be perceived as attacking the legitimacy of the government," MNC-I Commander Vines noted later. "[I]t would be the equivalent of the police coming down and arresting the Republican National Committee."²¹² The coalition's most potent enemy from the summer of 2004 would now be an integral part of the Iraqi state.

* * *

The October and December elections of 2005 left coalition leaders with the mistaken sense that a strategic victory was within their grasp. The coalition had fulfilled the United Nations (UN) mandate in UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1546 and was about to shepherd into existence Iraq's first democratically elected government, a step that U.S. doctrine, going back as far as the *Marine Small Wars Manual*, considered a sign of progress in counterinsurgency campaigns. From the perspectives of Casey and Abizaid, the election results were evidence that Iraqis, especially Sunnis, were choosing the democratic political process over the insurgency, and that a fissure was opening between the Iraqi Sunni population and al-Qaeda in Iraq. The Iraqi security forces' success in securing the election, meanwhile, seemed to indicate that Iraqi forces were ready to begin taking lead

responsibility for the country's security. For Casey, the time seemed right to begin the American troop drawdown and to accelerate the transition of responsibility and bases to the Iraqis, which he had believed since August 2004 was the eventual path to success in Iraq.

Yet, many of these were deceptive or simply poor indicators. MNF-I's assessment of a decrease in violence came from statistics that principally tracked violence against coalition forces, which was no longer the focus of al-Qaeda in Iraq and other groups that were more intent on killing fellow Iraqis. The Transition Readiness Assessment inflated MNF-I's perceptions of ISF capabilities. The increase in voter participation across 2005's elections concealed a darker sectarian competition that was playing out. The flawed statistics also concealed a deeper problem: that the assumptions underlying MNF-I's campaign plan were themselves fundamentally flawed. Virtually all of the U.S. Government had assumed that elections would solve Iraq's ills, so long as insurgents could not prevent the holding of the vote. MNF-I successfully blocked militant attempts to disrupt the elections, but Iraq continued its slow march toward civil war nonetheless, showing in hindsight that MNF-I and U.S. national leaders had applied the wrong prescription to Iraq. Assuming that Iraq's main problem was an insurgency against the coalition, U.S. leaders expected elections to remove most of the underlying reasons for insurgents to continue their struggle. Yet, the Iraq conflict had already evolved into an intercommunal political struggle that teetered on the edge of civil war. In such a scenario, elections were inherently destabilizing events that served as accelerants to civil war. By incorrectly diagnosing the problem, the United States had ensured it would not be able to accomplish a key component of its end state: a representative government that respected the human rights of all Iraqis.

In the world outside the coalition headquarters, uninfluenced by the flawed metrics being meticulously tracked in PowerPoint presentations, Iraqis viewed the late 2005 election season not as a stabilizing period, but rather as a potential preamble to sectarian civil war. In polls conducted between October and December by the State Department's Office of Research, a majority of Iraqis in the key cities of Mosul, Tikrit, Kirkuk, and Baghdad were concerned or very concerned that civil war was imminent in Iraq. In Mosul, 76 percent of respondents worried that civil war was looming, and in Baghdad, the number worried about civil war had doubled since the same question was asked in March, jumping to 53 percent.²¹³ As Iraqis began 2006, they tended to fear that sectarian violence in the country was primed to explode, and their fears were justified.

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CHAPTER 19

THE IRAQI CIVIL WAR COMES INTO THE OPEN, JANUARY-JUNE 2006

For General George Casey, Jr., and Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, the high Sunni voter turnout of December 2005 signified an opportunity to be exploited. Iraq's Sunnis had disregarded threats from al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and other hardline insurgent groups against joining the political process, the U.S. leaders noted, and the time was right to expand outreach to Sunni leaders to draw them further away from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and other Sunni rejectionists. From his headquarters in Tampa, FL, General John Abizaid agreed, asking his staff in late 2005 how best to exploit the strategic advantage he believed the coalition had gained over al-Qaeda in 2005.¹ Coalition leaders also believed 2006 would be the year increasingly capable Iraqi security forces would be able to shoulder much of the burden for internal security, allowing U.S. forces to extricate themselves from the country gradually as Casey's campaign plan had envisioned. If the coalition could build on the momentum created by Sunnis' decision to vote, then 2006 could be the year in which the coalition and its Iraqi partners defeated AQI.

In the course of events, these expectations would not last long. Instead of stabilizing under the influence of a solidifying government and a maturing security force, Iraq was about to erupt in a sectarian conflict that would derail Multi-National Force-Iraq's (MNF-I) drawdown plans and prompt a divisive debate within the coalition over how to prosecute the war.

THE RESPONSE TO THE DECEMBER ELECTIONS

Iraq's Sunni leaders viewed the December 2005 election results in far different terms than coalition leaders. Within days of the voting, unofficial election returns began to indicate a large plurality for the Shi'a Islamist parties in the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), and Sunni political leaders realized they faced a political disaster. Having campaigned with the deeply mistaken assumption that Sunnis formed a much larger portion of the Iraqi electorate than they actually did, Sunni politicians had unrealistically expected to win a major share of power in the new Parliament. In essence, many Sunnis had come to the conclusion that their best hope to return to power was not with the insurgent group Hizb al Awda (The Ba'athist "Party of the Return"), but with the political process the coalition and the United Nations (UN) had established. Reestablishing a share of control over Iraq's political levers of power might also have enabled them to stop what they saw as a renegade Shi'a sectarian government that was using Iraq's security forces to terrorize Sunnis and cleanse them from the Baghdad region. However, as the unofficial vote count showed that Iraq's Shi'a and Kurdish parties together would easily have a majority in the 2006 Parliament, it became clear that the Sunni parties possessed little power to secure their constituency's political aims. After spending several months urging the Sunni populace to reconcile themselves to the new political process in the hopes that it would return them to power, Sunni leaders realized they had gambled their political reputations on the election outcome and lost. On December 20, 5 days after the election, several key Sunni

leaders, including Tariq Hashimi and Khalaf Ulayan, met with Casey to express their anger and frustration at the election result. Unwilling to accept the reality of their demographic minority, they alleged that the impending Shi'a-Kurdish victory was the result of massive voter fraud. According to notes from the meeting, furious Sunni leaders noted that they had "spoke[n] out for participation in the elections, it turned out to be useless, and now they are shut out of the political process and have lost credibility within their community."² The encounter worried Casey enough that in a discussion with President George W. Bush the following day, he identified Sunni disappointment with the election results, and the potential that the disappointment could lead to increased violence, as the most significant of post-election challenges.³ The looming reality that electoral disappointment could lead to increased violence was further evidence that the elections, rather than serving as venues for national reconciliation, had in fact been destabilizing events that helped push the country toward civil war.

A Second Look at Force Reductions

Casey's concerns about the Sunni political reaction, however, did not alter MNF-I's plans. By January 5, 2006, Casey had regained enough optimism to predict to Bush that MNF-I would be able to cancel the deployments of a total of four brigade combat teams (BCT) and one Marine regimental combat team (RCT) for the next troop rotation, drawing the U.S. forces down to just 10 BCTs and 1 RCT in Iraq by October 2006.⁴ While pleased with the scope of these estimates, Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld was unhappy with their speed, preferring an acceleration of the drawdown with further troop reductions in January. Casey disagreed, judging that it was too soon to gauge the full impact of the elections and of December's two-brigade off-ramp decision. "Broad trends in Iraq develop over time," he wrote to Rumsfeld, "and week-to-week (and even month-to-month) upward or downward spikes in enemy activity or friendly capabilities often do not identify the true long-term trends."⁵ MNF-I had developed a procedure to evaluate force structure decisions on a quarterly basis, Casey explained, and he proposed to postpone any decisions until the formal reviews scheduled for March, June, and September – each of which might support a decision to cut one to two brigades. "Reacting to monthly data 'spikes' or making the next off-ramp decision before the impact of previous unit off ramps is determined risks making off-ramp decisions prematurely," Casey argued.⁶ Rumsfeld, after insisting that a special, limited distribution briefing be put together for him, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) and the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) commander relented and agreed to wait until March to make any decisions.⁷ However, Casey and Rumsfeld agreed that in March they expected to make a decision that would curtail the 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, PA National Guard, by 1 month and curtail 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, by 3 months, with neither of those brigades replaced, effectively drawing down the U.S. contingent to 13 BCTs by May.⁸

MNF-I's Sunni Outreach

Having convinced Rumsfeld that the time was not right to consider additional troop reductions, Casey turned his attention to attempting to exploit the perceived success

of the election through other means. Instead of trying to mollify Sunni anger over the election defeat, Casey and other coalition leaders worked to broker better relationships between Sunnis and the Shi'a leaders of the government. In January, Casey took Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'afari to Ramadi to confer with a group of local leaders called the Anbar Security Council. After months of subsequent meetings, Ja'afari would eventually pledge \$75 million in reconstruction funds for the city – although the Iraqi Government would never actually follow through on this promise.⁹ Ja'afari would also agree to hire 15,000 Anbaris into the Iraqi security forces (ISF) to offset Sunni perceptions that the ISF was becoming a Shi'a sectarian tool, with the tribal sheikhs who were already working with the coalition's Desert Protectors initiative used to vet the new recruits.¹⁰

In addition to continuing their engagements with the Anbari sheikhs, MNF-I leaders began to expand their months-long negotiations with Sunni insurgent groups with the aim of permanently severing them from AQI and its allies. Even before the December election turnout, there had been promising signs that some of the Sunni insurgent groups were ready to turn against Zarqawi and AQI. By September 2005, the question of whether to participate in the elections had created a deep rift between AQI and other insurgent groups, a severe enough rupture that members of the 1920 Revolutionary Brigades and the Islamic Army in Iraq had agreed to form an alliance to destroy AQI over the issue. AQI, in turn, had begun targeting leaders from these rival groups in order to preserve its supremacy in the insurgency. Aware of these intra-insurgent dynamics, MNF-I and the U.S. Embassy had deftly begun to coax the less recalcitrant insurgent groups into the political process, aided by many Sunnis' grudging acknowledgment that the coalition was becoming a necessary protector against the sectarian behavior of the Ja'afari government.

By February 2006, discussions between mid-level leaders in MNF-I and the Sunni Iraqi resistance had gained enough momentum that, for the first time, Casey authorized a U.S. general officer, Major General Richard "Rick" Lynch, to begin formal talks with representatives of at least 15 insurgent groups.¹¹ Casey believed that Sunni insurgents had become more willing to negotiate in good faith because they hoped the United States could act as a counterweight to rising Iranian influence. At one point, Casey became hopeful enough about the negotiations' prospects that he briefly considered using the occasion of the seating of the new Iraqi Government, expected to take place as early as March or April, to announce the end of coalition offensive operations and the beginning of reconciliation efforts, an idea that would soon be overcome by events.¹²

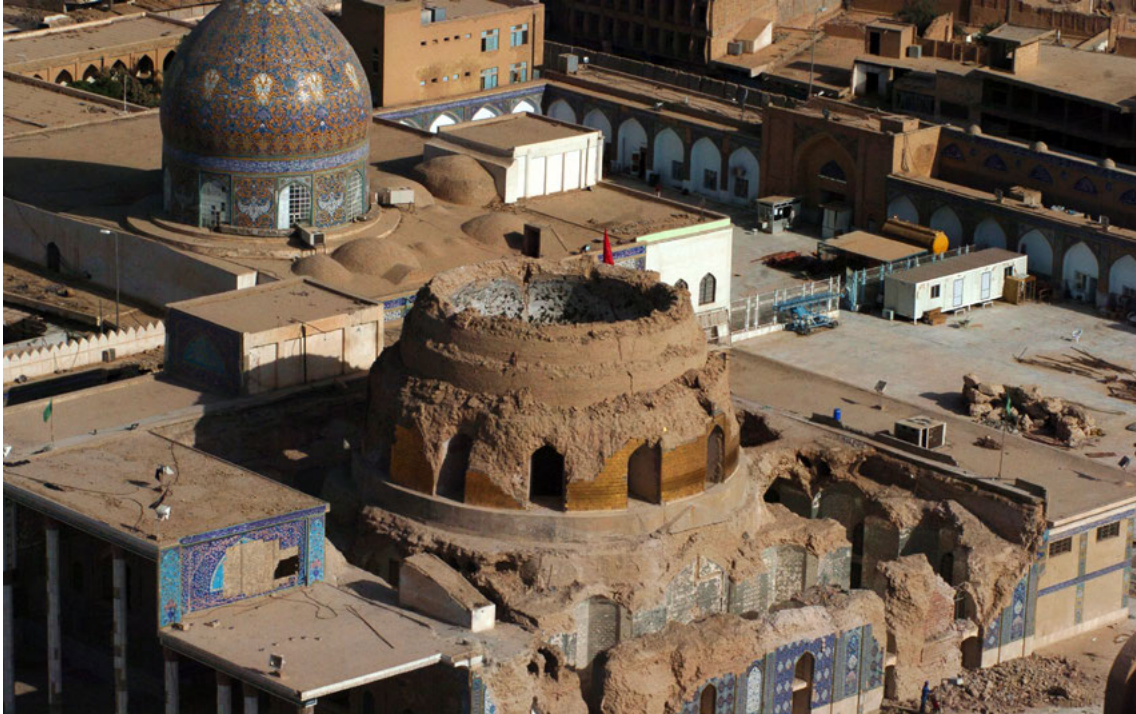
The Mujahideen Shura Council

While the election outcome alarmed Sunni political leaders who saw themselves headed for a much smaller share of government power than they had hoped, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was apprehensive by the election result as well, but for different reasons. The high Sunni turnout in the December 15 vote had indeed been a political setback for AQI, whose demand that Sunnis boycott the political process had fallen flat, and Zarqawi and AQI needed to take quick measures to bolster their popular support. As a Jordanian

leader of an insurgent organization with a large number of non-Iraqis, Zarqawi was vulnerable to other Sunni groups' assertions that he and AQI did not operate according to native Iraqi interests. Zarqawi also was stung by the criticisms from al-Qaeda's senior leadership in the Zawahiri and Atiyah letters, and he had searched for a way to soften his image. His solution to these political problems was to put an Iraqi face on his jihad by creating an insurgent front group consisting of AQI and five smaller native Iraqi insurgent groups. Two senior Sunni insurgents, Muharib Jabouri and Mullah Nadhim Jabouri, organized the groups in a meeting in the Tigris River town of Dhuluiyah, about 97 kilometers north of Baghdad and a mere 16 kilometers from the coalition air base at Balad. The resulting Mujahideen Shura Council that announced itself on January 15, 2006, succeeded in attracting some senior Iraqi insurgent leaders, including Ibrahim al-Badri, the future Iraqi State in Syria (ISIS) caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. It also created partnerships with elements of the 1920 Revolutionary Brigades in Diyala and Jaysh al-Islami in Baghdad, the two insurgent groups whose members elsewhere had turned against AQI during the election season. Despite the Shura Council's purported Iraqi leadership (and claims that it could moderate AQI's behavior), in reality, it was a thinly disguised vehicle for Zarqawi and AQI.¹³ As the real power behind the council, Zarqawi would continue his campaign to provoke a sectarian response from Iraq's Shi'a community, a strategy that some Iraqi insurgents did not endorse.

THE SAMARRA MOSQUE BOMBING

The formation of the Mujahideen Shura Council was followed 5 weeks later by AQI's most significant terrorist bombing of the Iraq War. Throughout 2005, U.S. officials had carefully watched the Iraqi Shi'a community's reaction to Zarqawi's campaign and tended to conclude that Shi'a leaders were able to preserve the Shi'a population's patience as it absorbed the brunt of AQI's mass casualty attacks, especially in Baghdad. Just 5 days after the December elections, MNF-I's December 20, 2005, Campaign Progress Review assessed that the AQI-led insurgency had failed "to foment sectarian violence. Terrorist attempts to provoke violent Shi'a retaliation have failed."¹⁴ Just 2 months later, however, Zarqawi and AQI would succeed spectacularly in this regard. Samarra, a city with a Sunni-majority population 129 kilometers north of Baghdad and just 29 kilometers from the town where the Mujahideen Shura Council had been founded, was home to the Askariyah Shrine, one of the four holiest sites in the Shi'a world along with the shrines in Karbala, Najaf, and Kadhimiyyah. With its famous golden dome, the Askariyah Mosque was the destination of hundreds of thousands of Shi'a pilgrims who made their way to Samarra to worship at the burial place of Shi'a Islam's 10th and 11th imams.



Source: U.S. Army photo by Major Johnpaul Arnold, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (AA) Public Affairs (Released).

Askariyah Mosque, After the February 2006 Bombing.¹⁵

Shortly after midnight on February 22, 2006, seven members of AQI—two Iraqis, one Tunisian, and four Saudis—entered the shrine dressed as Iraqi police officers and captured the five security guards posted there. The AQI men quickly went to work wiring the mosque with explosives, and just before 7 a.m. detonated their charges, collapsing the golden dome and doing extensive damage to the mosque itself.¹⁶ The attackers had chosen their target and timing well, doing their work with no interference from U.S. troops or Iraqi security forces. Coalition troops had scarcely any forces nearby to prevent the attack or respond to the aftermath. As a by-product of MNF-I's ongoing base closure effort, the main coalition bases inside Samarra had again been shut down in late 2005, leaving only two platoons from the 101st Airborne Division, a special police transition team, and a Special Forces Operation Detachment Alpha (ODA) inside the city of 350,000.¹⁷ One of the bombers later claimed that "the shrines of the Al Askari imams were chosen because of their religious importance and their geographical location, and the choice was meant to cause sectarian division among the people."¹⁸

"We're Not Seeing Civil War"

The news of the Samarra shrine's destruction unleashed an immediate and furious reaction by Shi'a across Iraq. In the days that followed, sectarian violence that had previously been mostly clandestine and limited began to explode into the open. In several major cities, Shi'a protesters flooded the streets calling for revenge. Black-clad Shi'a militia members dominated the protests, which, in many places, gave way to attacks against

Sunni mosques by militiamen using rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons. By the end of the day of the Samarra bombing, the Interior Ministry reported that 27 mosques had been attacked in Baghdad alone and several Sunni clerics murdered. Attacks against Sunni mosques took place in Basrah, Diyala, and central Iraq as well. A wave of killings accompanied the mosque attacks. In one instance, armed men claiming to be police reportedly removed Sunni prisoners from a jail and killed them. In another case, U.S. troops found a fresh mass grave with 47 bodies the day following the bombing.¹⁹

At MNF-I headquarters, Casey was inundated with frantic phone calls from Sunni leaders reporting militia attacks against Sunni mosques and civilians.²⁰ Although Casey discounted much of the reporting as hysteria, he and Khalilzad agreed that the danger of a dramatic escalation of violence was high and urged Ja'afari to impose a 24-hour nationwide curfew. The two U.S. leaders were dumbfounded when the Iraqi Prime Minister refused, telling them blithely that "the Shi'a have to blow off steam right now."²¹

In the hours and days that followed, dozens of bodies, many with signs of torture and mutilation, appeared on the streets and in the Tigris River. The bodies found by U.S. patrols were collected and delivered to the overflowing Baghdad morgue. What had previously appeared to be a narrowly targeted, systematic murder campaign devolved into random sectarian killings, with factors that before had served as a bulwark against the violence, such as intermarriage or tribal ties, seeming to dissolve overnight. Saman Dlawer Hussein, an Iraqi Sunni, later described how quickly the wave of violence broke over Baghdad "The night of the bombing, the head of a prominent Sunni family was murdered in Washash [in Baghdad] and left in the street. It was a statement by the Mahdi Army saying no Sunni was safe there anymore, no matter who they were. Everyone understood what that one killing meant for our area, and we were afraid. And after that the real killing started."²²

In the several days following the Samarra bombing, media sources estimated that approximately 1,300 Sunnis were killed and over 100 Sunni mosques attacked by Shi'a militants.²³ Eight Sunni clerics were killed in the first 24 hours.²⁴ A clerk at the Baghdad morgue told desperate Sunni families that the morgue required extra time to locate their missing family members because more than 1,000 bodies had been delivered since the day of the bombing, and a UN official separately reported the same figure to *The New York Times*.²⁵

Despite what media sources were indicating, MNF-I reports in the aftermath of the bombing gave a different, less alarming picture of the violence. MNF-I statistics showed considerably lower levels of violence, a fact explained in retrospect by the coalition's apparent loss of situational awareness and reliance on faulty metrics. As the violence was unfolding, much of the MNF-I leadership discounted the divergence between media reporting and MNF-I's internal reporting as the result of sensationalized press reports and the exaggerations of Iraqi Sunnis. Representative of this thinking was a February 28 report by MNF-I analysts that played down the number of protests and attacks on Sunni mosques on the day of the Samarra bombing, noting that:

there were 81 reports of mosques being attacked and damaged that originated from sources other than MSCs [major subordinate commands]. . . . Of the 81 . . . 50% were undamaged and another 20% were only lightly damaged. This accounts for nearly three quarters of all the reports of damaged mosques . . . 78 of the 83 demonstrations (directly attributable to the attack) were peaceful, and of the five described as violent the total BDA [battle damage assessment] was one ISF killed and three civilians injured.²⁶

Mirroring this assessment on the day after the bombing, coalition spokesmen Lynch told a press gathering, "We're not seeing civil war igniting in Iraq. We're not seeing 77, 80, 100 mosques damaged. We're not seeing death in the streets. We're seeing a confident, capable Iraqi Government using their capable Iraqi security force to calm the storm that was inflamed by a horrendous, horrific terrorist attack yesterday against the Golden Mosque in Samarra."²⁷ In Washington, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice echoed Lynch on the same day, saying, "I don't think we do the Iraqi people any good, or really that we are fair to them, in continually raising the specter that they might fall into civil war."²⁸

Yet despite the differing statistics, Casey chose to hedge his bets by instructing his subordinate commanders just 2 days after the Samarra attack that the situation demanded more than "business as usual."²⁹ In a strategic directive issued on February 24, Casey outlined the ways in which increasing ethno-sectarian violence could jeopardize the coalition's mission in Iraq and urged his subordinates to take measures to dampen tensions and stabilize the situation, particularly in Baghdad. Still, Casey viewed the bombing mainly as a threat to future progress rather than a near-term unraveling of the security situation. While the attack and its aftermath had triggered warnings, he judged the crisis could be managed and even used as an opportunity to bolster confidence in the Iraqi Government and demonstrate the capability of the Iraqi security forces, thus reinforcing his overall strategy to put the Iraqis "in the lead" and help them as they handled the security situation.³⁰ Yet, for the first time, Casey's command guidance delved explicitly into the sectarian conflict that had been roiling Iraq since the toppling of Saddam Hussein. Casey ordered his subordinates to "prevent the fracture of the ISF along sectarian lines," to "remain alert for indicators of ethnic or sectarian movement," and to block "extra-governmental armed groups from filling a perceived security vacuum."³¹

Casey was right to warn his units of these dangers. While the initial spasm of killing seemed to die down after several days, it was replaced by an increasing number of systematic sectarian abductions, murders, and bombings. On March 8, armed men in police uniforms kidnapped and later killed 50 Sunnis at a security company in west Baghdad owned by relatives of Ghazi al-Yawar, Iraq's former interim President. On March 12, six car bombs ripped through Shi'a neighborhoods, killing an estimated 50 people and wounding at least 200 more in coordinated attacks that bore AQI's hallmark. Even elite members of the Iraqi Special Operation Forces (ISOF) Brigade were not spared, with four Sunnis from the unit kidnapped and executed in the first week of March. The U.S. advisers from the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) who accompanied ISOF members to recover the bodies in the Baghdad morgue were shocked at what they discovered. Throngs of Iraqis queued outside the morgue to look for their missing relatives. Inside, room after room contained stacks of bodies, some with their hands still zip-tied, and many displaying evidence of torture. When the special operators asked the morgue employees whether the collection of bodies represented a week's worth or longer, the employees simply responded that it was what had come in overnight. Sensing that they were witnessing a significant event that had not registered with coalition leaders, the operators recorded the scene and passed the video to Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) and MNF-I leaders.³²

The scene at the morgue was a sign that the Baghdad region had begun to devolve into a chaotic state, with populations of either sect coming to realize that neither the

Iraqi Government nor the coalition could effectively protect them. As a result, previously unaligned civilians began joining militias to survive or seek revenge. Across Baghdad, minority Iraqis in heterogeneous neighborhoods were driven out by violence and threats, fleeing to the relative safety of neighborhoods where their own sect was the majority. Ali Kadhem, an Iraqi Shi'a, later described how his family was swept up in Baghdad's demographic changes:

The area we lived [on the western edge of Baghdad] was mostly Sunni, but there were several Shi'ite families. After the Samarra bombings, all the Shi'ite families got threat letters from al-Qaeda in Iraq. The notes were delivered to every Shi'ite house. The letters said we were dirty collaborators working with the Americans, the Iranians, and the Jews and said we had 72 hours to leave. We didn't bother to take anything from the house, just some blankets for the children because it was cold weather then.³³

As the weeks passed, the violent outburst of February 22 gradually settled into what were apparently coordinated plans by militant groups to cleanse mixed neighborhoods of the opposing sect and, having captured those neighborhoods, use them as bases from which to strike areas controlled by the opposing side. One Sunni insurgent group's operational plan, captured in the weeks following the Samarra attack, instructed its militant members that "the priority in Baghdad is the Shi'a. . . . Drive away the Shi'a and expel their businesses and workplaces from our areas. . . . Expel all merchants of gas, bread, or meat. . . . Move the battle to the Shi'a depths and cut off the paths from them by any means necessary to put pressure on them to leave their areas."³⁴

Once neighborhoods had been taken over, militias such as Jaysh al-Mahdi quickly began to serve as surrogates for the state, taking over social services and quasi-government functions. With mass expulsions from neighborhoods occurring on both sides, the militias began assuming responsibility in some neighborhoods for providing the basic needs of shelter, security, and food. Rasim Haikel, an Iraqi Shi'a, described this process:

The Mahdi Army had basically taken over our neighborhood [in northern Baghdad] by the middle of 2006. They were very open about it. They established checkpoints on the main roads to search cars coming and going. . . . At that time, in our area, they controlled everything and were involved in everything. One day . . . they summoned me and a bunch of other ration distributors in the area. . . . They made it seem like an official meeting. They said the government had given them authority to collect any rations dedicated to Sunni families and redistribute them to families of Shi'ite martyrs. Most of the distributors were so scared they agreed to cooperate without asking questions, even though it was not clear whether there had been such an order from the government.³⁵

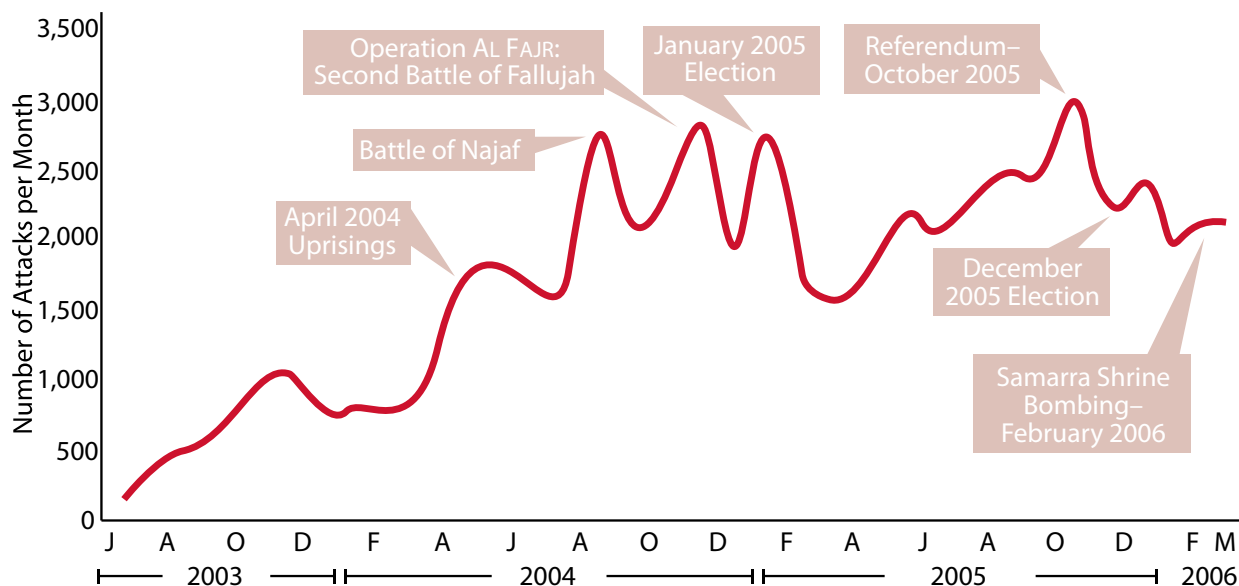
In short order, the bombing had driven Iraq's mixed-sect regions into a situation in which the central government had all but failed, with the population's basic needs increasingly met through associations with localized religiously affiliated groups and with mass migrations rising significantly.

Considering the post-bombing period in hindsight, Major General Richard Zahner, Casey's intelligence director, judged that Shi'a leaders such as Moqtada Sadr had "basically let JAM [Jaysh al-Mahdi] off the leash" and allowed Shi'a militants to indiscriminately attack Sunni mosques, Sunni citizens, and even anyone with a Sunni name. The

Shi'a attacks inevitably caused retaliatory violence from the Sunni population, creating a cycle of violence with significant momentum and inertia. In essence, "[it] grew to become a self-sustaining sectarian conflict," Zahner recalled.³⁶

Despite these unmistakable signs of civil war, less than a week after the mosque bombing, CJCS U.S. Marine General Peter Pace began using a refrain that would be repeated frequently in the coming months, remarking, "I think that the Iraqi people – Kurds, Shi'a, Sunni – walked up to the abyss, took the look in, didn't like what they saw, have pulled together, have pulled back from violence, and are working together to keep things calm and to find the right mix for their own government."³⁷ Casey adopted a similar tone in his press engagements and discussions with U.S. officials in Washington. Casey maintained that the level of violence had been overstated, recalling later that the phone calls from Sunni leaders on the night after the bombing were full of reports "all night long about militia here and militia there," but that when MNF-I had spent several days "going around trying to verify . . . stories about mosques being burned down all over Baghdad . . . you would go there and there would be a broken window and the mosque would be fine. . . . It was a hysterical period."³⁸ This downplaying of the attack's aftermath came through in a March 3 press briefing in which Casey reported that just 350 civilians had been killed in the days since the bombing and told reporters that "it appears the crisis has passed."³⁹ While Casey carefully caveated his conclusion with the comment that "Iraq is still not out of danger," his central message was that the situation was not dire and a civil war not imminent, a judgment he reprised on March 9 in prepared comments for congressional testimony.⁴⁰

Casey downplayed the violence in reports to senior U.S. leaders as well. In a March 10 briefing to Bush on "Post-Samarra Violence in Perspective," Casey noted that according to MNF-I statistics the number of attacks in the aftermath of the Samarra bombing was smaller than during the November 2004 Battle of Fallujah, the August 2004 Battle of Najaf, and each of the three election periods during 2005 (see Chart 9). "Overall attack levels are decreasing since the referendum and have held steady for the last four weeks," he reported.⁴¹ Aside from the day immediately following the attack, Casey informed the President that the "levels of violence did not increase substantially," and that "reporting [had] exaggerated the levels of violence and instability."⁴² Briefing Rumsfeld on the post-Samarra situation a few days later on March 22, Casey assessed that "Civil war in Iraq . . . is not imminent nor inevitable."⁴³ As in previous assessments, he emphasized that it was important to look at the bombing in the context of what, in his opinion, had been other darker periods that the 3-year mission had safely weathered. He added his opinion that "Iraq could not be 'pushed' into civil war as long as [coalition forces] remain in large numbers, ISF remains a national force, and ethnic groups support the political process."⁴⁴



**Chart 9. Post-Samarra Violence in Perspective:
MNF-I's Viewpoint, March 10, 2006.**

In an internal MNF-I discussion on March 31, Casey clarified that he defined the term “civil war” in Iraq as meaning “intense, sustained, (and) widespread ethno-sectarian violence across multiple provinces accompanied by collapse of the central authority and the ISF.”⁴⁵ Casey and his staff selected the American Civil War as the model by which to determine whether the crisis in Iraq had, in fact, become a civil war and, in Casey’s view, Iraq was nowhere near such a state. “There was no one seceding, there was no one trying to set up a different country or join Iran or Syria,” Casey’s chief of strategy pointed out years later. “[Even] the Kurds realized they needed to be part of a bigger Iraq.”⁴⁶ Casey and his advisers had set a high bar for describing Iraq’s violence as a civil war.

In retrospect, the difference between MNF-I’s appreciation of the immediate post-Samarra security situation and that of civilians and nongovernmental organizations is striking. To begin with, MNF-I’s statistics and those of civilian organizations were sharply at odds. For the period stretching from the bombing until March 3 in which Casey estimated 350 civilians had been killed, the Baghdad morgue recorded 1,300 deaths and the Ministry of the Interior cited 1,077 – indicating perhaps that the coalition had succumbed to limited situational awareness, but certainly indicating the coalition was not reconciling its reporting with that of civilian counterparts.⁴⁷ One potential reason for the divergence in estimates was that MNF-I was principally tracking only the attacks that it characterized as ethno-sectarian in nature. An April 10 information paper by MNF-I’s intelligence directorate stated that an attack was considered ethno-sectarian if “it is committed by individuals from one ethnic or religious group against individuals or symbols of a different ethnic or religious group, where difference in religion or ethnicity are a primary

motivation."⁴⁸ But because the coalition and Iraqi authorities often lacked evidence and basic information about the corpses in Baghdad's streets or floating in the Tigris River, determining whether the motivation of a murder or violent act was ethno-sectarian was highly subjective and erratic, a factor that almost certainly skewed MNF-I's statistics on civilian deaths.

Staying the Course at MNF-I

Casey and MNF-I remained on course after the Samarra bombing to continue the transition of security responsibility to the Iraqis. In Casey's regular updates to Washington, the post-Samarra violence did not figure significantly. Only two of the 25 videoconferences that Casey conducted with the President, SECDEF, or National Security Council between February 22 and the end of May addressed the attack or sectarian violence. By contrast, three briefings addressed the topic of accelerating the transition by further reducing U.S. brigades over the summer. In March, Casey reported to Rumsfeld that MNF-I was still on track to draw down from 15 BCTs to 10 by the end of 2006, and from 81 bases to around 50 in the same timeframe, indicating that the bombing had done little to alter his campaign plan.⁴⁹ However, the bombing had adjusted the plans that Casey and Rumsfeld had made in January to redeploy two brigades early. Now, after conducting the March force structure review, Casey recommended that 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard, would redeploy as planned in June and 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, would only be curtailed a month, redeploying in July.⁵⁰ While Casey reported that the December decision had yielded positive returns, citing a drop in attacks in Diyala where a brigade was off-ramped, he ultimately argued that it was "still too early to fully assess the impact of the December 2005 decision."⁵¹ With the updated plan, MNF-I would drop to 14 BCTs in June and to 13 by August.⁵² The precipitous drop was a result of MNF-I's 2005 decision to source only the 2006-2008 rotation with 13 total BCTs, meaning that when the 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard, left Multi-National Force-West (MNF-W) and the 1st Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, left Multi-National Division-Baghdad (MND-B), there would be no backfill for either unit.⁵³

The MNF-I high-value target list reflected this continuity in strategy as well. Despite considerable evidence of Shi'a death squads and militias stoking sectarian violence throughout 2005, and in the immediate aftermath of the bombing, MNF-I's list of the most wanted terrorists and insurgents remained almost exclusively Sunni. On the February 25, 2006, list, 12 of the 19 names were members of AQI or other affiliated jihadist organizations, and the top target was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri had dropped to number 19 on the list, one of only five former regime members still on the list. Tellingly, only two targets were associated with Shi'a organizations.⁵⁴

Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE

Even as MNF-I continued at the strategic level on its course of transition, drawdown, and consolidation, Casey and his commanders recognized that the violence in the Iraqi capital required a tactical response. On March 12, MNF-I launched Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE, a month-long U.S.-Iraqi effort to establish new fixed-checkpoints in and

between Baghdad's neighborhoods and to enforce curfews reminiscent of the Ba'athist regime's pre-2003 method of controlling the city's population.⁵⁵ To ensure that the operation could serve the additional purpose of demonstrating the Iraqi security forces' growing capability, MNF-I planned Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE collaboratively with Iraqi leaders and aimed to integrate U.S. and Iraqi units throughout the city, but with Iraqi units actually "in the lead" on the street. The fixed-checkpoints, which aimed to inhibit the freedom of movement of sectarian elements, were combined with raids to capture individuals suspected of conducting sectarian violence.⁵⁶ Two U.S. brigades, 4th Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, in east Baghdad and 4th Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, in central south Baghdad would support Iraqi-led operations on either side of the city. In southwest Baghdad, MNF-I committed one battalion from 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division, the "call forward force" that had been off-ramped in December from Iraq to Kuwait. At the same time, MNC-I moved one battalion from Colonel Michael Steele's 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, in Salahadin Province (MND-N) to east Baghdad, and one Marine battalion from RCT-5 to west Baghdad, bringing the total U.S. contingent for the operation to 10,000 troops.⁵⁷

The influx of U.S. troops into the Baghdad area was a partial reversal of the policy of shrinking the American footprint in the capital that Casey had been employing just weeks earlier. The MNF-I commander had previously aimed to starve U.S. units of troops, thereby forcing them to partner fully with their Iraqi counterparts, and to concentrate tactical units on the forward operating bases on the city's periphery. This approach had confounded many of Casey's tactical commanders, who had difficulty finding ways to tamp down the sectarian violence with diminishing resources at the same time they were instructed to distance themselves from the areas they were tasked to control. When Casey visited the 4th BCT, 101st Airborne Division, in east Baghdad on the day of the Samarra bombing, for example, brigade commander Colonel Thomas Vail complained that his transformed brigade was "stretched" as it tried to secure Sadr City's population of 3 million with 2 of its maneuver battalions missing. Casey responded that feeling stretched was "part of the plan."⁵⁸ As Casey told historians later, in his view, the only way to make an Army unit do less was to give it less with which to do the job.⁵⁹ This concept would shape much of MNF-I's response to the post-Samarra violence throughout the spring and summer of 2006.

For his part, Ja'afari committed to reinforce the initial footprint of 26,000 ISF with an additional 11,000 Iraqi troops.⁶⁰ However, in light of coalition commanders' concerns about the Interior Ministry's involvement in sectarian activity, the Commando and National Police Brigades would fall under the tactical control of U.S. brigade combat teams in order to restrain their ability to "conduct rogue operations."⁶¹ All told, the coalition and Iraqi leaders expected an operation involving 47,000 troops inside the city.

Meanwhile, 3 weeks after the spasm of killings that followed the shrine bombing, Casey began to reorient his headquarters to the new threat from death squads and "extra-judicial killings." On March 15, 3 days after the launch of Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE, Casey stood up a joint U.S.-Iraqi extrajudicial killing (EJK) task force inside the MNF-I headquarters to investigate sectarian violence and nominate targets that could be used to detain, prosecute, or neutralize those responsible.⁶² Even as the Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE checkpoints appeared around the city, there were plenty of killings for the EJK

task force to investigate. On March 21, Iraqi and U.S. officials estimated that almost 200 executed and tortured corpses had been found in Baghdad over the previous 2 weeks, a tripling of Baghdad's normal murder rate.⁶³ Five days later, U.S. and ISF troops found 30 beheaded bodies in Diyala Province.⁶⁴ On March 29, armed men in police uniforms – who were likely actually police – killed nine people in a raid in the Mansour neighborhood in west Baghdad. On the same day, gunmen abducted 35 Baghdadis in four separate mass kidnappings across the city, and Baghdad morgue officials reported that 30 to 40 dead bodies were found on the streets of the city each day.⁶⁵

Within 2 weeks of the launch of Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE, U.S. troops were noting large armed groups in the Baghdad region, a shift in tactics more akin to the 2004 uprisings than to the more shadowy militant posture of 2005. On March 25, a large gunfight erupted between JAM and Sunni fighters in the mixed-sect town of Mahmudiyah south of Baghdad, a rare force-on-force battle between militias that ended with an estimated 40 gunmen killed or wounded.⁶⁶ A day later, on March 26, a combined CJSOTF-Iraqi special operations raid on a JAM compound in Adhamiya resulted in 16 Sadrist militiamen killed.⁶⁷

The raid in Adhamiya, which had been launched to target the same sectarian forces responsible for killing ISOF soldiers earlier in the month, had serious political repercussions. In a display of their information operations savvy, less than an hour after the mission had concluded, the Sadrists had removed weapons from the site of the battle, repositioned militiamen's bodies to make it look like they had been executed in the midst of prayer, and released photos and a statement accusing the coalition and ISOF of massacring innocent Shi'a worshippers in a mosque.⁶⁸ Picked up by major press organizations, the photos created political shockwaves that reverberated back to Washington, with the SECDEF and the CJCS fielding questions about the operation. A 6-week investigation that involved the Iraqi Prime Minister's office and MNF-I ensued, with the special operators eventually cleared of any wrongdoing on the strength of recordings from helmet-mounted video cameras and a combat cameraman who accompanied the mission. However, the political damage had been done. CJSOTF missions against JAM death squads were essentially sidelined during the investigation, and when the CJSOTF proposed a comprehensive mission in late May that would simultaneously hit dozens of JAM targets from Basrah to Sadr City in one night, Casey decided that the missions would be conducted sequentially over a period of days instead, blunting their effect.⁶⁹

The sectarian violence taking place during Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE sometimes had political overtones as well. On April 7, three suicide bombers attacked the Buratha Mosque in west Baghdad, a Shi'a religious compound controlled by the senior Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq politician (and cleric) Jalaladin Saghir. Sunnis had long suspected Saghir, a former Badr Corps member, of operating Shi'a death squads out of the mosque complex, and the April 7 bombing appeared to target him specifically. Two of the bombers, dressed as women, detonated themselves among worshippers, but the third penetrated Saghir's office and almost killed Saghir himself. Altogether, their bombings killed 85 and wounded another 160.⁷⁰

One reason Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE failed to stem this kind of violence was that the ambitious plans for Iraqi security forces reinforcements and ISF-led operations in Baghdad did not happen. Only 2,000 of Ja'afari's promised 11,000 Iraqi troops ever

materialized, leaving the operation significantly under-resourced.⁷¹ Kurdish-led ISF brigades, in particular, did not respond to orders to deploy from northern Iraq to the capital, highlighting that the new Iraqi Army the coalition had built was not a national institution, but instead a force with many ethnically homogeneous or single-sect units that answered to political parties rather than the formal chain of command. The units that did deploy in Baghdad suffered from the same ghost soldier problem that coalition commanders had observed in the Iraqi Army and police in late 2005, the Iraqi units' real strength on Baghdad's streets was often significantly less than their strength on paper or in transition readiness assessment reports.

The performance of those Iraqi troops that were on the street was disappointing. Often relegated to duty at checkpoints, the ISF seldom left them, and the checkpoints themselves largely failed to limit the movement of insurgents or weapons. The Iraqi soldiers manning the Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE checkpoints tended to be "poorly equipped, undisciplined, [and] running around in their skivvies," MND-B Commander Major General James D. Thurman observed.⁷² Inspecting the checkpoints himself, the Iraqi minister of defense commented that the enemy would have to be quite bad not to be able to bypass or get through the barriers.⁷³ Meanwhile, Iraqi Army units that were well trained and capable often were restrained from operating against Shi'a death squads because of the political repercussions of taking on sectarians who were connected to major Iraqi political parties.

By the time Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE ended in mid-April, the number of civilian deaths in Baghdad each week had dropped to about 230, down from over 300 in the weeks following the Samarra bombing but still significantly higher than the December 2005 average of about 160.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, despite the still-elevated violence and the sobering performance of the ISF, Casey and his command judged that the situation in Baghdad had stabilized, at least temporarily.⁷⁵ MNF-I's April 15 assessment of the operations in Baghdad concluded that "Operations Scales of Justice and Northern Lights helped reduce the number of VBIED [vehicle-borne IED] and SVBIED/SVEST [suicide vehicle-borne IED/suicide vest] attacks in Baghdad. The nature of the violence changed as there is an increase in the small arms attacks but violence overall appears to be reduced since those operations started."⁷⁶ Attack levels, meanwhile, were "on the rise but have not reached the levels that occurred around the January 2005 election and the Referendum." Finally, rather than blaming the violence on a worsening sectarianism, the MNF-I assessment blamed the slow pace of the formation of the new government, concluding that "much of the increase in violence is likely due to the perceived instability of the government. This instability is exacerbated by the prolonged period of time that it is taking the government to form."⁷⁷ As had long been the case, MNF-I leaders hoped that the seating of the new democratically elected Iraqi Government would naturally encourage the warring parties to begin to resolve their problems politically.

"The Fundamental Nature of the Conflict had Changed"

Despite MNF-I's relatively positive pronouncements, and Casey's own, as Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE came to a close, the MNF-I commander's perspective on the post-Samarra environment was beginning to evolve, as was that of his senior subordinates. On

April 22, just a week after MNF-I had assessed Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE as a relative success, Casey's intelligence director, Zahner, told Casey and a gathering of coalition commanders that the post-Samarra period had witnessed "a shift in the nature of the struggle from a Sunni insurgency attempting to derail the political process and terminate an occupation to a competition among social and political leaders and their ethno-sectarian constituencies for economic power and political dominance."⁷⁸ The drivers of violence had shifted as well, Zahner concluded. Before Samarra, MNF-I had perceived most sectarian violence as a matter of tit-for-tat attacks in which the Badr Corps conducted targeted killings of individual Sunni figures, while Sunni militants carried out indiscriminate suicide attacks against the Shi'a population. However, after the bombing, Shi'a attacks against Sunnis had become indiscriminate as well, with JAM taking a much more prominent role by carrying out random sectarian killings against the Sunni population at large.⁷⁹ Iran's role in the sectarian violence also became clearer, with MNF-I concluding that "Iran is arming, training and financing Shi'a militant groups (especially Jaysh al Mahdi and Badr)."⁸⁰

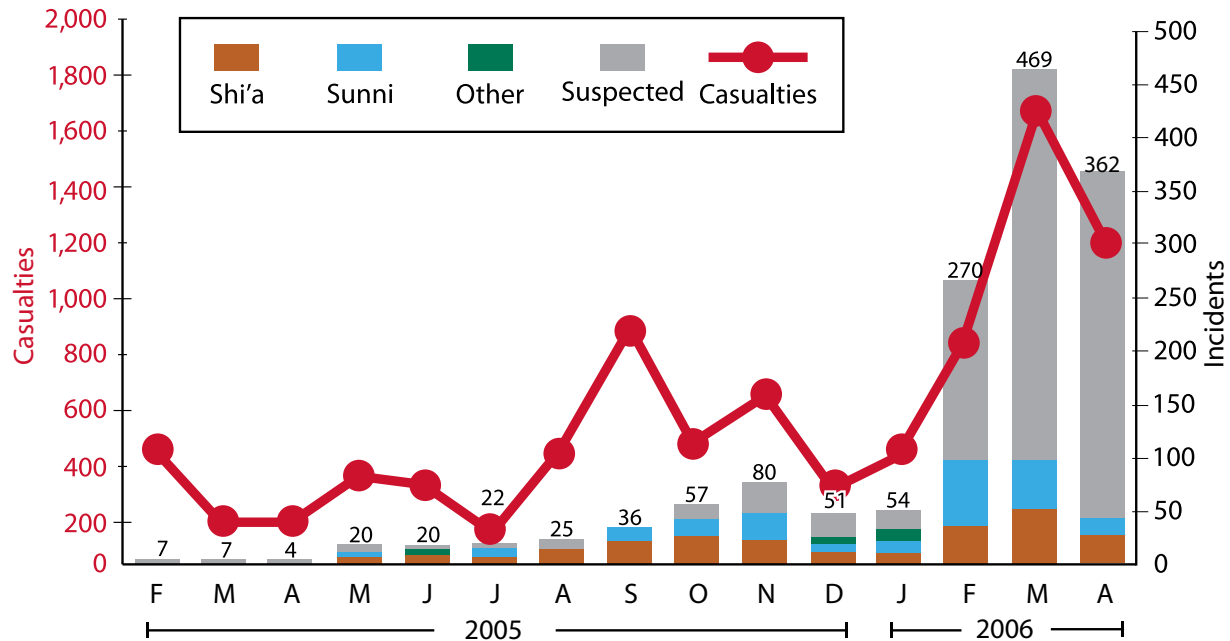


Chart 10. MNF-I Reporting on Monthly Ethno-Sectarian Incidents and Casualties as of April 2006.

Casey was coming to the even broader conclusion 2 months after the Samarra attack that the nature of the conflict, as he termed it, was changing. It was a proposition he had been pondering since before the shrine bombing, reflecting both his frustrations with the Ja'afari government and his recognition of the Sunni-supported AQI bombing campaign. A week before the attack, Casey had proffered to his subordinate commanders the idea that the Iraq conflict had become a fight for the division of power among competing ethnic and sectarian groups rather than an insurgency against the coalition.⁸¹ By late April, Casey's thinking on the question had crystallized. The war was a struggle for the

division of political and economic power by Iraqis, he told a gathering of U.S. generals on April 24, with four different groups driving the conflict: Iran, Shi'a extremists, secular Sunni resistance, and Sunni extremists.⁸² In this altered paradigm, fighting the coalition was no longer the central objective of the conflicting parties, and for the first time in the war, the U.S. theater command was acknowledging the powerful, destabilizing influence Iran and Shi'a extremists were having on the campaign.

Casey continued his analysis along these lines in discussions with Rumsfeld 2 days later. The nature of the violence had changed, he reported to the SECDEF. Since the Samarra incident, eight times more civilians were killed by execution or murder than by car bomb, a significant change since AQI's 2005 car-bomb campaign.⁸³ MNF-I was also showing a spike in the number of murders and executions, from 11 a day before the bombing to a high of 36 a day for the week of March 8-14. Casey remained hopeful that the escalating violence was only a short-term trend and noted that, for the week of April 13-20, the number of murders and executions had dropped to "only" 29 per day.⁸⁴

The updated campaign plan that Casey and MNF-I published on April 28 also reflected the change in the command's new understanding of the Iraqi environment. The April plan intended to lay out the coalition's activities throughout a 4-year period that would theoretically include the end of the MNF-I mission and a transition to "normal diplomatic and security relationships." But in a change from earlier campaign plans, the April version noted that the war had evolved from an insurgency directed against external actors (i.e., the coalition) into a conflict "between and among its ethnic and sectarian groups over the distribution of political and economic power," as evidenced by the "outpouring of rage and violence" following the Samarra attack.⁸⁵ Whereas coalition leaders had assumed in late 2004 and throughout 2005 that the Iraqi election process would naturally stabilize the country, the April 28 document declared instead that "voting in the elections has been substantially driven by ethnic and sectarian identity rather than by political issues, reflecting a polarized society which inhibits the creation of a stable, enduring, democratic state." For the first time, the MNF-I directive also identified militias, called extra-governmental armed groups, and ethno-sectarian violence as part of the overall threat to the coalition's mission.

Despite this dramatically changed analysis, coalition commanders did not believe the changing situation invalidated the core principle of previous campaign plans: that responsibility must be shifted to the Iraqis as quickly as possible in order to avoid continued Iraqi dependency and to minimize the buildup of opposition, or antibodies, against coalition forces. "Enduring strategic success will only be achieved by Iraqis; Iraq's problems require Iraqi solutions," the April 28 document stated. "We will succeed by increasingly putting Iraqis in charge across all lines of operations, moving to a supporting role, reducing our visibility and level of involvement, and by pressing them to address and resolve Iraqi problems with Iraqi resources."⁸⁶ In 2006 and 2007, the coalition would aim to foster the "formation of a government of national unity" in order to "address those conditions that have the potential to push Iraq into a civil war." At the same time, the coalition would "progressively transition battle space to the IA [Iraqi Army]," prepare Iraqi police to "begin assuming the lead role in combatting the insurgency," and mentor the new government so that its ministries and institutions would "begin to develop the skills to govern effectively."⁸⁷ The coalition would also carry on with its attempts to persuade

Sunni insurgents to eschew violence in favor of politics: "Coalition outreach to Sunni Arabs will continue to stress that the political process offers the best hope for resolution of their legitimate concerns. The involvement of Sunni Arabs in the political process at all levels will be essential."⁸⁸

Finally, abandoning the 2005 emphasis on reestablishing control over the borders in order to interdict what Casey and others had assumed to be the external accelerants of the conflict, the April plan declared that "Baghdad's significance as the seat of government and crucible of sectarian strife makes it the coalition main effort for 2006."⁸⁹ In addition to Baghdad, the MNF-I plan identified nine cities of strategic significance where the coalition would consolidate its presence and focus on developing capable Iraqi forces to assume responsibility for security: Najaf, Ramadi, Baqubah, Babil (Hillah), Fallujah, Samarra, Kirkuk, Mosul, and Basrah.⁹⁰

Casey later explained his rationale for maintaining the core principles of previous campaign plans, noting that the Samarra bombing:

didn't cause me to go back and question the fundamental underpinning of our campaign plan, which was that Iraqi success in the long term will only be achieved by Iraqis. My view then and my view continues to be now that they had to work through these sectarian problems. It wasn't going to be pretty as they worked their way through them; but they had to solve them, they had to get to the bottom of them, and we could only help them get through this period.⁹¹

THE "YEAR OF THE POLICE"

The disappointing performance of the Iraqi security forces in Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE and the immediate aftermath of the Samarra bombing showed that they were far from ready to take the level of responsibility that coalition leaders had hoped they would shoulder in 2006. MNF-I and MNSTC-I had begun the year with a set of plans to make 2006 the "Year of the Police," in which the coalition would place special emphasis on building the capabilities of the Interior Ministry's local police and border troops. Thus, they could eventually take over internal security duties from the Army, as Colonel William Hix's 2005 Counterinsurgency Survey had recommended and as Casey and other commanders believed was necessary for the long-term success of the counterinsurgency effort. Three weeks before the Samarra bombing, MNSTC-I had given Casey a plan for "accelerating the Year of the Police," noting that the goal of the enhanced effort was to reach Transition Readiness Assessment level 2 for police stations, which would "[equal] transition and coalition forces off ramping."⁹² To get the Iraqi police to this level, MNSTC-I would discard its Police Partnership Program in favor of more robust mentoring. Using the special police and military transition team programs as a model, MNSTC-I would create police transition teams (PTTs) that would eventually place coalition advisers in nearly 200 provincial, district, and local police stations with the goal of improving community policing in the 10 "strategic cities" identified in MNF-I's campaign plan.⁹³

On the ground, the police transition teams would be built around MNSTC-I's 500 international police liaison officers (IPLO), civilian police professionals from around the world who had volunteered to mentor the Iraqi police. Most of these police professionals were either contractors with former law enforcement experience, or traffic police or other

local law enforcement officers seconded by their governments. Few, if any, were paramilitary police units such as the Italian Carabinieri or the French Gendarmes. MNSTC-I's previous experiences with the international officers had shown that the program tended to be ineffective because the lightly armed officers with no military training rarely left the safety of coalition forward operating bases. However, under the new PTT concept, the liaison officers were paired with interpreters and a military police squad that would allow the IPLOs to move more freely and interact with the Iraqi police whose capability they were supposed to be building.⁹⁴ To meet this increased requirement for military police, MNF-I requested an additional five military police companies to join the two brigades already deployed for the mission. The arrival of nearly a brigade's worth of National Guard military police made the total in-theater military police contingent an extremely large one for the Army's low-density military police corps, but also made it possible for the first time for the coalition to place transition teams with local police and not just the special police. At the same time, to restore the crumbling local police stations, MNSTC-I would oversee \$425 million in building and renovation contracts. This effort was complicated because many police stations were merely leased from private owners who, in some cases, took advantage of the upgrading of their property to raise the rent, sell the renovated facilities, or release them to higher-paying tenants.⁹⁵

Like the local police, the Interior Ministry's Department of Border Enforcement would receive heightened MNSTC-I attention in 2006 as well. The plan to grow the number of border transition teams (BTTs) from 15 to 26 was adjusted to reflect heightened concerns with Iranian malevolence.⁹⁶ Because a steady drumbeat of intelligence in late 2005 and early 2006 had warned of Iranian involvement in explosively formed penetrators (EFP) smuggling and sectarian violence, MNF-I and MNSTC-I leaders decided that most of the new BTTs would deploy to the Iranian border, previously largely without any coalition presence, though the new teams would not be in place until the spring.⁹⁷

As these initiatives were getting underway, MNSTC-I and the Interior Ministry consolidated the originally Sunni-majority Special Police and the Shi'a-majority Public Order Brigades in April 2006, shortly after their lackluster performance in Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE. The amalgamated police units were rebranded as "National Police" brigades, with each of the two formerly separate elements forming a National Police division headquarters under the Ministry of the Interior.⁹⁸ In mute testimony to the increasingly dangerous security environment, MNSTC-I decided to outfit the National Police units with heavy weapons such as RPK and PKM machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, an effort that paralleled a similar program to issue each Iraqi Army battalion eight mortars, eight DShK heavy machine guns, 10 SVD sniper rifles, and 10 RPGs.⁹⁹

These new armaments for the National Police and Iraqi Army represented a further reversal of the coalition's original 2004 plan not to provide heavy weapons to Iraq's security forces. They also highlighted an underlying conundrum that had bedeviled the coalition's advisory mission from the start. On one hand, MNSTC-I and MNF-I planners intended that the Iraqi police would eventually perform the true rule of law functions of a democracy: investigations, arrests, and processing the accused through a criminal justice system. On the other hand, realists in both headquarters knew that such techniques were not what Iraq needed in the midst of an insurgency and intense civil violence. Providing Iraqi police units with only handcuffs, Glock pistols, and fingerprinting kits was likely

to result in dead policemen. As a result, the coalition was effectively training and equipping the police as paramilitaries capable of conducting counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations, a fact at cross purposes with the goal of creating police on the beat performing rule of law functions.

The addition of transition teams for the local police and border forces added to the already complicated picture of provincial reconstruction teams (PRT), special police transition teams (SPTT), military transition teams (MiTT), and several varieties of special operations forces deployed across Iraq. In theory, these elements would follow the guidance of battle space-owning commanders and synchronize their activities with the commander's intent. However, in reality, the growing array of advisory organizations made maintaining unity of effort within the coalition's brigade and division areas of responsibility even more difficult than before.

THE RETURN OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL PETER W. CHIARELLI

Amid the escalating sectarian violence and new campaign plan of spring 2006, most of the U.S. tactical units and their headquarters were rotating out of the country, meaning



U.S. Army photo by Specialist Kelly McDowell (Released).

**Lieutenant General Peter W. Chiarelli,
Commanding General,
V Corps/MNC-I.¹⁰¹**

that in many places newly arrived units were the ones dealing with the deteriorating security situation. In January, Thurman's 4th Infantry Division took over responsibility for Baghdad from Major General William "Fuzzy" Webster and the 3d Infantry Division. In late February, Major General Richard Zilmer and I MEF replaced Major General Richard Huck's II MEF as the headquarters for MNF-W. Unlike previous Marine rotations, the I MEF headquarters was restructured so that the 1st Marine Division headquarters did not have to deploy, thereby reducing redundancy in the Marine command structure as well as the number of Marines deployed.¹⁰⁰ In a break with Marine doctrine, for the first time in the war, a MEF would directly command two Marine RCTs and an Army BCT without any intermediate layer of command. Also in February, Colonel Sean MacFarland's 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, a legacy brigade, replaced Colonel H. R. McMaster's 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment in Tel Afar.

Within this series of handovers, Lieutenant General John Vines and his XVIII Airborne Corps relinquished duties as MNC-I to Lieutenant General Peter Chiarelli and V Corps on January 19. Chiarelli's return to Iraq came little more than a year after leaving Baghdad as commander of the Army's 1st Cavalry

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Division and handing responsibility for the city to Webster and the 3d Infantry Division. Chiarelli had left Baghdad in early 2005 deeply concerned that the U.S. Army's culture was leading its tactical units to take far too violent an approach to their operations and to view their role too narrowly in the fluid counterinsurgency campaign. In Chiarelli's judgment, it was fairly easy for U.S. brigades to focus on the security component of the campaign, especially the capturing and killing of the armed resistance. However, he believed an overreliance on this approach was unnecessarily fueling the insurgency. In a widely circulated *Military Review* article in summer 2005, Chiarelli voiced his frustration along with his prescription that the Army should embrace the full spectrum of operations. "It is no longer sufficient to think in purely kinetic terms," he wrote, "executing traditionally focused combat operations and concentrating on training local security forces works, but only for the short term. In the long term, doing so hinders true progress and, in reality, promotes the growth of insurgent forces working against campaign objectives. It is a lopsided approach."¹⁰²

Arriving in Baghdad in January 2006, Chiarelli set about establishing a "focus on improving Iraqis' quality of life," emphasizing more precise and measured kinetic responses, the improvement of economic conditions, and the provision of basic services to the Iraqi population.¹⁰³ As he published his first MNC-I operations order in April, he also encouraged his units to reduce what he saw as their overreliance on raids and to focus more on the non-lethal methods he believed would lead to more enduring results.¹⁰⁴ Echoing the approach he had taken as MND-B commander when he organized his division to deliver "SWET" (sewer, water, electricity, and trash) services, Chiarelli aimed to have MNC-I's political and economic development efforts catch up with its security efforts. It was a sharp break from previous commanders who had accepted the importance of pursuing all the lines of effort but had generally believed that putting money or effort into political and economic development before the security situation had stabilized was folly. Chiarelli, by contrast, believed that the fastest way to stabilize the security situation was through economic development. "It is absolutely ludicrous, this concept that somehow you have to get to that level of security that will allow commerce to occur," he told reporters in mid-2006.¹⁰⁵

In his first few months in command, Chiarelli became more certain that the Army's culture required adjustment toward the non-kinetic factors of counterinsurgency. He was cognizant of the increasing sectarian violence in spring 2006, but also convinced that U.S. units' missteps were contributing to the insurgency and violence, particularly in escalation of force incidents in which a perceived threat to coalition troops resulted in the death or injury of civilians. Chiarelli's headquarters monitored these incidents closely, and Chiarelli himself believed that decreasing the number of escalation of force incidents was not only a moral imperative but also a necessary step that would stop some Iraqis from joining the insurgency.¹⁰⁶ A study on such incidents commissioned by Chiarelli immediately after he arrived validated his suspicions, concluding that "CF [Coalition Forces] escalation of force casualties against Iraqi civilian population far exceed the threat posed by them."¹⁰⁷ The study also found that 81 percent of escalation of force incidents occurred during coalition force movement under conditions that gave Soldiers and Marines very little time — often only seconds — to make life-and-death decisions on whether approaching Iraqis were a threat.¹⁰⁸ As a result, most escalation of force incidents resulted in

coalition forces firing on Iraqi civilians: of the 4,492 incidents recorded between January 2005 and January 2006, only 67 (1.5 percent) actually involved insurgent attacks.¹⁰⁹ Convinced that some units were acting too aggressively, Chiarelli was predisposed to react strongly when, over the first few months of his command, allegation after allegation of violations of the laws of armed conflict and the rules of engagement landed on his desk.

The Hadithah Killings

Barely a month after taking command and just as sectarian violence was about to escalate in central Iraq, Chiarelli was confronted with evidence supporting his belief that systemic problems in U.S. military culture were creating an overemphasis on kinetic operations. When Chiarelli learned that *Time Magazine* planned to report allegations that Marines had deliberately killed 24 civilians in Hadithah the previous November, Chiarelli quickly opened an investigation, which was initiated on February 12. The allegations were disturbing, and Chiarelli judged that, if true, they had the potential to do as much damage to the coalition's interests as the Abu Ghraib scandal. The story did not take long to emerge under investigation. In the aftermath of an improvised explosive device (IED) attack that destroyed a High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) and killed a Marine, the remainder of the Marine squad killed the occupants of a passing civilian vehicle and then systematically cleared nearby buildings, using grenades for forced entry and shooting the unarmed civilian residents in the head, chest, and back.¹¹⁰ None of those killed had been found with weapons, and the dead included elderly Iraqis, 76- and 66-years-old, and children, 3-, 4-, 5-, 10-, and 15-years-old.

The initial MNC-I investigation, completed on March 9, highlighted "inadequate and untimely" reporting of the killings through the chain of command, which led Chiarelli to open a second investigation and refer the case to the Naval Criminal Investigative Service based on the possibility of criminal misconduct.¹¹¹ The initial Marine report of the incident filed in November had been highly inaccurate, blaming the IED blast for the deaths of 15 civilians and indicating that eight insurgents had been killed in the aftermath of the ambush, despite considerable evidence to the contrary. An Army Regulation (AR) 15-6 investigation by Major General Eldon Bargewell, MNF-I's director of operations, completed on June 15, did not find evidence that the Marine chain of command had attempted to cover up the incident. However, it did conclude that Marine leaders had displayed a lack of interest in investigating the massacre and had created an atmosphere in which "civilian casualties, even in significant numbers, [were viewed] as routine and as the natural and intended result of insurgent tactics."¹¹² Bargewell determined that the Marines' training on the rules of engagement (ROE) and the law of armed conflict (LOAC) had been adequate, but that the command climate from platoon through MNF-W levels "may not have consistently or professionally encouraged the disciplined application of ROE and LOAC."¹¹³ He also recommended that "the USMC [should] determine if the command climate and philosophy of RCT-2 and subordinate units could have been a contributing factor in the misapplication of tactical firepower" during the Hadithah incident.¹¹⁴

While Chiarelli and his command were still digesting the initial Hadithah inquiry and initiating a formal investigation into the incident, similar crises were developing elsewhere. On April 26, in Hamdaniyah, seven Marines and a Navy corpsman from 3d

Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, allegedly executed an Iraqi civilian and placed an AK47 and shovel next to his body to provide justification for the shooting.¹¹⁵ By June 21, the week after Bargewell completed his Hadithah report, those involved in the execution were charged with murder, kidnapping, conspiracy, larceny, and providing false official statements.¹¹⁶

General Chiarelli and Colonel Steele

The next incident occurred on May 9 during the 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division's Operation IRON TRIANGLE near Muthana in Salahadin Province, in which members of Company C, 3d Battalion, 187th Infantry Regiment, executed three detainees and tried to cover up the killings. The ensuing investigation raised questions in the mind of Chiarelli about the command climate and the aggressiveness of the entire brigade. The commander of that brigade, Colonel Michael Steele, had commanded a Ranger company during the "Black Hawk Down" battle in Mogadishu in 1993, and from that experience, he had drawn the lesson that his Soldiers above all else must be prepared to fight a determined enemy. Steele had employed this lesson during his brigade's predeployment training, emphasizing the skills necessary to kill the enemy and offering unit commemorative coins to Soldiers who had achieved confirmed "kills" of insurgents.¹¹⁷ Steele had also banned the practice of firing warning shots, a decision which stood in contravention of the rules of engagement for the Iraq theater of operations.¹¹⁸ As investigators delved into the Company C incident, they discovered that members of the company had kept a running tally of the number of kills they had accumulated and that other Iraqi civilians had been killed during the operation.¹¹⁹



Command Sergeant Major Comacho (left), Colonel Steele (right). Source: U.S. Army photo by Captain Amy Bishop, 133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment (Released).

Command Sergeant Major Vincent Comacho and Colonel Steele of 3d Brigade, 101st Airborne Division.¹²⁰

For Chiarelli, the most significant element of the case was the investigation's revelation that, in briefing his unit immediately before Operation IRON TRIANGLE, Steele had told his troops that all the military-aged males on a small portion of the operation's objective were to be considered enemy combatants and therefore could be killed without the step of positively identifying an enemy posing a threat. Chiarelli feared that Steele's guidance reflected broader problems within the brigade and that Steele's command climate had contributed to wanton killings. Steele had based his justification on an interpretation of the ROE that allowed enemy personnel that had been declared enemy combatants, including AQI, to be killed simply based on their status, regardless of whether they were making hostile acts. This was the same ROE, for example, that the coalition had applied after declaring JAM enemy combatants during the 2004 uprisings. Steele had applied his ROE interpretation to the portion of his brigade's objective in which intelligence reports indicated that enemy personnel from AQI were present. But MNC-I investigators concluded later that this interpretation had confused many of the Soldiers and leaders in the assault force, who concluded that the entire operation was being conducted according to status-based rules allowing enemy personnel to be shot on sight. The MNC-I investigation also concluded that Steele's interpretation had been reached "after a tortured and convoluted reading of the ROE."¹²¹ However, a parallel investigation by the 101st Airborne Division into the brigade's command climate diverged from MNC-I's assessment, concluding that:

although the command climate had the potential to contribute to a 3 BCT soldier being more likely to use deadly force in a situation where he or she is authorized to do so under the applicable ROE [Rules of Engagement], it is apparent that the brigade commander's comments and actions did not result in a command climate that encouraged illegal, wanton, or superfluous killing. Some 3 BCT officers, however, clearly felt that it did.¹²²

After reviewing these opposing viewpoints, Chiarelli concluded that Steele's command climate had contributed to the incident, and the MNC-I commander ordered the Criminal Investigation Division to open an investigation of Steele on charges of dereliction of duty, obstruction of justice, and making a false official statement.¹²³ Contributing to Chiarelli's decision was an MNC-I review that determined that of MNC-I's 14 brigades, Steele's brigade had produced the most friendly fire incidents (instances in which U.S. troops fired on other U.S. forces or Iraqi forces) and second-most civilian casualties, resulting in 15 investigations in less than 6 months.¹²⁴

From Steele's perspective, a series of early interactions with Chiarelli had already gone badly, leaving the MNC-I commander with a negative picture of Steele and his brigade. Most significantly, as U.S. leaders hailed the first meeting of the newly elected Council of Representatives on March 16, that political news had been overshadowed by international coverage of a combined air assault that Steele and his brigade had conducted with Iraqi troops in Salahadin Province that morning. Operation SWARMER, as Steele's brigade had called it, was the largest air assault mission since the beginning of the war, with almost 2,000 Soldiers from the 3d Brigade, along with hundreds of Iraqi troops, assaulting into a 26-kilometer-by-14-kilometer square area near Samarra in search of insurgents and weapons caches just as the new Parliament was being seated.¹²⁵ A senior officer later recalled that Chiarelli, upon learning of the mission, angrily commented, "The President

just called me up and wanted to know what SWARMER was and how come it was the lead in the paper."¹²⁶ Frustrated by the lack of information operations coordination that created a distraction from the more strategically significant political events in the capital, Chiarelli and other senior coalition leaders in Baghdad had angrily reproached Steele. The perplexed Steele had replied that no one had warned him to delay operations during the opening of the Parliament and that his operation had been a combined U.S.-Iraqi operation acting on information that Zarqawi himself might be present in the area.¹²⁷

After receiving the Operation IRON TRIANGLE and command climate investigation reports a few weeks later, Chiarelli initially decided to relieve Steele for what he considered an "unacceptable command climate" and for what Chiarelli considered Steele's failure to report the suspected killings when he first learned about the incident. The relief action progressed far enough that MNC-I drafted a press release on what would have been the first removal of a U.S. brigade commander in Iraq.¹²⁸ But after MNC-I's legal experts did not recommend relief, Chiarelli settled on issuing a general officer letter of reprimand for creating a command climate "where irresponsible behavior appears to have been allowed to go unchecked."¹²⁹ Part of Chiarelli's motivation for punishing Steele was to deliver a message to the force. A senior Chiarelli aide later recalled, "I think the way that he reprimanded Colonel Steele he thought was both appropriate from a military discipline point of view, but also from the point of view of signaling to the rest of the force the organizational impact. That [doing] this was not okay, and this is not how we should be doing business."¹³⁰

The Weight of MNC-I's Investigations

While Chiarelli was still fully engaged in the investigations of Operation IRON TRIANGLE and Colonel Steele, yet another incident came to light. The event had originally happened on March 12 when four Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, raped, murdered, and burned the body of a 14-year-old Iraqi girl and then killed the remainder of her family in Yusufiyah, a rural town south of Baghdad. The crime would finally become known in June when insurgents captured and executed two Soldiers from the same unit in apparent retribution for the murders.

Faced with successive alleged incidents of crimes by his own troops, Chiarelli decided to invest a significant amount of his time and energy into their investigations and consequence management. The MNC-I commander himself spent nearly 30 days reviewing and studying the incidents and personally presented the Hadithah report to Casey during a 2-hour briefing in July. The incident warranted his personal attention, Chiarelli later recalled, because:

... looking back at [Lieutenant General] Sanchez's issue with Abu Ghraib . . . I did not want to be put into the position that I think Sanchez was put into. He basically took recommendations from a written report that he did not have the time to sit down and read. So I looked at all of the evidence, rightfully or wrongfully. . . . I was doing that to protect General Casey to make sure that this thing got a thorough review by everyone and we did not just sign off on it.¹³¹

Yet the investigations would reveal a philosophical fault line between Casey and Chiarelli. As the investigations mounted, Casey concluded that Chiarelli was spending too

much time personally focusing on them, given the breadth of his responsibilities as MNC-I commander. Like Chiarelli, Casey believed the incidents were morally reprehensible and should be investigated and prosecuted fully, but he did not share Chiarelli's judgment that the problems with interpreting the rules of engagement cut deeply or systematically across the force. Nor did he agree with Chiarelli's view that the incidents were having a significant impact on the coalition campaign.¹³² Instead, Casey became concerned about the potential impact the investigations were having on the vast majority of Soldiers and Marines who were conducting their operations professionally. "There was a constant patter about why were there so many investigations," Casey recalled later. "The troops and the captains were saying, 'what the heck, everything we do gets investigated'."¹³³ The two commanders' sharp differences of opinion came to a head during Chiarelli's presentation of the conclusions of the Hadithah investigations, with Casey venting his frustration about his subordinate's focus, according to Chiarelli's recollection.¹³⁴

The investigations and MNC-I's responses to them also revealed deep philosophical fault lines about the proper conduct of the war, with the operational-level command on one side and some tactical units such as the 101st Airborne Division on the other. "The story of Colonel Steele and Operation Iron Triangle is about a fundamental difference of opinion about how to prosecute the war in Iraq," Brigadier General Michael Oates, one of the 101st's assistant division commanders, noted later.¹³⁵ Many of the 101st leaders believed Chiarelli's emphasis on restraint at the tactical level simply did not make sense in the less urbanized, insurgent strongholds in northern Iraq. They had bristled during Chiarelli's initial visit to the 101st headquarters in Tikrit in late January, when the MNC-I commander had, among other things, discouraged the division from using artillery counterfire against insurgents firing mortars and argued that it was counterproductive in civilian areas. The interaction had left Oates and other 101st leaders convinced that Chiarelli did not appreciate the character of the conflict in Tikrit, Samarra, and other areas that had been the heart of Saddam's regime.¹³⁶ For his part, Chiarelli was convinced that "there was a cultural issue as the Army was struggling to understand [the] nonlinear battlefield. . . . They did not understand the balance of kinetics and non-kinetics and how it could change things."¹³⁷

To win in Iraq, Chiarelli believed he had to adjust U.S. units' ingrained focus on killing the enemy, which he considered a vestige from the Cold War era of interstate conflict unsuited to an environment where identifying the enemy was extremely challenging, and the reality of who was actively fighting on the side of the insurgents seemed to change on a near-daily basis. In Steele, the MNC-I commander believed he recognized the diametrically opposite view, and Steele agreed. In Steele's view, Chiarelli's emphasis on reconstruction was "a fundamental failure to understand the threat in Iraq. . . . We will never win [Iraqis'] hearts and minds. We are fundamentally in tension with their culture. And we can give them every dime of taxpayer money, we can build them every project in the world, and we will still not win their hearts and minds."¹³⁸ For Steele and those who shared his views, presence patrols and reconstruction projects would not solve Iraq's problems, and they argued instead that aggressively pursuing and killing enemy organizations "led to fewer dead Americans" and greater operational success.¹³⁹

By late spring 2006, Chiarelli had decided to take broad steps to suppress the point of view that Steele represented. Under Chiarelli's guidance, MNC-I began using the Army Criminal Investigation Division to investigate escalation of force incidents, with a view

to reduce those incidents by restraining liberal interpretations of the ROE. In cases where Criminal Investigations Division investigators believed they had discovered credible information that Soldiers had committed a crime, those individuals were “titled,” a process that involved Soldiers or leaders having their fingerprints collected, their mugshots taken, and their names added to the Defense Clearance and Investigations Index and Army Crime Records Center databases, where they would remain for a span of 40 years regardless of the investigation’s eventual outcome.¹⁴⁰ The measure appeared to some subordinate commanders to be heavy-handed because the databases were often used in civilian employment decisions, military promotion and selection boards, and clearance reviews.

At the same time, Chiarelli directed all MNC-I units to conduct reinforcement training on what he considered the core warrior values, changed the procedures for following up on events that triggered command notifications, and prohibited use of the term “military-aged males” because it could desensitize U.S. troops “to the distinction between insurgents and male noncombatants.”¹⁴¹ In writing to Marine leaders in the wake of the Hadithah investigation, Chiarelli also recommended a broader counterinsurgency training regimen, noting that units “were very comfortable with kinetic operations, but less so with the complexities of counterinsurgency operations, in which the support of the population is essential to success.”¹⁴² Inside Iraq, MNC-I’s core warrior values training reflected Chiarelli’s concerns that a small number of individuals were tarnishing the reputation and the accomplishments of the broader coalition through criminal acts and violations of the laws of war. This group, Chiarelli believed, tended to view every Iraqi as the enemy, contemptuously refer to them by names such as “Hajji,” and to presume “that because we are at war, the rules that normally govern their conduct don’t apply.”¹⁴³ The MNC-I training packet included discussions of military values and integrity as well as training vignettes that covered different situations coalition members might encounter. While several of the scenarios covered innocuous subjects such as whether to handcuff a detainee in front of his family or the use of female Soldiers to search female Iraqis, one of the training scenarios was a close approximation of the Hadithah incident in which a unit, having taken casualties in an IED attack, had to respond to its leader’s pronouncement, “I think the guy in the window with the phone is the trigger man. Engage him.”¹⁴⁴ Participants were then quizzed about what they would do in such a situation, with attached teaching points emphasizing that immediately engaging was wrong, and stressing the ROE and the requirement to positively identify targets as threats before engaging all part of Chiarelli’s objective of rebalancing the kinetic and non-kinetic activities of many Army and Marine units.¹⁴⁵

THE NURI AL-MALIKI GOVERNMENT

As the coalition struggled internally with the question of their forces’ tactical posture, Iraqi politicians jockeyed for position in the process of forming the new Iraqi Government in the aftermath of the December 2005 elections. Many American officials had hoped that Adel Abdel Mahdi, the senior SCIRI candidate, would secure the Shi’a UIA bloc’s nomination for Prime Minister. However, in a secret ballot of UIA Members of Parliament on February 12, he lost by one vote (64 to 63) to Ibrahim al-Ja’afari, who benefited from the support of the 30 Sadrist Members of Parliament.¹⁴⁶ After the political turmoil

and sectarian infiltration of the government that had occurred under Ja'afari's year-long premiership, however, U.S. leaders were unwilling to support his return. Kurdish parties and powerful Shi'a politicians joined the United States in opposition to Ja'afari's candidacy, creating an extended lame-duck period that frustrated Iraqis and coalition leaders alike.¹⁴⁷ The hiatus between governments effectively froze coalition efforts to improve the Iraqi political environment and the capacity of the government, with "no focus and reform of ministries [and] no purging" of sectarian actors, as MNF-I intelligence director Zahner later termed it.¹⁴⁸



Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki (left) and Ninawa Governor Kashmoula (right). Source: U.S. Army photo by Sergeant Dennis Gravelle, 138th Public Affairs Detachment (Released).

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki Arrives at Forward Operating Base Diamondback in Mosul with Ninawa Governor Duraid Kashmoula.¹⁴⁹

The frustration in Iraq's political stagnation reached to the highest levels of the U.S. Government. On March 25, Bush wrote a letter to Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, at least in part with the hopes that the Shi'a leader could spur the government formation process along. After praising Sistani's restraint in the wake of the Samarra bombing, President Bush emphasized what he viewed as joint Iraqi-American goals, writing:

Like you, I am deeply concerned about the slow pace of government formation and hope for rapid progress in the coming days. . . . Working together, we want to help build a democracy that respects the principles of majority rule with a respect for minority rights, as provided in Iraq's constitution. Iraq needs a strong, effective Prime Minister to lead it at this turning point in history. . . . Iraq needs

a Prime Minister who can unite the nation . . . we would not support a Prime Minister who cannot garner the necessary support across communities to meet the constitution's requirements and thus would not be capable of leading a united Iraq.¹⁵⁰

Bush concluded his letter hoping that Sistani would use his influence to encourage Iraq's leaders to take brave and decisive steps to demonstrate their commitment to a strong, unified Iraq.¹⁵¹

On April 20, Ja'afari finally acceded to the pressure to give up his candidacy and placed his support behind Nuri al-Maliki, a senior leader in Ja'afari's Da'wa Party whom Khalilzad had quietly encouraged to seek the premiership.¹⁵² Two days later, Parliament took the required first step of electing a president—Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader Jalal Talabani—and two vice presidents, paving the way for Maliki's nomination as Prime Minister.¹⁵³ When the UIA took another vote for premier after Ja'afari's withdrawal, Maliki defeated Mahdi by the same 64 to 63 vote that Ja'afari had won 10 weeks earlier, with the same Sadrist support.

Nuri al-Maliki grew up in a small, middle-class neighborhood near Karbala, 121 kilometers south of Baghdad.¹⁵⁴ He was heavily influenced by his grandfather, a tribal leader and Shi'a cleric who participated in Iraq's 1920 uprising against the British; and his father, an Arab nationalist who sided with the military against the Ba'ath Party after the 1963 coup.¹⁵⁵ After earning a bachelor's degree in theology and a master's degree in Arabic, Maliki worked in the government education department in Hillah and had convinced the department's senior Ba'ath Party officials that he was a Ba'athist sympathizer, even as he secretly worked within the outlawed Da'wa Party.¹⁵⁶ He had joined the Da'wa Party in 1970 and remained a member as Saddam cracked down on the party in the mid-1970s. When the crackdown intensified at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, Maliki fled to Syria, where he established a network of Da'wa activists from Iran to Beirut.¹⁵⁷ He left Syria for Iran in order to fight against the Iraqi regime in 1982 but eventually returned to Syria to oversee the Da'wa Party newspaper published there and to become an important political operative. In Damascus, he formed close ties to the Syrian regime of Hafez al-Assad, including to Assad's senior security strategist, Mohammed Nasif Khayr-Bayk, and reportedly took part in planning militant operations focused on assassinating Saddam.¹⁵⁸ Following the U.S. invasion, Maliki returned to Iraq, where he became a senior Da'wa Party Member of Parliament.

On May 20, the Iraqi Parliament approved Maliki's premiership and a council of ministers that included 8 Sunnis, 7 Kurds, 21 Shi'a, and 1 Christian.¹⁵⁹ With a parliamentary support base composed of more Sadrists (30) than members of his own Da'wa Party (28), Maliki found himself reliant on Moqtada Sadr first to form and then to maintain a government. As a result, the Sadrists gained cabinet posts as the Ministers of Health, Transportation, and Agriculture.¹⁶⁰ The Sadrists' powerful role within Maliki's cabinet would have far-reaching effects, as even the hint of support for coalition operations against Shi'a militias could result in Maliki's ruling coalition falling apart.

Coalition leaders, however, welcomed Maliki's accession to the premiership enthusiastically, judging him a welcome change from the indecisive, sectarian Ja'afari. Maliki "said all the right things," British Ambassador William Patey recalled. "He was leading a government of national unity. They agreed to a national programme in May. It was based

on national reconciliation, national recovery, international engagement. He said all the right things about inclusion . . . we were quite encouraged by his steps and initial statements."¹⁶¹ Casey, Khalilzad, and other American leaders believed that Maliki's government of "national unity" could finally take action against the violence being carried out by sectarian actors both inside and outside the government. For MNF-I leaders, Maliki's nomination in late April signaled that the coalition's troop drawdown plan could remain on track. On May 1, Casey reported to Rumsfeld that the "breakthrough in the formation of the Iraqi Government, coupled with the continuing development of the Iraqi Security Forces, sets the conditions to go forward with the next force structure step . . . [an off-ramp of two BCTs that] will result in 3,800 troops not deploying to Iraq."¹⁶²

Casey later described the heady time of the government formation as a "false bump." At the tactical level, the situation continued to deteriorate as the Iraqi political parties formed their unity government. On May 10, the newly elected President Talabani announced that 1,091 civilians had been killed in Baghdad in April, a sign that the burst of killings following the Samarra bombing had not dissipated at all.¹⁶³ Two weeks later, the Iraqi Government arrested 42 soldiers from the Iraqi Army's 16th Brigade in the Dora neighborhood of Baghdad who had effectively become a Sunni death squad, assassinating Shi'a Baghdadis connected with the government and even murdering their own commander when he threatened to report their activities.¹⁶⁴

As the summer approached, Casey himself was unsure of how to interpret the increasing violence. Provided with an assessment of the growing number of daily attacks on May 31, the MNF-I commander wrote in the margin, "Attacks may be [the] wrong metric. Who are they against?"¹⁶⁵ The note seemed to show that the coalition leader's thinking had not yet caught up with the situation, which, by reasonable definitions, had become a civil war.

Negotiations with the Sunni Insurgency

The worsening violence was partly masked by signs that a significant number of Sunni insurgent factions were responding to MNF-I's outreach efforts by contemplating a cease-fire with the coalition. The discussions of early 2006 in which Lynch and other U.S. officials had participated offered promise in this regard, but in order to take the next steps, Casey had demanded that the insurgents demonstrate the ability to reduce violence locally in exchange for potential prisoner releases. Though the evidence was inconclusive about whether the insurgent representatives could actually deliver the confidence-building measures Casey required, the months of meetings between insurgent and coalition representatives led to a formalized exchange of requests between the two groups. In a May 10 letter provided to MNF-I, a broad array of Sunni insurgent groups outlined 16 major demands, including the preservation of Iraq as a unitary state, the cancellation of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA)-written transitional administrative law, the holding of new democratic elections to reverse the victory of sectarian parties, the purging of militias from the Iraqi security forces, and the recall of former Iraqi Army and security forces while "purging and removing bad elements who committed crimes against the people, as well as dishonest and corrupt elements, and referring them to the judiciary."¹⁶⁶

The insurgent groups also called for a constitutional amendment process to cancel the constitution's de-Ba'athification sections, change the planned distribution of revenues from natural resources, and review the federal status of the "region of Iraqi Kurdistan."¹⁶⁷ The desire to amend the constitution was not just an insurgent aspiration. A December 2005 poll had shown fully 44 percent of Iraqis supporting such a step, with the Sunni-majority provinces of Salahadin and Ninawa registering 76 percent and 78 percent support, respectively.¹⁶⁸

In a final point that revealed much about the Sunni insurgents' changing calculus, the May 10 letter called for "ensuring complete cooperation and coordination between Iraq and America in confronting the Iranian Persian presence in and infiltration into the internal affairs of Iraq . . . and combatting all official and party authorities that facilitate and encourage this presence and [its] blatant intervention into the affairs of our country."¹⁶⁹ As one of the Sunni negotiators told Lynch, MNF-I's chief negotiator, "General, we hate you. We hate the Americans. You're occupiers. But we hate the Persians worse."¹⁷⁰

To the surprise of many MNF-I leaders, many of the demands of the Sunni resistance organizations seemed relatively reasonable, and almost all political in nature. Encouraged by the talks, MNF-I released nearly 3,000 detainees as part of the broader effort toward reconciliation in June, although amid the intensifying sectarian violence, it was difficult to gauge whether the insurgent groups were actually fulfilling their end of the bargain by ceasing attacks.¹⁷¹

The Zarqawi Raid

Like the positive developments coming out of negotiations with Sunni insurgents, the extended hunt for Zarqawi was bearing fruit. A major lead had come in January when Iraqi Interior Ministry forces captured Abu Zar, an al-Qaeda in Iraq operative who specialized in launching car-bomb attacks on Baghdad. Realizing his importance, other special operations forces obtained Abu Zar's transfer and, in turn, he provided the location of an AQI safe house in Yusufiyah, a city in Iraq's "Triangle of Death" where he had met senior AQI leader Abu Ayyub al-Masri. After watching the safe house through intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance platforms for 3 months, U.S. troops were rewarded for their patience in April when several vehicles arrived at the abandoned house nearly simultaneously. Special operations forces leaders ordered an assault force to be launched, and nine senior AQI members were captured, including the AQI emir of northern Iraq, Baghdad's AQI media emir, and a Sufi Iraqi known simply as Allawi. Ironically, Allawi had previously been arrested in September 2005 and released from Abu Ghraib in February 2006, only to be recaptured by the special operations assault force 6 weeks later.

After 39 days in detention, Allawi revealed critical information: that an Iraqi named Sheikh Abd Ar Rahman was Zarqawi's spiritual adviser and met with him weekly. Allawi also revealed the location of Rahman's house. Armed with this information, other special operations forces shifted assets to watch Rahman's house, chronicling his activities for 3 weeks, noticing Rahman at times switched between multiple vehicles in one outing, a tactic known to be used when AQI operatives met with Zarqawi.

On June 7, Rahman again used this tactic, eventually arriving at a house in Hibhib, a town northeast of Baqubah and a mere 19 kilometers cross-country from the coalition

base at Balad. As the house in question met the profile for Zarqawi's safe house, SOF leadership became convinced that Rahman was probably meeting Zarqawi. Facing the reality that the location of the house made it difficult for an assault force to kill or capture Zarqawi successfully, special operations leaders instead requested a lethal strike by a pair of orbiting U.S. Air Force F-16s. When a man matching Zarqawi's description appeared on the full-motion video surveilling the target house, they gave the order to drop laser- and global positioning system (GPS)-guided bombs on the target and directed an assault force to move immediately to the site. As the members of the assault force arrived and secured the site, they found a grievously wounded man being loaded into an Iraqi ambulance. The wounded man, who would die before he could be questioned, was Zarqawi himself, and the long manhunt for Iraq's most barbarous sectarian murderer was finally over.

To a great degree, the success was a result of three transformational ingredients for special operations forces: the improvement of the targeting process; the acquisition and effective integration of additional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets; and the professionalization of interrogation procedures at purpose-built temporary detention facilities, all of which had matured in Iraq in 2005–2006.

When Casey called Rumsfeld to inform him of the most significant kill-capture mission since the capture of Saddam, Rumsfeld's initial thoughts when answering the unscheduled phone call from Iraq were, "Jesus Christ. . . . What the hell else could have gone wrong in that place?"¹⁷² The SECDEF's response typified U.S. anxiety with the Iraq mission. Still, the killing of Zarqawi was undoubtedly a coalition success and the culmination of many months of hard work. Moreover, many coalition leaders hoped that the killing of AQI's founder would help stem the sectarian violence that was wrecking the country: with the main Sunni driver for sectarian violence gone, the coalition might gain some breathing room to get the situation under control.

At the beginning of 2006, Casey and MNF-I believed that their campaign plan was broadly on track. Indicators of violence were down, electoral participation was up, the Iraqi security forces appeared to be growing in size and capability, and the Sunni insurgency appeared to be fracturing. As a result, Casey and his command determined to continue, or even accelerate, their process of off-ramping coalition combat power, consolidating coalition forces, and passing responsibility to the Iraqis. The bombing of the Askariyah Mosque on February 22 highlighted Iraq's fragility, but in the Samarra bombing's immediate aftermath, Casey and MNF-I mistakenly perceived only a temporary spike in violence, concluding that the attack had not set off a civil war and that the Iraqi political process could resolve Iraq's problems. MNF-I leaders' denials that Iraq had devolved into civil war were reminiscent of the coalition's 2003 denial that an active insurgency had developed, and, as in 2003, MNF-I in 2006 believed the situation could be addressed by tactical responses – and might even provide an opportunity to showcase the Iraqis' self-sufficiency. As MNF-I's assessments grew less sanguine in spring 2006, Casey's views changed to reflect his realization that the Iraq conflict had shifted from an insurgency against coalition forces to a new and complex war for political and economic

power among Iraqis.¹⁷³ Despite this change, Casey maintained his belief that, as had been the case in Bosnia, the locals needed to solve their sectarian problems themselves, a conclusion that validated MNF-I's decision not to alter its campaign plan.

At this critical juncture, the seating of a unity government led by Maliki, the killing of Zarqawi, and seemingly successful outreach to Sunni insurgents convinced Casey that the coalition might have "turned the corner." Casey later recalled the optimism of this period, noting:

Maliki . . . gets the government formed at the end of May, we get Zarqawi on June 7th, and he [Maliki] appoints his security ministers the next day. So there is this great ground swell of good feeling. . . . At the beginning of June, there was a very positive sense that we had finished the UN process and we had an elected Iraqi Government based on their constitution, so there was a great sense of optimism. Their army was in good shape and the police had more work to do; but we were going in the right direction.¹⁷⁴

In actuality, the shrine bombing did not mark the start of the violent power struggle among Iraqis. It marked instead the point at which MNF-I's perception of the conflict began to catch up with the reality that resistance to the coalition occupation was no longer the most significant driver of violence. The violent power struggle among Iraq's ethno-sectarian groups had been sparked in earnest at least a year earlier by the formation of the Ja'afari-led government, and in truth, it had been ongoing since the fall of Saddam. Iraqis, by contrast, had understood the magnitude of the bombing, recognized how quickly the situation was unraveling, and behaved accordingly. The summer of 2006 and the sectarian violence that it would unleash would upend Casey's thesis and challenge the core philosophy and assumptions of the coalition's strategic plans, setting the campaign on a completely new direction.

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CHAPTER 20

BAGHDAD BURNS, SUMMER-FALL 2006

In the weeks following the Samarra mosque bombing, General George W. Casey, Jr., had believed the violence that followed the attack would subside, especially as a result of combined security operations, the seating of the new Nuri al-Maliki government, and the June 7 death of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. As the new Maliki government began to organize itself in the early summer, the coalition's victory against AQI's top leadership would prove short-lived. By the early summer, violence in central Iraq was increasing steadily. Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE had been insufficient to halt the killing, both because of a flawed concept and because the Iraqi Government had not managed to reinforce the Iraqi security forces (ISF) in Baghdad as it had agreed to do. What slowly dawned on coalition leaders in the summer of 2006 was that Baghdad had descended into a self-sustaining cycle of communal violence, part of a larger conflict in which Shi'a and Sunni militants attempted to cleanse the population of the opposite sect from vital terrain inside and around the city. The promising election period of December 2005 had given way to one of the worst years in Baghdad's modern history.

TACTICAL RESPONSE IN BAGHDAD: OPERATION TOGETHER FORWARD

As the situation in central Iraq worsened through the spring and early summer, Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) looked to reduce violence while continuing its planned withdrawal. While Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE had failed to achieve its goal of reducing violence in Baghdad during the politically uncertain government formation period of April and May, coalition leaders believed a renewed security operation under the newly seated government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki had much better chances of success. Accordingly, as Casey prepared in early June to return to Washington to brief President George W. Bush and the National Security Council (NSC) principals on the Iraq campaign's progress, Maliki and his coalition counterparts announced a new phase of the Baghdad Security Plan (BSP). On June 14, the Prime Minister declared that Operation TOGETHER FORWARD would commence immediately following the conclusion of SCALES OF JUSTICE.¹ In all, nearly 50,000 troops in 48 Iraqi and coalition battalions would take part: 13 Iraqi Army battalions, 25 Iraqi National Police Battalions, and 10 coalition battalions comprised of 21,000 Iraqi Police, 13,000 Iraqi National Police, 8,500 Iraqi Army soldiers, and roughly 7,200 coalition forces.² These troops would aim to implement a "clear, hold, build" concept in Baghdad, with the Iraqis in the forefront and assigned the most difficult tasks.³ While coalition forces partnered with Iraqi troops would "clear" Baghdad neighborhoods, the Iraqi police were expected to "hold" the cleared areas and the Iraqi ministries and local governments to "build," with coalition assistance.⁴ MNF-I's guidance for the operation emphasized transitioning authority to the Iraqis, directing coalition forces to "accelerate the transition from SCALES OF JUSTICE to Iraqi Police Lead-Interim Provincial Authority to enable the continued formation of the Government of Iraq."⁵ The operation envisioned an end state in which Iraqi police forces would lead security operations in the Karada Peninsula and begin to take the lead

in Rusafa, Adhamiya, Sadr City, and New Baghdad. Operation TOGETHER FORWARD also involved the implementation of emergency antiterrorism and weapons control laws. Security measures included an increased number of checkpoints and patrols, a citywide nighttime curfew, and targeted raids against terrorist networks.⁶

It became apparent throughout the summer, however, that the Iraqis lacked the capacity for either “holding” or “building,” especially with a police force and ministries that were themselves embroiled in the sectarian war.⁷ While some Iraqi forces were capable of clearing and holding territory, they tended to lack the will to do so in areas where the troops had no sectarian, tribal, or political ties. On the ground in Baghdad, Operation TOGETHER FORWARD focused on Sunni and mixed-sect neighborhoods suspected of being support zones for AQI and other Sunni militants. Under Maliki’s instructions, the predominantly Shi’a National Police were charged with leading the security initiative, while the Iraqi Army and coalition forces played supporting roles.⁸

Operation TOGETHER FORWARD was typified by large-scale clearing operations that yielded little intelligence, roiled the population in Baghdad’s Sunni neighborhoods, and largely ignored areas controlled by Shi’a militias such as Sadr City and Sha’ab.⁹ As Sunni areas were cleared, they were often left without any lasting security arrangement, so that, in many cases, the local Iraqi inhabitants were under greater danger of sectarian killings after U.S. forces had cleared an area than before. Ten days into the operation, an MNF-I periodic review noted that “Sunni citizens continue to fear MOI [Ministry of the Interior], JAM [Jaysh al-Mahdi], and Badr death squads. High profile (intimidation) incidents continue. JAM continues assassinations. Adhamiyah, Dora, Mansour still key areas of violence.”¹⁰ Media coverage had caught on to the ineffectiveness of the operation, MNF-I officers noted, with “civil war” replacing the term “reconciliation” in most reporting, and numerous reports concluding that “[the] Baghdad Security Plan is failing and not protecting.”¹¹

In addition to Operation TOGETHER FORWARD’s lopsided focus on Baghdad’s Sunnis, serious shortcomings in the ISF’s performance quickly emerged, especially as the operation settled into a system of checkpoints across the city. In east Baghdad, Colonel Thomas Vail’s 4th Brigade, 101st Airborne Division noted that police checkpoints “required constant supervision” and that, when attacked, National Police outposts tended to respond by firing outward in all directions in a “death blossom” without discriminating among their targets.¹² The Iraqi police seemed willing to emplace checkpoints, but, in some cases, these became places to identify Sunnis for killing. Iraqi police also searched mosques that they believed to be insurgent safe havens and weapons caches. Mosque searches were considered a critical metric for MNF-I throughout Operation TOGETHER FORWARD and one that MNF-I spokesmen frequently cited.¹³ However, as Vail later recounted, mosque searches by the Iraqi police while coalition forces waited outside rarely produced results, and only “with rare exception were we able to trust the results of a mosque search.”¹⁴

The Shibboleths of Baghdad

The technical deficiencies of Operation TOGETHER FORWARD were many, but there were other important reasons for the security forces’ failure to stem the violence in

Baghdad. First and foremost, the violence by summer 2006 was intercommunal, with various neighborhoods and suburbs of the capital in a chaotic state of sectarian war. Baghdad's nine districts were battlefields on which Sunni insurgents and Shi'a militias preyed upon each other's populations. The city's civilians were caught between two warring sides, with sectarian violence altering their daily lives during what became the deadliest summer of the Iraq War.

One early sign of the sectarian violence was the appearance of what Iraqis called the "mejhool" – unidentified bodies that were dumped into the Tigris River or left in vacant lots in contested neighborhoods such as Dora. By mid-2006, parts of the river had become a graveyard as murder victims were dumped in the river and left to float downstream. Those found downstream were often stripped of identification, blindfolded, handcuffed, or with gunshot wounds to the head. Local police in the town of Suwayrah south of Baghdad reported in fall 2006 that they had collected 339 bodies of men, women, and children from the river since January 2005, but that number likely represented just a fraction of the dead. "We used to fetch them out," one local fisherman told reporters, "but now there are so many we leave them. Otherwise, there would be no time for fishing."¹⁵ In early May, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani announced that more than 1,000 Iraqis had been killed in Baghdad alone during the previous month, signaling that the capital had become the most violent place in Iraq.¹⁶

MNF-I officers began using the term "extrajudicial killing" (EJK) to label the wave of largely sectarian murders and death squad activities sweeping Baghdad throughout the spring and summer of 2006. As the number of these killings mounted, Casey began receiving regular updates from his staff on this new category of violence. MNF-I analysts quickly discovered that a great deal of the killing was being carried out by Shi'a militia groups that operated either with impunity or with the tacit approval of the local police. In one instance in May, a coalition unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) recorded militia members in the act of carrying out extrajudicial killings at a JAM compound in Baghdad, and Casey thought the incident important enough to show newly appointed Prime Minister Maliki as evidence that his government needed to rein in the militia. Maliki, after viewing the videotape and demurring for several days, asked Casey not to raid the JAM compound and not to release the tape publicly, arguing that doing so would "start a sectarian conflict and make it worse than it is now."¹⁷ Having tracked the rise of these types of murders over the course of the 3 months following the Samarra bombing, Casey's staff reported on May 23, 2006, that they were having an impact on the overall security situation.¹⁸

For many Baghdadis, the most dangerous locations in the city were the many checkpoints the police and army had emplaced as part of the Baghdad security plan. In some instances, Iraqi security forces allied with JAM used the checkpoints to divert Sunnis to secondary checkpoints – manned by militia death squads – on side roads or behind concrete walls where Sunnis could be abducted or shot. A similar system of false checkpoints for purposes of abducting and murdering Shi'a Baghdadis sometimes sprang up in Sunni areas of the capital and the surrounding belts. As the danger from the checkpoints grew, many of Baghdad's residents began employing dual identities just to get around the city. Commuters began carrying two sets of identification cards, one with Shi'a information and the other with Sunni information, that would allow them to pass through the ISF

or militant checkpoints they were sure to encounter on their way. Parents also began instructing their children to carry two different identity cards, complete with backstories for each identity, to give to police or militants who might stop them on their way to school. Baghdadis who traveled throughout the city by car even learned to play Sunni or Shi'a music, or to hang Sunni or Shi'a symbols from their car mirrors, as they moved through different neighborhoods.¹⁹

Throughout the early summer of 2006, Sunni suicide bombers continued to target Shi'a mosques and markets in Baghdad and beyond. On June 2, a suicide bomber, probably dispatched by AQI, killed 33 people in Basrah, demonstrating that the terrorist group was capable of reaching Iraq's far south. Back in Baghdad, on June 17, a suicide bomber with explosives hidden in his shoes attacked the Buratha Mosque just before Friday prayers, killing about 10 people and wounding dozens more in the second major attack against the mosque in 2 months. According to Major General Mehdi Gharrawi, a notorious National Police commander in the capital, the bomber had detonated a suicide belt while praying among other worshippers. Following the attack, the mosque's leader, Jalaladin Saghir, a senior member of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), placed the blame on AQI members he claimed were targeting leading Shi'a clerics in order to "restore some respect after the killing of al-Zarqawi."²⁰ Despite the massive security crackdown in the city as part of Operation TOGETHER FORWARD, attacks on Shi'a mosques, holy sites, and neighborhoods became part of daily life as AQI and its supporters waged a bloody sectarian war in Baghdad's streets.

The Iranian Regime's Destabilizing Role

Another major factor complicating operations like TOGETHER FORWARD was the fact that the Iranian regime was playing a destabilizing role in Baghdad and central Iraq. In the months after the Samarra mosque bombing, evidence mounted of the Iranians' involvement in promoting Shi'a-on-Sunni sectarian violence and in prosecuting attacks against U.S. troops. The situation was problematic enough for General John Abizaid to write Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld on May 8, 2006, about the extent of Iranian involvement in anti-coalition violence, a report that Rumsfeld shared with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley the following day.²¹ An increasingly concerned Casey was determined to share this knowledge with Maliki so the new Prime Minister could be persuaded to do something to stop it. Casey concluded that the Iranians had two goals in Iraq: first, to establish a friendly government by providing political, economic, and security assistance to Iraqi Shi'a allies; and second, to impose political, economic, and human casualty costs on the United States in order to deter future American military actions against Iran.²² Thus, the Iranian regime had an interest in conducting direct, lethal attacks against the United States, not just through Shi'a militant groups like JAM or the special groups, but also through the ostensibly friendly Badr Corps.²³ MNF-I believed that the Badr Corps had, in fact, been trained by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran (IRGC) in insurgency tactics in the event that the Iraqi Shi'a militia might be called on to fight in a conflict with the United States or other countries.²⁴ Casey's views were seconded by Lieutenant General Peter W. Chiarelli and his officers at Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I), who on May 13 shared with

Casey their assessment that the Iranian regime was “supplying weapons to militia and extremist groups, providing safe haven, allowing smuggling of weapons and terrorists, and acting in such a manner in Northern Iraq that violates Iraq’s sovereignty.”²⁵

Presenting the problem to Maliki, Casey laid out the broad lines of Iranian influence in Iraq, many of which, the MNF-I commander believed, undermined Iraqi sovereignty and independence. Iranian-sponsored groups carried out lethal attacks using explosively formed penetrators (EFP), Iranian camps trained Iraqi “extremists,” and the Iranians even provided some support for AQI. The Iranian regime also had a strong influence over Iraq’s Shi’a political parties, especially SCIRI, the Badr Corps, and the Sadrists, and was also playing a role in the northern Kurdish regions and in various southern areas such as Basrah. Finally, there was an extensive deployment of the IRGC inside the country, constituting Iran’s largest foreign operational presence.²⁶ Despite Casey’s determined efforts to convince Maliki to confront the Iranian foreign minister at an upcoming meeting, however, Maliki did little beyond privately acknowledging to Casey that Iran was conducting terrorism in Iraq.²⁷

By May 24, Casey had ordered his staff to evaluate whether the coalition should declare the IRGC Qods Force a “hostile force” whose members could be engaged or arrested without previously demonstrating hostile intent, the same category into which AQI fell and into which JAM had fallen during the 2004 uprisings.²⁸ The review was the second time in 7 months that Casey had ordered the same evaluation, and it produced the same results – an ambiguous legal recommendation that would make convincing political leaders a difficult task.

Chiarelli shared Casey’s concern that the Iranian regime was apparently conducting a proxy war against his troops. “[A]t my level what most concerns me is [the Iranians’] apparent active participation in killing and maiming U.S. and coalition soldiers Evidence of the Iranian government in violence against the coalition seems to be growing,”²⁹ he wrote to Casey in late May, also sharing with the MNF-I commander a summary of the extent of Iranian-sponsored EFP networks and the lethality of their technology. “The Government of Iran is pursuing a multi-faceted, interventionist policy in Iraq,” Chiarelli wrote, adding that “the primary purpose of their activities is to ensure that Iraqi policy is determined by a relatively weak, pro-Iranian, Shia-dominated, Islamist government. . . . The secondary purpose is to either accelerate the withdrawal of Coalition Forces or, perhaps, to keep us tied up here and ‘bleed us white’.”³⁰

Chiarelli also noted that Iran was attempting to manipulate Iraq’s politics, supporting the “formation of the UIA political alliance” which “advocated for MNF-I withdrawal.”³¹ Once the UIA had come to power, the Iranian regime had “increased efforts to place SCIRI and Badr members . . . into senior leadership” positions, especially in the Interior Ministry.³² As another means to garner influence, Iran had also given Iraq a \$1 billion loan for reconstruction projects in Basrah and provided additional funds for schools and mosques in Najaf, Karbala, and Amarah.³³

In Chiarelli’s view, the most pressing military aspect of the problem was the Iranians’ freedom of movement across the border into Iraq. “The Iranians are in at least partial control of the borders into Iraq, either through proxies or directly,” Chiarelli reported. Chiarelli cited the example of Zurbatiyah, where the Iranian regime controlled electricity and water to the Iraqi border crossing point that served as a gateway to the militia-controlled

city of Kut. Indeed, by August, the MNF-I J-2 had concluded, "Iran [is] smuggling weapons across [the] border near Badrah [in Wasit Province]; using Iraq Ministry of Health, Transport vehicles (Sadrist-controlled) to transport weapons throughout southern Iraq."³⁴ To address this problem, Chiarelli proposed a redeployment of U.S. forces, unconsciously echoing the arguments Casey had made in 2005 about protecting Baghdad by moving U.S. troops to the Syrian border:

I believe we should at least consider whether to adjust our own force posture to the region of the Iranian border. I believe that a big part of the security problem in Baghdad is originating outside of the city – the ratlines are coming in from both the west and the east. To help secure Baghdad, we may have to go after the problem at its source. We could, for example, put a battalion (or more) of U.S. forces near the eastern border, or establish a screen line away from the border to backstop the Iraqi border forces.³⁵

Chiarelli posited that tackling the Iranian border problem might even help with the coalition's Sunni insurgent problem because "Sunni insurgent elements . . . would see us addressing a key concern of theirs. We might leverage a reduction in violence in the west and in Baghdad as a result."³⁶ At his level, Chiarelli planned to take measures to "immediately stanch the virtually unimpeded flow of people and materials" through the border crossing points, and to "look at whether there are particularly nefarious individuals involved in providing EFP technology and expertise who we may request authority to target." But these steps "would only get at a part of the problem," he explained to Casey. "What we most need is a comprehensive approach that would provide Iran with the necessary disincentives to continuing on their current course, inhibit their ability to achieve their objectives, and that would get the Iraqis to defend their own sovereignty."³⁷

Chiarelli saw the issue of controlling the border with Iran as important enough to merit an internal MNC-I study to explore courses of action that would address the problem. When it was briefed to him on July 8, the study concluded that sending additional transition teams to support the Iraqi Department of Border Enforcement was not the solution, as the problem was a matter of the border guards' corruption and ulterior motives rather than a lack of training. Instead, a more extensive coalition force presence was required to oversee the border enforcement employees and ensure they did their jobs to standard.³⁸ To meet this requirement, MNC-I proposed sending up to two battalions of U.S. forces, preferably motorized forces, armor, or mechanized infantry. Ideally, these forces would come from outside Iraq and deploy to the provinces of Wasit and Diyala, the areas MNC-I considered most problematic.³⁹ In effect, Chiarelli's officers were proposing to discard Casey's military transition team (MiTT)-type approach in favor of the unit-to-unit partnership approach General Peter Schoomaker had advocated in 2004. Casey met with Chiarelli on June 14, just before the MNF-I commander was to depart for meetings in Washington, DC. Casey generally agreed with his subordinate commander's analysis, although he made no final decisions on border security changes. In the strategic picture, there was little daylight between the two commanders. There were four groups that would have to be neutralized "to allow the Iraqis to work out the division of power and resources in a secure environment," Casey believed: Iran, Sunni extremists, Shi'a extremists, and the Sunni Arab "resistance."⁴⁰ It was not at all clear, however, that the new Maliki government saw the situation the same way. Nor was it clear how far the

coalition itself was willing to go to shut down the Iranian regime's proxy war. The week before meeting Chiarelli about the Iranian problem, Casey and his command had prepared a plan to kill or capture Qods Force commander Qassem Soleimani, who had made his way into Iraq for at least the second time in 2006. However, the U.S. commanders had ultimately refrained from taking action against Soleimani, allowing the Iranian general to enter and exit Iraq unhindered.⁴¹

GENERAL CASEY'S DRAWDOWN PLAN

Five days after the launch of Operation TOGETHER FORWARD, Casey arrived in Washington for high-level meetings on the state of the Iraq campaign and discussions on the way ahead. He had left Baghdad optimistic that TOGETHER FORWARD and the heavier reliance on Iraqi troops to secure Baghdad would reverse the cycle of violence in the city, and his presentations in Washington reflected this optimism. In separate meetings with Rumsfeld and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon, Casey reported that the security situation would allow MNF-I to cancel the planned deployment of 2 American brigades to Iraq in August, resulting in a net reduction of 7,000 Soldiers.⁴² Like the December 2005 decision that also canceled the deployment of two brigades, MNF-I would keep one of the units, 2d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, at a heightened alert status at its home station in Germany but prepared to deploy. If the situation proceeded as MNF-I anticipated, Casey later told the NSC principals on June 23, the deployment of additional brigades could be canceled, dropping the U.S. contingent to 10 combat brigades spread across only 57 bases by the end of 2006. By summer 2007, the force would be reduced further to 7 or 8 brigades and 30 bases, and eventually to just 6 combat brigades and 11 bases by the end of 2007.⁴³

To justify this drawdown in the face of Iraq's escalating violence, Casey again cited growth in the size and capability of the ISF and the pending transfers of provincial control to the Iraqis. Though the drawdown would incur some risk to the coalition's mission, Casey emphasized that there were risks in not reducing coalition forces, too, noting that the proposed reductions would "create a sense of urgency in the Iraqi Government and its security forces" and would "continue to remove a central motivation attracting foreign fighters and drawing Iraqis into the insurgency."⁴⁴ Years later, Casey would argue that the drawdown was the best possible response to the mounting violence, noting that "since the fundamental problem in Iraq was over the division of political and economic power, and that this conflict was the root cause of the sectarian violence, the ultimate solution would be political and not military."⁴⁵

In the course of events, the drawdown would be temporarily postponed until Casey and Khalilzad could discuss its details with Maliki. Yet Casey's drawdown plan leaked to the U.S. media immediately, with *The New York Times* publishing most of its details on June 24, the morning after the general concluded his briefings to the NSC. The disclosure of the MNF-I commander's plans to significantly reduce U.S. combat power in Iraq prompted immediate criticism from U.S. observers who were watching the spike in violence in Baghdad. A number of prominent critics outside the U.S. Government charged that Casey's drawdown plan resembled the same approach that the United States took to stop ethnic cleansing early in the Bosnian conflict. Such a plan avoided directly

challenging sectarian forces, and instead relied on American forces pulling back from the population, creating fire breaks to prevent the violence from spreading to surrounding countries while the country descended into full-scale civil war.⁴⁶ American forces would only return when the ethnic fires had burned themselves out, and the conflicting parties were truly ready to negotiate a cessation of violence, often after areas had been ethnically “purified.”

| Months | Civilians killed | % increase by month |
|----------|------------------|---------------------|
| January | 1778 | |
| February | 2165 | 21.7% |
| March | 2378 | 9.8% |
| April | 2284 | -4% |
| May | 2669 | 16.8% |
| June | 3149 | 18.0% |

Table 4. Iraqi Civilian Violent Deaths, January–June 2006.⁴⁷

The concern over ethno-sectarian cleansing rose as the civilian casualties mounted. Whereas 1,778 Iraqi civilians had been killed in January, by June, the figure had risen to 3,149, a jump of 70 percent. One week after Casey reported to Bush at Camp David that U.S. troop withdrawals could go ahead as planned, the United Nations (UN) estimated that 14,338 civilians had died violently across the country in the first half of 2006, with an average of 100 people dying per day in June, more than half of them in Baghdad.⁴⁸

The False Hope of Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC)

One reason for Casey’s optimism about drawing down combat power was his assessment that the long-stagnant effort to improve the Iraqi political situation was beginning to show promise. MNF-I had created a program, originally named Provincial Iraqi Governance, but changed to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) when a staff officer noted what the original acronym would spell, to establish conditions to transfer security responsibility in the various provinces back to Iraqi control.⁴⁹ When a province met the PIC program’s specific criteria, the coalition would withdraw its combat forces from the province and then transfer authority over security matters to the local Iraqi Government. Following the transfer, the Iraqi Army would serve only in a supporting role, and coalition forces would move to tactical overwatch in a nearby province, ready to assist if needed. Because the Iraqi police would assume responsibility for security, the coalition stipulated that the overall threat would have to be low, and the local Iraqi police forces needed to have attained a Transition Readiness Assessment level of 2, the level at which Iraqi forces were deemed capable of taking the lead in providing security.⁵⁰ The PIC program also stipulated that each Iraqi province should have a stable provincial government and should create a provincial joint coordination center to oversee security operations. If the Prime

Minister declared a crisis, Iraqi military forces and coalition forces could be called back to restore order.⁵¹

By June, Casey had briefed Rumsfeld that 5 provinces would be transferred in July, 7 by August, and 13 by the end of the year.⁵² It appeared to MNF-I leaders that the hard work of the provincial reconstruction teams was paying dividends and that Casey's Year of the Police initiative and increased police transition teams were improving the Iraqi police in several provinces.

Those initial estimates proved overly optimistic. The first province would not be transferred until July 13, 2006, when Multi-National Division-Southeast (MND-SE) Commander Major General John Cooper signed the Provincial Iraqi Control agreement for Muthanna Province in the provincial capital of Samawah.⁵³ With the turning over of Muthanna Province to the Iraqis, the 600-man Japanese military contingent that had focused on humanitarian assistance and reconstruction withdrew completely from Iraq, closing an ironic period in the Iraq War in which British and Australian soldiers guarded Japanese soldiers building roads and bridges under the hot sun.⁵⁴ In September, Dhi Qar Province, also in MND-SE, became the second province handed back to the Iraqis under the PIC program. By the end of 2006, only one other province had been transferred to the Iraqis, a far cry from the heady estimates made by MNF-I in June.

The President Loses Confidence in the Transition Strategy

Throughout 2005, President Bush had supported the MNF-I campaign plan to achieve what he considered the two most important U.S. goals in Iraq: protecting the United States from terrorism, and fostering an Iraqi democracy. The elections of 2005 had appeared to bring progress toward Iraqi democracy, and Casey and Abizaid had bet that the formation of the new Iraqi Government would begin to stabilize the country and reduce the terrorist threat as well. The President had been willing to go along with the transition plans as long as they brought progress toward these dual goals, but as the violence in Baghdad escalated, the campaign appeared to be neither reducing the terrorist threat (manifested in al-Qaeda in Iraq and its allies) nor securing an Iraqi democracy.⁵⁵

For Casey, the violence in central Iraq and the danger to the new Maliki government were unacceptable, but in his view, it remained important that the Iraqis themselves solve these problems. Assessing the situation through his Bosnia experience, in which he had concluded that Americans could not resolve someone else's intractable sectarian conflict, Casey believed a more forward-leaning U.S. intervention in Baghdad would represent a setback on the road to the ultimate goal of a self-sufficient Iraqi Government. As a result, he was unwilling to use a large infusion of U.S. troops to calm the situation, believing that any gains would be short-lived and easily reversed once the American units inevitably left. For Abizaid, the prospect of more U.S. troops on the ground in Baghdad was similarly undesirable. Based on his reading of Middle Eastern history and his experiences in Lebanon in 1983, he remained convinced that foreign troops in the Arab world created antibodies against their presence. The more numerous and visible the foreign troops, the more numerous the antibodies would become. Like Casey, he also believed that Arab armies and governments were inclined to allow Western troops to perform their security tasks for them if the Westerners were willing to do so. Abizaid had long believed that the

proper response to the violence in Iraq was to continue reducing the American footprint so that those militants motivated by the offending U.S. presence would stop fighting. A steady withdrawal of American personnel would also press the Iraqi Government and its security forces to take responsibility for securing their own capital, in his judgment. For Rumsfeld, both Casey's and Abizaid's analyses rang true, and he agreed that the ultimate way to achieve the President's goals was to encourage, cajole, or even coerce Iraqi self-sufficiency. He also added his own consideration that a heavier investment in the ground campaigns in both Iraq and Afghanistan would undoubtedly slow the effort to modernize the U.S. military into the leaner, more technologically enabled fighting force that he believed the United States would need to secure itself against threats in the decades to come.⁵⁶

Over the course of 2006, however, Bush's assessment of the situation in Iraq diverged from the optimistic appraisals made by his generals and SECDEF. In mid-2006, many observers in Washington sensed that the situation in Iraq was going awry as sectarian violence escalated from month to month, AQI and Iran appeared to be on the rise, and Iraq's political and military elements appeared immobilized.⁵⁷ The commander in chief's concerns first came to a head during Casey's return to the United States in early June. Speaking to military historians years later, Bush recalled that, along with the other NSC principals at Camp David on June 12, he had listened to Casey's assessments of the Baghdad Security Plan and to the MNF-I commander's plans to transition security responsibility to the Iraqis, but that in smaller discussions with his closest advisers, he had decided that the transition strategy was not working – and that it could not work.⁵⁸ Speaking later to NSC staffer Meghan O'Sullivan in the Oval Office after she wrote a critical memo questioning the validity of the strategy, Bush had asked her how her Iraqi associates in Baghdad were faring, and the President was struck by her reply that Baghdad's population had descended into a violent nightmare in which families were afraid to leave their own homes.⁵⁹

National Security Adviser Hadley later told military historians that he, too, had heard Casey's campaign progress report at Camp David and had come away with the conclusion that the transition strategy was no longer capable of achieving the President's goals. In a one-on-one meeting back in the White House, Hadley and Bush agreed that the transition and drawdown plans were not working, Hadley recalled.⁶⁰ What was needed, Hadley suggested to the President, was a new approach, and probably new leadership to implement it. He asked the President for authorization to proceed quietly with a review of the options for changing course and to gather information from Casey and MNF-I to inform the strategy review. The President gave his approval, initiating what became a 6-month process of finding a new approach to Iraq to replace the one the commander in chief had concluded had failed.⁶¹

By July 21, 2006, Hadley's review was underway, with the national security adviser sending Casey 50 questions inquiring about the situation in Iraq and MNF-I's plans. These were questions, Hadley noted, that "the President asks every day that he [Hadley] cannot answer."⁶² Rather than review all 50 questions, the somewhat frustrated Casey asked rhetorically "whether the real issue wasn't whether the change in conflict meant that there needed to be a change to their strategy."⁶³ More than 3 years into the war, the

President had decided to part ways with his top officials overseeing the U.S. military campaign in Iraq.

JULY 2006: THE SECTARIAN CLEANSING OF BAGHDAD

The wave of sectarian killings increased further in July when more than 3,400 Iraqi civilians met violent deaths, 1,962 of them in Baghdad alone. Meeting separately with Prime Minister Maliki and with the new Iraqi Interior Minister Jawad Bolani on July 8, Casey expressed his worry that the combined coalition-ISF operations were not slowing the sectarian killings.⁶⁴ The July death toll led both Abizaid and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Peter Pace to comment publicly on the possibility that Iraq could descend into civil war.⁶⁵ Within MNF-I, strategic operations director Major General David A. Fastabend made a similar observation that where the question of an Iraqi civil war was concerned, "we are at least at Harpers Ferry," referring to the 1859 event involving John Brown that had presaged the coming American Civil War.⁶⁶

Hours after Casey warned Maliki about the mounting violence, a bloody massacre confirmed his concerns. On July 8, a car bomb struck the Shi'a Zahra Mosque in west Baghdad, and the next day Shi'a gunmen retaliated by killing about 50 Sunni men, women, and children in nearby Hay al-Jihad, a predominantly Sunni neighborhood in the Rashid District along the road to Baghdad International Airport.⁶⁷ After setting up checkpoints along a main commercial street in the neighborhood, the gunmen had pulled Sunni Arabs from their vehicles and homes, killing them and leaving their bodies in the streets. Neighborhood residents reported seeing the victims' bodies in the streets with their hands bound behind their backs, some with gunshot wounds to their heads, others with bodies pierced by bolts and nails.⁶⁸ In an attempt to quell the chaos, the Iraqi Government imposed a daytime curfew and, by early afternoon on the same day, American and Iraqi forces had sealed off the neighborhood. Sunni leaders accused the Mahdi Army of committing the killings, a charge that Moqtada Sadr deflected by calling the massacre a "Western scheme" to foment "a civil and sectarian war among brothers."⁶⁹

The Hay al-Jihad massacre set off a string of bloody attacks in Baghdad. In the 5 days that followed, over 150 Baghdadis were killed in suicide bombings, indirect-fire attacks, and shootings in various neighborhoods of the capital, including attacks on police patrols and checkpoints.⁷⁰ The sectarian violence spread beyond Baghdad as well. On July 18 in the Sadrist stronghold of Kufa adjacent to Najaf, a Sunni suicide bomber lured a group of Shi'a day laborers into his van and then detonated the vehicle, killing 53 people and wounding 100 in one of the deadliest attacks of the year. When policemen arrived at the scene, bystanders pelted them with stones and demanded that JAM take over security of the city.⁷¹

While sectarian violence played out across Baghdad, the composition of its nine districts underwent a significant transformation. By the end of the summer, Baghdad's once mixed Sunni-Shi'a neighborhoods had become far more segregated along sectarian lines. The gradual displacement of Baghdad's population into sectarian enclaves had been taking place practically since the fall of the regime, but this process accelerated after the Samarra mosque bombing in February 2006.⁷² West of the Tigris, Hurriyah and Washash went from mixed-sect to almost wholly Shi'a in population. East of the river,

the neighborhoods of Sha'ab and Hayy al Basateen also went from mixed-sect to predominantly Shi'a, while the Shi'a-majority neighborhoods of 9 Nissan and Rustamiyah lost their Sunni minorities completely. In turn, the majority Sunni Ameriyah and Ghazaliyah on the west side of the city lost nearly all their Shi'a residents, while al-Jihad and Dora went from mixed-sect to majority Sunni. In east Baghdad, the mixed-sect Fadhel neighborhood became a Sunni majority, while the Sunni majority Adhamiya lost its small Shi'a minority altogether. Meanwhile, west and south of the city, Shi'a were completely expelled from the Sunni-majority suburbs of Abu Ghraib and Haswah.⁷³ With these changes, Baghdad's demographic layout was changing virtually beyond recognition.

The Yusufiyah Abductions

In mid-June 2006, news broke that Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division had gang-raped and killed an Iraqi girl and murdered her and her family in Mahmudiyah on March 12, 2006, further poisoning Baghdad's already hostile atmosphere. On June 16, in an apparent act of retaliation, AQI fighters ambushed three U.S. Soldiers manning a vehicle checkpoint near the Euphrates River. The ambushed Soldiers belonged to the same platoon as the Soldiers responsible for the March rape and murder.⁷⁴ Hearing small-arms fire from about a kilometer away, other members of the platoon arrived 25 minutes later to find one Soldier's body lying face down in weeds and water near an empty HMMWV and the two other Soldiers on duty that night missing.⁷⁵ After several days of searching along the Euphrates, U.S. troops found the two Soldiers' bodies bearing signs of torture, about five kilometers away near the defunct Yusufiyah power plant in the area known as the Triangle of Death.⁷⁶ On the day the bodies were recovered, the Mujahideen Shura Council announced the kidnapping of the two Americans, followed by a statement that the new leader of AQI, an Egyptian named Abu Ayyub al-Masri (who had worked with AQI's Ayman al-Zawahiri in the terrorist group Egyptian Islamic Jihad), had killed the two Soldiers himself.⁷⁷

In late June, Major General James D. Thurman, the commander of MND-B, ordered an investigation into the March killings. On July 9, 2006, a federal court charged four Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry Regiment, with the rape and murder of 14-year-old Abeer al-Janabi and the murder of three members of her family.⁷⁸ As the news of the incident spread in early July, a number of insurgent groups made retaliatory claims or announced revenge campaigns, calling them the "Abeer Operations." On July 4, JAM declared its responsibility for the downing of a U.S. Army AH-64 Apache weeks earlier and promised upcoming revenge operations in Abeer's honor.⁷⁹ On July 10, the Mujahideen Shura Council released a gruesome video of the mutilated bodies of the Soldiers AQI had captured on June 16, with an accompanying message in which a Shura Council member claimed the group had carried out the killings as "revenge for our sister who was dishonored by a soldier of the same brigade."⁸⁰ The following day, Jaysh al-Islami claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in the Green Zone "as a revenge operation for the rape and slaying" of Abeer, killing dozens of Iraqis in the area.⁸¹

Abizaid and Casey Reverse Course

The apparent failure of Operation TOGETHER FORWARD to stem the sectarian killing in Baghdad in June and July 2006 was partly a result of the fact that MNF-I's transition campaign plan was creating a shortage of U.S. troops needed to support the shaky Iraqi police and army in the city. Throughout the spring, Casey and Abizaid had remained committed to MNF-I's drawdown plan, and Casey had continued to look for opportunities in May and June to redeploy additional brigade combat teams (BCT) early. While he had hoped to allow the 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, PA National Guard in Ramadi to depart without a relieving unit, Casey had no choice but to replace the brigade with Colonel Sean B. MacFarland's 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division when it became clear that Anbar's capital was falling into AQI's hands. The repositioning of MacFarland's brigade from Tel Afar would leave only one Stryker BCT in Ninawa Province, re-creating the conditions that had led to the province's security collapse in 2004. In Baghdad, however, Casey went ahead with a plan not to replace Colonel Jeffrey Snow's 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division despite the fact that the unit was responsible for stemming the increasing violence in northwest Baghdad. The decision to replace the departing 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division with a brigade already deployed in Iraq reduced the number of brigades in the country to 14. The scheduled withdrawal of the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division would bring the number of brigades to 13. When Snow's brigade withdrew in early August, the unit's entire area of operations fell under the responsibility of a lone reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition squadron, the 8th Squadron, 10th Cavalry Regiment commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Gian Gentile.⁸²

Beyond the dearth of coalition troops, SCALES OF JUSTICE and TOGETHER FORWARD had cast doubt on the readiness of the ISF to take over the security missions that Casey and Abizaid intended U.S. troops to stop performing. In order to continue the drawdown and transition effort, the U.S. commanders needed to find quicker ways to increase the Iraqi security forces' capabilities. In late June, Abizaid dispatched CENTCOM's Chief of Staff, Major General Lloyd Austin, to Baghdad to determine how best to strengthen the Iraqi forces. From June 20 to July 5, Austin and a team of CENTCOM officers dubbed the "Chief of Staff Assessment Team" (COSAT) inspected the ISF development mission and optimistically concluded that MNSTC-I had "generated a force that within the next 6 months will have the capacity to completely assume the battlespace and transition to Iraqi Army Lead (IAL) up to brigade level throughout Iraq."⁸³ To achieve this end state, Austin and his team concluded, Casey would need to make the MiTTs the coalition's main effort and take advantage of "a window of opportunity to reduce the presence of [coalition forces] while expanding the capabilities of transition teams as behind-the-scenes combat multipliers."⁸⁴

By mid-2006, however, it was not clear that Iraq and the U.S. mission there could afford to wait those 6 months. On July 11, Prime Minister Maliki met with Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr., who told the Prime Minister that the American public was losing patience and that U.S. forces would not remain in Iraq for much longer. In a meeting with Maliki and Rumsfeld the following day, Casey laid out for the Iraqi leader his plan to reduce the coalition footprint by two brigades – a plan that U.S. leaders had agreed on in Washington

in June but had not yet socialized with Maliki. This news, coming directly on the heels of Biden's dire warning, unnerved the Iraqi Prime Minister about the coalition's commitment to protect his new government.⁸⁵ Maliki was anxious that the coalition was reducing forces, particularly in Baghdad, while sectarian bloodletting continued unabated. After Rumsfeld departed, Casey attempted to reassure Maliki about the impending U.S. draw-down, telling the Iraqi leader that, because the Prime Minister was opposed to any immediate reductions, Casey would "reduce the proposal from two brigades to one and move the additional forces into Baghdad."⁸⁶ Having been pressed by Iraqi leaders since 2004 to hand them greater responsibility, Casey now faced the prospect of those same leaders resisting the transition plan. To restore the Iraqis' comfort with the transition, Casey and the U.S. Embassy secured Maliki's support for a U.S.-Iraqi "Joint Committee for Coalition Withdrawal," which met for the first time just 4 days later, on July 16, with Mowaffaq Rubaie heading the Iraqi side.⁸⁷ Rumsfeld, however, was nonplussed when learning that the committee had included the words "coalition withdrawal" in its title, and in a typical "snowflake," the SECDEF reminded Casey that the committee's purpose was to discuss the "Way Forward," and "certainly, in the current environment" both he and Hadley believed a committee focusing explicitly on withdrawal "would not be good."⁸⁸

Even as he worked to ease the Iraqi leaders' concern about the departure of U.S. troops, Casey began to share the Iraqis' misgivings after another spike in AQI suicide attacks on the capital that resulted in cycles of Shi'a and Sunni retribution. June had seen 104 suicide vest attacks and 38 suicide car-bomb attacks across the country, both numbers representing the highest number of attacks since October 2005.⁸⁹ Even though the suicide bombings generated significant media attention, most of the violence in Baghdad – a stunning 93 percent according to MNF-I statistics – was due to either murders or executions rather than terrorist bombings. This violence, causing an average of 105 attacks against civilians a day, had been on a continuous, upward trend since the elections held in December 2005.⁹⁰ Facing a changed situation, Casey began to agree with the intelligence briefings given by Major General Richard P. Zahner, MNF-I deputy chief of staff for Intelligence, that posited the conflict had shifted "from a Sunni insurgency attempting to derail the political process and terminate an occupation to a competition among social and political leaders . . . (and) to a struggle between Sunni and Shia extremists."⁹¹ Zahner argued that the shift had begun in February 2006 and had led to a cycle of sectarian violence in which AQI bombings triggered JAM retaliatory violence, which then prompted further Sunni reprisals, all of which undermined confidence in the Iraqi Government and hurt reconciliation efforts.

On July 18, less than a week after hearing Maliki's concerns, Casey wrote in an e-mail to Abizaid and Pace that his thoughts on force reductions had changed. "I am beginning to see the retaliatory efforts by the Shia extremist groups less as tit-for-tat violence and more as a semi-organized effort to expand geographic control into Sunni areas (primarily in Baghdad, Basrah, Diyala, and to a lesser extent, Kirkuk)," he explained. Consequently, the MNF-I commander would need "to keep more coalition troops here than I had originally intended to help the Iraqis through this."⁹² In the span of just over a week, Casey reversed his previous stand on troop numbers and decided to extend the deployment of the 172d Infantry Brigade to stabilize Baghdad and Diyala; to "call forward" the 2d BCT, 1st Armored Division from Kuwait; and to cancel all pending plans to further reduce

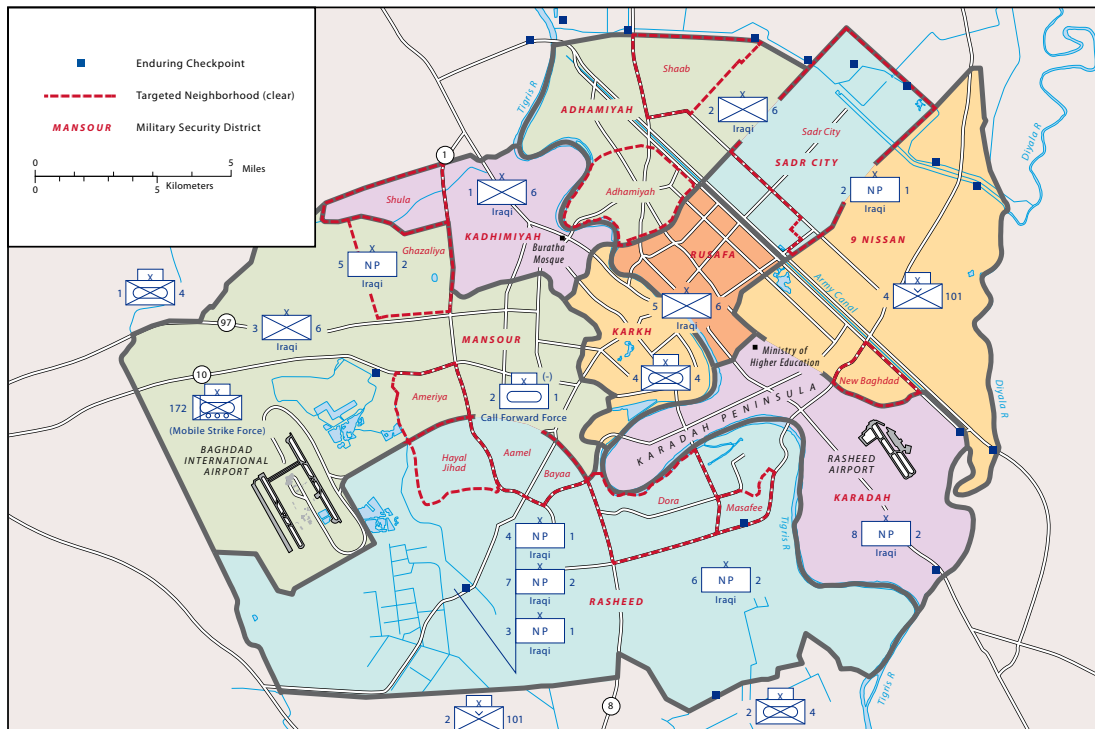
MNF-I's force structure through the end of 2006.⁹³ Casey made these changes grudgingly, noting in the same July 18 e-mail to Abizaid and Pace that:

there will never be a good time for reductions until the Iraqis reconcile the past and get on with the future. I firmly believe that the longer they feel they can rely on us, the longer it's going to take them to find the political will to reconcile—which they must do for Iraq to move forward. The extra brigade will help the security situation, but it is not likely to have a decisive effect without the commitment from the political and religious leadership of Iraq to stop the sectarian killing—something they are not ready to do. I also believe that we must leverage this extension of U.S. support to press the Iraqis into reconciliation action. Otherwise, it may actually extend the conflict and our timetable by allowing them to postpone their ultimate reconciliation.

In other words, Casey believed the extended presence of the U.S. military merely “postponed” the inevitable political reconciliation Iraqis would eventually be forced to undertake on their own. Casey's view did not seem to allow for the possibility that a withdrawal of the U.S. military might actually undermine the reconciliation he believed would ultimately happen, or that the country might break into warring fragments after U.S. withdrawal.

On paper, Casey's July 2006 plan to stabilize Iraq was impressive, returning the number of brigades in Iraq to 15 and effectively reversing his December 2005 redeployment schedule.⁹⁴ In reality, however, the plan had significant challenges. First, Colonel Robert Scurlock's 2d BCT, 1st Armored Division was no longer a full-strength brigade, as all three of its maneuver battalions had already been called forward: one to Baghdad in March to support Operation SCALES OF JUSTICE, and the other two to Ramadi in June to reinforce Colonel MacFarland's brigade. Thus, when Scurlock's brigade was ordered to Baghdad as part of Casey's plan, only his headquarters and some support elements remained to reinforce coalition troops in the capital.⁹⁵ While this provided a badly needed brigade headquarters, Scurlock would command a hodgepodge of three battalions from three different units with which he had not trained.⁹⁶ His cobbled-together brigade signified again that coalition planners in Iraq were misapplying the Army's concept of modularity down to the battalion level. A second challenge came from the fact that the extension of the 172d Stryker Brigade came so late that nearly 400 members of the brigade had already returned home to Alaska, with even more Soldiers and equipment in Kuwait waiting to redeploy.⁹⁷ Extending the brigade meant that the redeployed Soldiers needed to return to Iraq for another 4 months, a development that damaged morale and was deeply unpopular in the brigade's home community. After the extension, Soldiers from the brigade grimly joked that Operation TOGETHER FORWARD had become “Operation TOGETHER FOREVER.” Nevertheless, the extension was a move that Chiarelli had been urging Casey to make for months, since the MNC-I commander had long since reckoned he needed to bring the brigade's combat power and a large infantry contingent from Mosul to Baghdad to stabilize the capital.⁹⁸ On August 2, 2006, a perturbed Rumsfeld wrote to Casey of his frustration over the 172d Stryker Brigade's late-breaking extension: “[The] late request to keep the Stryker Brigade in Iraq has been unfortunate. We can manage the extension, but the fact they were already en route to Kuwait hurt. We have to do a better job looking around corners.”⁹⁹

OPERATION TOGETHER FORWARD II



Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 19. Operation TOGETHER FORWARD II, Baghdad, August–October 2006.

The 172d Stryker Brigade and 2d BCT, 1st Armored Division would form the backbone of Operation TOGETHER FORWARD II, MNC-I's renewed effort to extinguish the sectarian fires burning throughout the capital (see Map 19). In Casey's view, however, the real reinforcements needed to come from the Iraqi forces stationed outside the capital, something he had been unable to force Iraqi leaders to provide for Operations SCALES OF JUSTICE and TOGETHER FORWARD I. In an attempt to reverse this trend, Casey flew to Kurdistan on July 20 to press the Kurdistan Regional Government's President Massoud Barzani to agree to the deployment of two majority Kurdish Iraqi Army brigades from the north for the pending operation in Baghdad. With the additional U.S. forces and two more Iraqi brigades—5,500 U.S. troops and 6,000 Iraqis—Casey and Chiarelli judged the coalition could stanch the bleeding.¹⁰⁰ The operation, which began on August 7, 2006, had a scheme of maneuver similar to the previous two Baghdad operations, with coalition troops doing the clearing and Iraqi police the holding, a division of labor that Casey still judged appropriate. "COIN [is] about getting the Police to do it," he told Rumsfeld in August.¹⁰¹ While the Iraqi police held terrain, MNF-I would work with the Iraqi Government to "build" reconstruction efforts in the capital, spurring economic development and improving basic needs measured in employment statistics, power generation, and popular opinion. As with previous operations, TOGETHER FORWARD II

emphasized keeping the Iraqis in the forefront. “[T]o be successful, we will assist the government of Iraq in developing and sustaining a well-orchestrated security effort that integrates all elements of national and coalition power,” read the commander’s intent for the operation.¹⁰² As part of this concept, the 172d Stryker Brigade would not be given its own area of operations and would instead be used as a mobile strike force to assist other American units in clearing neighborhoods. The only significant change from previous efforts was Casey’s suggestion to MNC-I to construct a berm around Baghdad because “it had worked in Mosul, Tal Afar, Ramadi, and a number of cities in western Al Anbar.”¹⁰³ The perimeter security plan for Baghdad would become known as “Lions’ Wall” – an 88-kilometer obstacle belt around the city that would be tied to the canals and rivers and would include 28 enduring checkpoints manned by Iraqi security forces.¹⁰⁴ As before, the operations would involve the predominantly Shi’a National Police, the Iraqi Army, and local Iraqi police, with U.S. troops from Thurman’s MND-B again working alongside the Iraqi forces.

From the coalition perspective, TOGETHER FORWARD II was the second phase of an Iraqi-led operation meant to reduce sectarian violence by all sides in Baghdad. From the Iraqi Government’s perspective, however, it was yet another operation against Sunni terrorists and Ba’athist-affiliated militants. Casey’s hope that the operation would also target Shi’a militants quickly evaporated. When Casey pressed Iraqi leaders to authorize the targeting of Shi’a death squads in Sadr City in mid-August, Maliki forcefully rejected Casey’s proposal, accusing the U.S. general of trying to get his government overthrown.¹⁰⁵ The impact of the close election of December 2005, which had given the Sadrist an outsized role in the government, had fully materialized. With a relatively small political base of his own, Maliki rejected MNF-I’s target packets due to pressure from Shi’a political parties and pressed MNF-I to focus solely on Sunni militants. The impasse drove home the fact that Maliki fundamentally disagreed with Casey and the Americans over what constituted the main threat to security and stability in Iraq. Maliki “was scared to death that the Ba’athists were going to come back,” Casey later recalled, and the Iraqi leader saw the Sunni resistance and the possibility of a Ba’athist return to power as a far more pressing danger than the Iranian regime and its proxy militias.¹⁰⁶ He was less troubled about the potential for a sectarian civil war, he told Casey on August 14, because “civil war [is] easier to deal with than the Ba’athists.”¹⁰⁷

The disconnect between U.S. and Iraqi objectives was not the only problem. As the 172d repositioned to Baghdad, the two additional Iraqi Army brigades from the north once again failed to materialize, meaning TOGETHER FORWARD II continued to rely heavily on the predominantly Shi’a police forces already in the city. These units, some of which were heavily infiltrated by Shi’a militia members, created a counterproductive dynamic in the Sunni neighborhoods that were the focus of the operation. Their aggressive cordon and search tactics, along with their tacit partnership with roving Shi’a militants, alienated Sunnis and created the perception that U.S. troops were sanctioning their use by partnering with them. The Shi’a ISF units were capable of conducting clearing operations but showed little inclination to secure Sunni neighborhoods against Shi’a militias.¹⁰⁸



Major General Thurman (left). Source: U.S. Army photo by Specialist Karl Johnson, 363rd Public Affairs Detachment (Released).

**Major General James D. Thurman, Commanding General,
4th Infantry Division Meets With Assad Altaee Abu Guilal, the Governor of Najaf.¹⁰⁹**

For the first weeks of the operation, MNF-I did not fully register these shortcomings, partly because coalition leaders continued to emphasize the transition of battle space to Iraqi control as a measure of success. At an MNF-I commanders' conference on August 19, Casey told his assembled division commanders and general officers that 75 percent of the ISF was in the lead in their areas of operations, and that by December, he anticipated 90 percent of Iraqi Army divisions would be in the lead and seven or eight more provinces transferred to Provincial Iraqi Control.¹¹⁰ TOGETHER FORWARD II was the third effort to clear Baghdad, Casey told the coalition generals, and "this one needs to be successful."¹¹¹ A few days later, on August 25, Casey assured Rumsfeld that the Iraqi capital would quickly transition to full ISF control.¹¹² He reported the same to the visiting Iraq Study Group (also known as the "Baker-Hamilton Group") in late August, and when asked, assured group members that MNF-I had enough forces for its mission. Violence in the capital was down 50 percent over the last 6 weeks, he reported to the visiting dignitaries, though this figure was juxtaposed awkwardly with an internal MNF-I report the same day that casualties had risen 21 percent over the previous week and that MND-SE was the only sector of the country not seeing an increase in violence.¹¹³ Reviewing a year's worth of attack trends 4 days later on August 29, MNF-I officers told Casey that AQI was still "capable of sustaining suicide attacks for 10 weeks before undergoing [a] reconstitution period."¹¹⁴ The growing disparity between actual trends and MNF-I's expectations did not sit well with Rumsfeld, who remarked to Casey on August 31 that the planned dates to transfer provinces to Iraqi control seemed to continually "slip" because of security conditions, so much so that he required the general to start reporting the originally planned schedule so the SECDEF could understand the reasons for the slippage.¹¹⁵

As September came to an end, the sectarian violence that coalition leaders had expected TOGETHER FORWARD II to resolve continued to climb, with the last week of the month the deadliest of the war by several measures.¹¹⁶ Instead of improving conditions in Baghdad, TOGETHER FORWARD II was winding down with a higher level of violence than when the operation had begun. “The results of Operation TOGETHER FORWARD II are disheartening,” the Iraq Study Group report would later note. “Violence in Baghdad—already at high levels—jumped more than 43 percent between the summer and October 2006.”¹¹⁷ As if to punctuate the operation’s failure, in the 2-day period of October 9–10 alone, Iraqi troops found 110 gunshot-riddled bodies in Baghdad.¹¹⁸ As had been the case with Operations SCALES OF JUSTICE and TOGETHER FORWARD I, U.S. troops could clear areas relatively easily, but the sparse coalition units would then move on to clear other areas, leaving the cleared battle space to be held by Iraqi units that often had sectarian objectives or were incapable of stopping Shi’a militias from carrying out killings in the cleared neighborhoods. In many cases, insurgents who could track the progress of the sequential clearing operations around the city were able to leave neighborhoods in advance of cordons and searches and simply trickle back in once U.S. troops had moved on.

The Problem of the National Police

Casey and MNF-I had begun 2006 with high hopes for the Iraqi Interior Ministry and its forces, billing it as “the Year of the Police,” but of the ISF units that participated in the three failed iterations of the Baghdad Security Plan between April and October, the police were the most problematic. Among the police, Baghdad’s National Police units stood out for their ineffectiveness and sectarian behavior. Rather than “holding” cleared areas, the National Police in many cases became actively involved in sectarian purges and large-scale arrests of Sunnis.¹¹⁹ To a great extent, National Police units had been infiltrated by sectarian commanders and militia-affiliated foot soldiers, many of whom had been absorbed into the Interior Ministry under the oversight of SCIRI Interior Minister Bayan Jabr. Compounding the problem was the fact that portions of the Interior Ministry’s intelligence and targeting apparatus in 2006 remained under the control of Bayan Jabr’s Badr Corps ally, Bashir Nasser al-Wandi, the sectarian militant who had run the infamous torture center in the Jadriyah bunker discovered by U.S. officers in 2005.¹²⁰ Though implicated in numerous cases of torture, Wandī—known by the nom de guerre “Engineer Ahmed”—continued to direct Interior Ministry units during the Baghdad Security Plan operations, undermining MNF-I’s goals by using the operations as a cover for sectarian-cleansing death squad activities.

The Interior Ministry itself had been undergoing further sectarian “purification,” with many Sunni and non-sectarian Shi’a officers purged, usually based on false pretexts. Some of the purging reached levels that triggered MNF-I reactions, as when Major General Ali Ghaleb, a Shi’a Turkoman from Tel Afar, was dismissed from his position as director of the Iraqi Police Service for alleged ties to the Ba’ath Party. Ghaleb’s dismissal prompted Casey to write a letter to Maliki, noting that Iraq was in a critical period of transition and reconciliation and that Ghaleb should be reinstated because he was “a loyal servant of

the people of Iraq.”¹²¹ Despite the official appeal from Casey, Maliki did not act on the request.

The Interior Ministry and the National Police had also been implicated in a second instance of detention facility abuse uncovered by U.S. forces in May 2006. The scale of the torture, which took place at a location known innocuously as “Site 4,” exceeded that of the Jadriyah bunker. When a bilateral U.S. and Iraqi team conducted a no-notice inspection of the facility run by the 1st National Police Division on May 30, they found 1,845 detainees, including 38 juveniles, crammed into a facility designed to hold no more than 750.¹²² In addition to horrendous overcrowding and unsanitary conditions, the investigators found widespread evidence of torture and abuse, including a heavy hoist and chain device used to lift handcuffed detainees by their wrists while they were beaten and tortured, at times with electric shocks. Blood splatters marred the floor underneath the hoist. The juveniles, the inspectors determined, were systematically raped by the guards, with other detainees volunteering to the investigators that they often “heard children being raped at night.”¹²³

By early July, 3 weeks into Operation TOGETHER FORWARD I, MND-B Commander General Thurman and his subordinates concluded that the sectarian behavior of the National Police had become a serious problem.¹²⁴ For instance, U.S. military advisers noted that members of the 1st National Police Division’s 2d Commando Brigade – infamously known to Iraqis as the “Wolf Brigade” – would conduct proper neighborhood searches when U.S. Soldiers were present, but would later return at night to kidnap or kill Sunnis and sometimes burn their houses.¹²⁵

Meanwhile, 2d National Police Division Commander Major General Mehdi Gharrawi was acquiring a brutal reputation, with dozens of witnesses reporting his direct involvement in torture and murder, sometimes allegedly torturing prisoners with his own hands – charges for which U.S. leaders would demand the Iraqi general’s prosecution the following year.¹²⁶ In west Baghdad, U.S. commanders saw the results of Gharrawi’s handiwork. As Lieutenant Colonel John Norris’s 4th Battalion, 23d Infantry – from the recently extended 172d Stryker Brigade – moved into the Bayaa neighborhood near Baghdad International Airport, they were immediately confronted with a sectarian murder they referred to as the “Meat Market Massacre.”¹²⁷ On October 1, gunmen in camouflaged uniforms abducted 22 Iraqis from a Sunni-owned meatpacking plant in Rashid District, and although most of the victims were later executed, a few survivors lived to tell the tale. Days later, while searching a field that American troops called “Dead Man’s Corner,” Soldiers from Lieutenant Colonel Jeff Peterson’s 1st Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment in nearby East Rashid found seven of the victims, one of whom was still alive and gave enough information to pinpoint an execution site. At that site, U.S. troops recovered bullet casings apparently from the Glock pistols used by the National Police. The Americans quickly determined that those responsible for the murders were most likely the 8th Brigade, 2d National Police Division, men under Gharrawi’s command.¹²⁸ As a result, Norris expelled the battalion of the 8th Brigade believed responsible for the “Meat Market Massacre” from Bayaa and requested that the Iraqi Army provide a replacement force since the Army was more respected in the community. Nevertheless, another National Police battalion assumed responsibility for the area instead; a decision Norris understandably feared was “only going to make the situation worse.”¹²⁹

Abuses like these were not limited to the National Police. Throughout Baghdad, especially on the western side, both the National Police and the local police were involved in sectarian violence. JAM members and other Shi'a militiamen coordinated with police at local checkpoints as a means of carrying out sectarian murders, a practice that was a common feature of the violence engulfing Baghdad. Driving through a police checkpoint was "like Russian roulette," one Sunni told reporters in September 2006.¹³⁰ "Shi'a death squads leveraged support from some elements of the Iraqi Police Service and the National Police who facilitated freedom of movement and provided advance warning of upcoming operations," a November 2006 Department of Defense (DoD) report observed.¹³¹ In the Dora neighborhood, 4th BCT, 4th Infantry Division reported on November 5 that police attacks against Sunni locals were prompting a violent response:

This past week the NP [National Police] conducted a unilateral raid to detain a target. . . . The local nationals believed that this was a militia led unauthorized raid due to the lack of coalition forces. As a result the local nationals in the area began to defend themselves and attacked the National Police. This incident has further impacted the trust the local nationals have for the National Police. . . . [they] believe that the NP are detaining people at checkpoints and are turning them over to the militia. They state that they do not trust going through a checkpoint unless coalition forces are on the checkpoint with the NP. They continue to state that they do not trust the NP and IP and assert that they are undisciplined, corrupt, and that they only see the [local Iraqi police] and NP detain Sunni[s]. They say that the Sunnis that are taken are beaten and tortured during interrogation and show up beaten to death.¹³²

Pressed by Sunni locals in October about how to tell good police from bad, one Iraqi police colonel admonished that Baghdadis should not open their doors to any Iraqi policeman "unless he is accompanied by an American soldier."¹³³

These dynamics had significant implications for the MNF-I campaign plan. On August 25, Casey had warned Rumsfeld that MNF-I might have to invoke Leahy Amendment restrictions and cease U.S. support for the National Police divisions in the near future.¹³⁴ Named for its sponsor, Senator Patrick Leahy, the 1997 law stipulated that the U.S. military and Department of State could not provide assistance to foreign security forces if U.S. officials concluded that those police units were guilty of "gross violations of human rights." That American officials were contemplating invoking the amendment in the fall of 2006 attested to just how much had changed since the "year of the police" had been announced at the start of the year.

THE WAR OF THE MINISTRIES

After the frustrations of dealing with the government of Ibrahim al-Ja'afari in 2005, Casey, Khalilzad, and other coalition leaders had placed great hope in the seating of the new Maliki government in June 2006. Abizaid, in particular, believed a 4-year government of more permanent ministers and a Parliament elected by almost 80 percent of the Iraqi electorate could play a stabilizing role after three transitional governments in 3 years. For Chiarelli and MNC-I, meanwhile, the prospect of more effective ministers and ministries was an essential element of the plan to dissipate the country's violence by non-kinetic means such as the provision of essential services and the development of the Iraqi economy. This concept echoed Chiarelli's 2004 rubric of SWET: that burgeoning

ministries would be able to speed improvements in Iraq's sewer, water, electricity, and trash systems. These improvements, Chiarelli predicted, would create economic growth and jobs that in turn would encourage Iraqi militants to abandon violence. Within months of the new government's formation, however, signs emerged that the Iraqi ministries' effectiveness in many cases was sliding backward. By fall 2006, the violence ravaging the streets of Baghdad had seeped into the operation of the Baghdad-based ministries as well, so that each major ministry became a sectarian battleground over which the same warring parties waged a violent struggle for control, often with ministerial staffs and security details transformed into a sectarian killing apparatus for the cleansing of various neighborhoods.

MNF-I leaders had particularly hoped the transition to a new government would bring a change to the sectarian, militia-infiltrated Interior Ministry. The replacement of former Badr Corps officer Bayan Jabr by the independent Shi'a politician Jawad Bolani as Interior Minister in summer 2006 seemed to offer hope that Badr's militant influence within the ministry would diminish. However, little changed in the months after Bolani's appointment. Despite his responsibility for the torture at the Jadriyah bunker, Engineer Ahmed remained in his position as the ministry's deputy director of intelligence with little change to his activities, and coalition advisers as late as spring 2007 would describe him as the most powerful man inside the ministry. The Interior Ministry building itself was part of the problem: located in northeast Baghdad, the site was difficult for Iraqi officials to reach via Baghdad's unsafe streets, and its various floors and wings were guarded by different political factions that kept nervous watch on each other. Though Bolani had been appointed to clean up the ministry's activities, he rarely visited the building, deciding instead to locate his office at the safer Adnan Palace near the Green Zone, which Bayan Jabr had also done before him. Indeed, though Jabr had become finance minister, he kept the same office he had used as interior minister and retained some unofficial lines of authority into the ministry, meaning that in late 2006 there seemed to be two competing interior ministers working remotely from the same palace, one a would-be reformer and one interested in preventing reform.¹³⁵

Beyond the Interior Ministry, other ministries came under greater militant sway once the Maliki government's slate of ministers took their posts. Under acting minister Shirwan al-Waeli, a Da'wa Party appointee who had once been a Ba'athist military officer, Sadrists loyalists began filling key posts in the Transportation Ministry, leading to a virtual takeover of portions of the state transportation infrastructure by the Mahdi Army and its allies. The Sadrists controlled the ministry's civil aviation department, giving them significant power over the state-run Iraqi Airlines, and they also administered Iraq's seaports. More importantly, the Sadrists controlled many of the operations of Baghdad International Airport, including Iraq's sky marshals and the British contracting company that provided airport security.



Source: Photo by Public Relations Department, Ministry of Defence Republic of Serbia.

Hakim Zamili, Iraqi Deputy Minister of Health.¹³⁶

In other ministries, the Sadrists used their new official positions to carry out direct attacks against coalition or Iraqi civilian targets, often in official uniforms and using government vehicles and identification. U.S. officers monitoring indirect-fire attacks on the Green Zone noted that Shi'a militiamen sometimes fired mortars from within the grounds of the Ministry of Agriculture, where JAM members served as security guards.¹³⁷ Most egregious, though, was the Ministry of Health, which under Sadrist influence in 2006 perversely became a sectarian killing machine. Deputy Health Minister Hakim Zamili, a senior Sadrist who had been a junior army officer under Saddam Hussein, oversaw the infiltration of Sadrist militiamen into the ministry's security positions. As a result, the detachments meant to guard Baghdad's hospitals in 2006 instead became sectarian death squads who killed Sunni hospital patients and used ambulances to ferry death squad members, militiamen, and weapons around the city. Zamili's activities were so brazen that his fellow Shi'a deputy health minister, Da'wa Party politician Ammar Saffar, gathered evidence and witnesses to build a case against Zamili and his henchmen. But on November 19, men wearing Iraqi police uniforms abducted Saffar and made a series of videos in which the captive deputy minister recited the demands issued by a previously unknown, allegedly Sunni militant group—all of which American officials determined was a ruse orchestrated by Zamili to conceal his involvement in the kidnapping. The videos culminated in the apparent on-camera shooting of Saffar, who, since his body was never found, became the highest-ranking Iraqi Government official to disappear during the country's sectarian violence.¹³⁸

Assassinations and kidnappings were taking place in other ministries as well. The highest-profile of them took place the month before Saffar's abduction. On October 9, 2006, gunmen in Iraqi military police uniforms shot to death army Lieutenant General Amer Hashimi, brother of Iraq's Sunni Vice President Tariq Hashimi, and the third Hashimi sibling to be murdered since 2003.¹³⁹ The fact that Hashimi's killers wore ISF uniforms was typical in that the militants and death squads of 2006 were finding it easy to infiltrate the ISF or to mimic them, all of which harmed the Iraqi public's trust in the country's security forces. The assassination also came at a time that coalition officers were noticing a sectarian shift in the Iraqi officer corps, with Sunni officers like Hashimi often targeted or intimidated into leaving their posts. Just weeks after Hashimi's death, MNF-I judged that Shi'a political leaders in the Maliki government were seeking to impose sectarian quotas in the senior ranks of the Iraqi Army in order to place politically loyal Shi'a officers in key positions.¹⁴⁰

The wave of sectarian killings became problematic enough that on November 5, Vice President Richard Cheney's national security adviser John P. Hannah raised the issue with Badr Corps leader Hadi al-Amiri during a visit to Baghdad. Amiri, whose own Badr Corps militia was deeply involved in the death squad activity Hannah was complaining about, attempted to misdirect blame to former regime members and the coalition for the rise in sectarianism, arguing that because MNF-I and the ISF had failed to protect Iraqi communities from sectarian attacks, those communities had turned to militias for their defense. For good measure, Amiri denied any Iranian involvement with the Badr Corps.¹⁴¹

Nine days after the Hannah-Amiri meeting, Baghdad witnessed the most audacious attack in the so-called war of the ministries. On November 14, approximately 50 police vehicles full of gunmen arrived at the Ministry of Higher Education in the Karada neighborhood. Dressed in National Police uniforms, the well-organized gunmen closed off the surrounding streets, entered the building without resistance, and hauled away more than 100 ministry employees in handcuffs.¹⁴² Not until several years later did Iraqi officials report that the gunmen had been Shi'a militiamen, likely members of Qais al-Khazali's Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, who had infiltrated the National Police. The gunmen drove their captives—presumably through the numerous ISF checkpoints of the Baghdad Security Plan—into Sadr City and sorted them by sect, executing the Sunnis and dumping at least 16 of them into a mass grave that Iraqi authorities did not uncover until 2012.¹⁴³ The smoothness of the operation—a huge logistical undertaking—illustrated the impunity with which Shi'a militia death squads could operate in the Baghdad region.

These constant pressures on the Iraqi ministries meant that by late 2006, U.S. officials visiting Iraqi ministries often found their Iraqi counterparts living in a state of siege, hunkered down in offices from which they rarely ventured out, sleeping on cots and making the dangerous trek back to their family homes only a few times a month. In some cases, ministries run by one party virtually fell out of regular contact with ministries run by enemy parties, with formerly routine matters such as delivering inter-ministry paperwork—a key component of the Iraqis' outdated paper-based system—having become deadly tasks from which couriers occasionally did not return. Within the larger ministries, different floors or wings were often subdivided, occupied by different parties and secured by their respective militants, so that ministry entrances and stairwells became

checkpoints manned by militiamen posing as security details. In this state of affairs, much of the regular business of the government ground to a halt, so that ministries had little hope of spending their budgets, other than for personnel salaries.¹⁴⁴ Such conditions precluded the possibility that the Iraqi Government could implement a successful SWET-style reconstruction program, as Chiarelli and MNC-I hoped. As the sectarian violence sweeping central Iraq had moved into the halls of government, the Iraqi state, to which MNF-I had hoped it could soon transition responsibility, had ceased to function.

* * *

The end of Operation TOGETHER FORWARD II, in October 2006, brought with it signs that the coalition's campaign plan was in serious jeopardy and that the assumptions underpinning the coalition's entire transition strategy were crumbling. Neither the seating of a 4-year government nor the pulling back of U.S. troops from the Iraqi population had had a stabilizing effect. The killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi had not slowed AQI's operations. Three successive attempts at a Baghdad Security Plan had yielded more violence, not less, and the concept of "police primacy" in an Iraqi counterinsurgency campaign had fallen apart as the national and local police became parties to the sectarian cleansing of Baghdad. The possibility that essential services and economic development could lead the country out of instability dissolved as the Iraqi state ministries went physically to war with one another. As the Iraqi capital's population fell into a nightmare of street-to-street killings, the Iranian regime's Qods Force used the chaos as cover to step up attacks on American troops and to help its proxies drive Sunnis out of the Baghdad region.

Against this backdrop, Casey's and Abizaid's plans to pull U.S. brigades out of the country in summer and fall 2006 became untenable, and they were compelled instead to reinforce a theater whose forces they had been determined to reduce. Finally, the disparity between MNF-I's projections and the hellish reality on the ground had caused the President to lose confidence in the strategy the coalition had been executing for 2 years, a development that would soon cause a furious search for a new approach.

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CHAPTER 21

HOPE IN RAMADI

As the situation in Baghdad unraveled during mid-2006, and central Iraq began to descend into sectarian civil war, a far different development unfolded in Anbar Province. After 3 years of increasing violence against the coalition and a growing consolidation of local power in Anbar by al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), a partnership between coalition troops and local Anbaris was about to challenge AQI's grip on the province. This partnership would take hold despite AQI's deep roots throughout the upper Euphrates River Valley, and it would involve coalition troops expanding their presence in the Ramadi area, a tactic that ran counter to Multi-National Force-Iraq's (MNF-I) heavy emphasis on reducing the coalition's footprint across the entire country.

AQI, THE COALITION, AND THE BATTLE FOR THE RAMADI TRIBES

The Anbar People's Committee

The December 2005 elections represented a stunning political turnaround in Ramadi, where voter turnout had exceeded 80 percent – an extraordinary difference from the mere 2 percent in the boycotted January election. The change represented a major success for Mohammed Mahmoud Latif, the Ramadi cleric and insurgent leader who had pushed for participation in the political process after judging that the January 2005 boycott had been a mistake. Latif had risked a great deal to promote voting in December, defying threats from Abu Masub al-Zarqawi and other rejectionist insurgents and even using his 1920 Revolutionary Brigades fighters to ensure security at the polls.¹

Having decided to vote in December, Anbaris faced the frustration of sending new representatives to the national Parliament but still having to deal with a provincial government in Ramadi that almost no one in the province had voted for the previous January. Aiming to build on the December election's momentum, Latif immediately mounted a challenge to the members of the provincial government, especially the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), which he and other Anbari tribal leaders viewed as suspicious carpetbaggers. On January 1, 2006, Latif and more than a dozen tribal sheikhs and Anbari notables formed the Anbar People's Committee, through which they planned to represent the Anbari tribes' interests with the Iraqi Government and to form the nucleus of provincial military and police forces that would be under Latif's direction.² Latif's move was a bold one but was at odds with Multi-National Force-West's (MNF-W) existing political strategy for the province. Viewing the unpopular provincial council as the province's legitimately elected representatives, MNF-W had given IIP Governor Mamoun Sami Rashid al-Alwani its full backing. Though most of the provincial council had fled Ramadi during the violence of 2005 and early 2006, Alwani remained, riding to the governor's office each day in a coalition convoy and working under the protection of a company of Marines in the frequently bombarded provincial government center.³ Throughout 2006, Alwani did little more than survive – though he did that rather well, escaping more than 30 attempts

on his life.⁴ Still, as the representative of a political party that considered the tribes an anachronism, Alwani failed to win many allies among Anbaris through bravery alone.⁵ Seeing cooperation with the provincial government as essential, MNF-W Commander Major General Richard C. Zilmer sought to alleviate the mutual disdain between influential Anbari tribes and the governor. Against this backdrop, Latif and his new committee offered themselves to Anbaris as an alternate government, an open rival to the IIP-led government that Zilmer and MNF-W were working hard to solidify.

Latif and the Anbar People's Committee also challenged Zarqawi and his terrorist allies, who had been fighting for more than a year to create an extremist Islamic emirate within Anbar. AQI's immediate response to the committee's creation was to issue fatwas calling for the death of every Ramadi sheikh participating in it as well as to direct AQI and Ansar al Sunna fighters to attack the recruits the sheikhs had begun to assemble.⁶ Working with Colonel John L. Gronski and 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard, the coalition unit responsible for Ramadi, Latif and the committee signed up 671 Anbaris at a police recruiting drive at a local glass factory in the first days of January. However, on the drive's final day, January 5, an AQI suicide bomber killed 56 potential recruits and Lieutenant Colonel Michael McLaughlin, Gronski's tribal and police engagement officer.⁷ AQI followed up the bombing with assassinations of tribal leaders in the Anbar People's Committee, and by January 18, 2006, more than half of the dozen or so sheikhs who had formed the committee 17 days earlier had been killed.⁸ AQI's murder of Sheikh Nasser abd al-Karim Mukhlif al-Fahdawi, a prominent leader of the Abu Fahad tribe, prompted many of the remaining committee members to withdraw from public view.

As the Anbar People's Committee's leaders went into hiding, AQI reinforced its fighters in the Ramadi area and focused its attacks on Latif's 1920 Revolutionary Brigades that had guarded polling places the previous month. By February 5, AQI had defeated Latif's men and forced Latif himself to flee Ramadi to escape assassination. AQI's victory over Latif and other rivals in Ramadi began a gradual shift among Anbaris away from the optimism that had followed Operation SAYAID and toward a neutral stance between the insurgency and the coalition. Many Anbar residents and the leadership of local groups such as the 1920 Revolutionary Brigades sought to retaliate against AQI, but in each instance, they were outfought and unable to oppose the group on their own.⁹

For some observers, the coalition's failure to recognize and bolster the Anbar People's Committee represented another squandered opportunity to leverage Anbari tribal power to reverse the dismal situation in the province. Major Benjamin Connable, a Marine intelligence officer in Anbar, considered the Anbar People's Committee an abortive awakening like that of the Abu Mahal and the Desert Protectors in Al Qa'im the previous year and the efforts by Major Adam Such in 2004. Operation SAYAID had significantly degraded AQI in western Anbar, enough so that by the December election, Zarqawi and his followers were on their heels, and the Anbar People's Committee had posed a real political threat to AQI.¹⁰ By killing police recruits, slaughtering the committee's sheikhs, and renewing a campaign of violence throughout the rest of the winter, AQI had turned back the threat and emerged stronger than before.

AQI Retakes Ramadi

With the Anbar People's Committee out of the way, AQI immediately enjoyed greater freedom of movement in Ramadi and increased its attacks against coalition and Iraqi Government forces. During January 20-21, AQI and local fighters carried out two complex attacks against the Ramadi government center and nearby coalition bases using indirect fire, small-arms fires, rocket-propelled grenades (RPG), and car bombs.¹¹ AQI also stepped up its shadow governance throughout Anbar, offering compensation payments to Iraqis whose homes were damaged by the coalition, an offer 300 families accepted.

Against this increased AQI activity, Gronski's brigade's practice of conducting battalion-sized sweeps through Ramadi's neighborhoods and then returning to forward operating bases without leaving a large presence inside the city proved ineffective, a fact that the brigade's frustrated Soldiers and commanders increasingly recognized.¹² Even so, the practice was in line with the brigade's top stated objective of "protect[ing] the force," which, as the brigade explained in briefings to General George W. Casey, Jr., it had ranked in priority above the objective of "defeat[ing] the insurgency" – an approach that ran counter to MNF-I's goals.¹³

AQI fighters routinely mounted attacks against the government center from the abandoned buildings that surrounded it. They also moved freely around the city, skirting coalition checkpoints using side roads through the Sufiyah and 2d Officer districts. AQI leaders even set up a command-and-control center inside the Al Hajj Mosque in the city's Qatana district from which they oversaw attacks. They also issued coded orders using selected excerpts from the Koran recited over the mosque's loudspeakers. In their well-planned attacks, AQI commanders used operations orders and sand tables to rehearse their operations and synchronize massed attacks by up to 150 fighters – equivalent to an infantry company-sized attack.¹⁴

With limited intelligence on AQI's organization inside the city, Gronski responded by employing forward observers from the 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment to identify enemy targets that could be engaged by guided multiple-launch rocket systems fired from Camp Fallujah – a practice Gronski discontinued when he concluded the indirect fire was doing more harm than good.¹⁵ The situation was a curious role-reversal from most other coalition-held cities: in Ramadi, the coalition launched harassing fire against an insurgent force conducting coordinated battalion-sized maneuvers from bases inside the city.

By April, AQI had also taken over the city's black market and become financially self-sufficient. In Ramadi alone, AQI grossed more than \$500,000 per month on black-market fuel sales, which, when combined with its extensive criminal enterprises, produced a monthly influx of several million dollars, more than enough to cover expenses, acquire real estate, and make significant inroads into the provincial economy.¹⁶ These and similar revenues elsewhere in Iraq also allowed Zarqawi to operate independently of the senior al-Qaeda leadership outside the country.

The funds also kept fighters flowing into AQI's ranks. Coalition troops killed over 200 AQI fighters in March and April, but they were easy for Zarqawi to replace. By May 2006, with AQI's financial network in place, the starting salary for an AQI fighter in Ramadi was the equivalent of \$1,000 per month. The next highest-paying insurgent group, Ansar

al Sunna, paid far less at \$250 per month. AQI also funded bonuses: \$200 for a successful improvised explosive device (IED) attack, \$500 to \$700 for destroying a High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV), and \$7,000 for shooting down a helicopter. In Fallujah, where AQI's presence was more contested and lacked Ramadi's financial sophistication, al-Qaeda fighters were paid between \$190 and \$380 per month.¹⁷ By the end of the spring, AQI considered much of central Ramadi and its outlying regions to be safe areas, as well as the center of its activities across Iraq.

"No One is Really in Control of the City"

As violence escalated in Ramadi in early 2006, Casey's plans to reduce the footprint of U.S. forces in Iraq collided with AQI's expansion in Anbar. In his deliberations over force levels with Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld in early March, Casey judged that the situation in Iraq had improved enough to allow for Gronski's 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard to depart in June without another brigade to backfill it.¹⁸ Within days, however, Casey realized the situation in Ramadi had deteriorated with such speed that the plan to transition control of the city to Iraqi security forces upon 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard's departure might have become infeasible. On March 30, he issued a warning order to Colonel Sean MacFarland and his 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division to prepare to move from Tel Afar to Ramadi to replace 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard in June.¹⁹ MacFarland's brigade had replaced Colonel H. R. McMaster's 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment in western Ninawa only the month before, but having decided in December 2005 to off-ramp two U.S. brigades, Casey had to cover the insurgent hot spot in Anbar by uncovering another insurgent hot spot in Ninawa.

The violence in eastern Anbar touched Casey directly when mortar fire interrupted his April 13 meeting with Zilmer near Fallujah, killing two Marines and injuring 19 others. Following the incident, Casey questioned whether his Anbar consolidation plan could proceed without a major offensive in Ramadi.²⁰ AQI's 11 complex attacks against the U.S. and Iraqi forces in the city between April 9 and 24 seemed to reinforce these doubts.²¹ Even so, as late as May 5, Casey briefed Rumsfeld that he still intended to hand Ramadi over to the Iraqis instead of replacing 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard with another American unit. However, within 2 weeks, the MNF-I commander acknowledged the need for additional resources as well as a major operation to reestablish control of the city. Casey hoped the plan to transition Anbar could be kept on track by having 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard conduct a large operation in May, just before the brigade was scheduled to return home. On May 6, Casey met with Gronski, Zilmer, and Lieutenant General Peter Chiarelli to hear 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard's plan. He came away discouraged. The overall plan was "not imaginative," the MNF-I commander told his staff afterward, adding that the plan was being executed by a unit that lacked a good intelligence picture, had too few forces, and "seemed to be distracted by their imminent departure."²² "No one is really in control of the city right now," Casey observed, "not the government, not the terrorists, not the coalition."²³

Casey had contemplated launching a deliberate, two-brigade operation in Ramadi by overlapping MacFarland's and Gronski's brigades by a month, but the lateness of the decision to move 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division from Tel Afar made the idea impossible. Instead, to reinforce MacFarland, who would leave one battalion behind in Tel Afar and already had sent another to Hit months earlier, Casey called forward two battalions from 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division, the brigade that had remained in Kuwait as part of the theater reserve.²⁴ With the 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment remaining in east Ramadi and a Marine battalion still at the Ramadi government center, the shift in combat power to Ramadi was similar to MNF-I's reinforcement of Baghdad for Operation TOGETHER FORWARD I.

Despite Casey's assertion that "no one" controlled Ramadi, Zarqawi and AQI believed they had the city firmly in their control. However, AQI leaders were aware that the coalition's posture in the city was about to change. Lieutenant Colonel Ronald Clark's 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment received reports that insurgents within the city expected a Fallujah-like assault once 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard departed. Although Clark knew an operation of that scale was not planned, he did nothing to correct the insurgents' fears.²⁵ By late May, his unit learned that some AQI leaders were evacuating the city in anticipation of a coalition attack, and many senior and mid-level AQI members gravitated to safe havens in the Jazeera area, the southern end of Lake Tharthar, Hadithah, and Syria.²⁶

Zarqawi believed AQI's greatest vulnerability lay in the Ramadi area tribal network that opposed his organization and at times cooperated with the coalition. Accordingly, as MacFarland's troops conducted their 2-week relocation from Ninawa, Zarqawi and his allies met in the Ameriyah neighborhood of west Baghdad to devise ways to win or control the tribes. They planned to recruit five to ten trusted members of each tribe to report on tribal cooperation with the coalition and gather information about coalition activities, with the ultimate goal of establishing insurgent safe havens throughout the Euphrates River Valley from Al Qa'im to Ramadi.²⁷ Meeting again at the Ibad al Rahman Mosque in Ramadi, AQI leaders also decided to instruct low-level fighters to remain in Ramadi and defend against the new coalition offensive with IEDs and other indirect means rather than fighting coalition troops head-on as they had done in Fallujah in 2004.

Casey's guidance to MacFarland, meanwhile, had been "to fix Ramadi but don't do a Fallujah," an idea with which the brigade commander concurred.²⁸ "That was fine because I didn't have the combat power to do a Fallujah," MacFarland recalled. "But I wasn't quite sure how I was going to fix Ramadi. When we got there the enemy basically controlled the center part of the city."²⁹ The insurgency had inflicted significant damage on 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard, which had suffered 82 Soldiers killed and another 611 wounded throughout their deployment.³⁰ As Casey had judged the previous month, the coalition's intelligence on Ramadi was poor. What was known was that insurgents controlled large swaths of the urban terrain, and coalition troops were attacked an average of 20 times a day.³¹ "[T]he read that I got was pretty superficial," MacFarland recalled later. There were large parts of the Ramadi area to which 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard "never went," he noted, adding that "if they caught a lot of contact in an area, they just stopped going

there, especially in downtown Ramadi. So there were big parts of the map, I kind of joked, that I said were labeled, 'Here be monsters'."³²

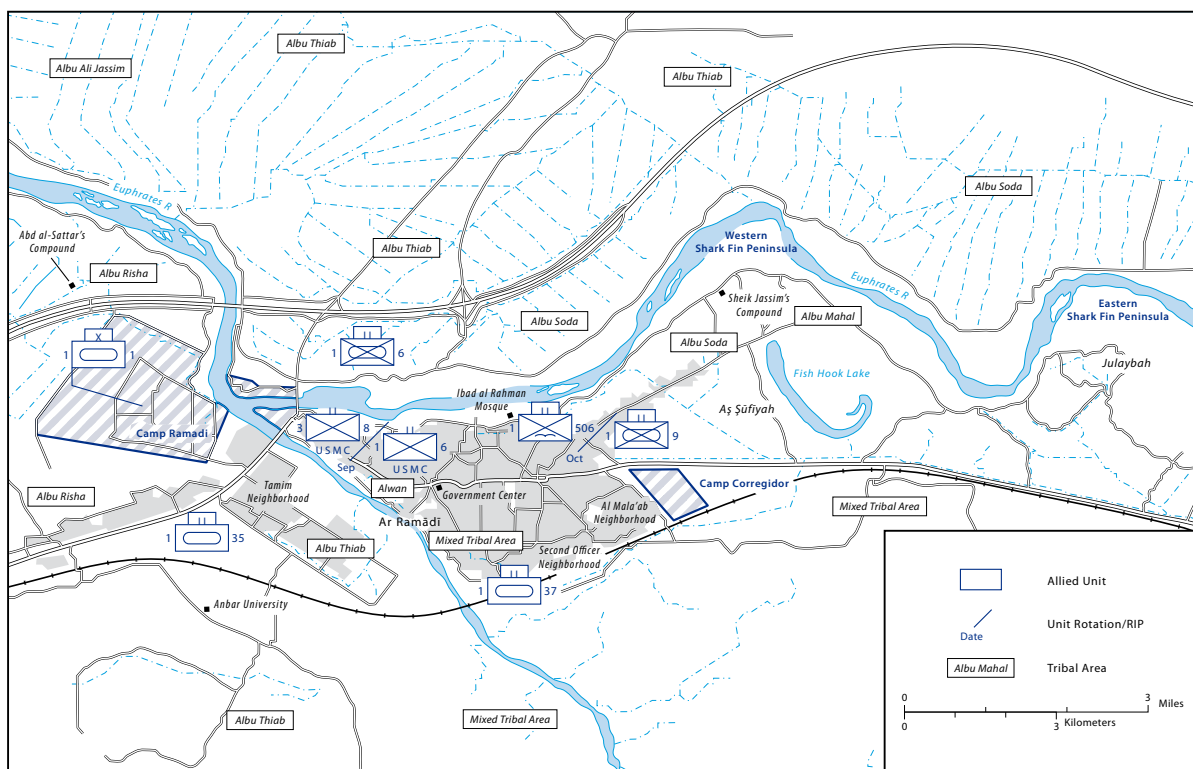
1ST BRIGADE, 1ST ARMORED DIVISION, TAKES OVER RAMADI

MacFarland and 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division officially relieved 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard on June 6, 1 day before AQI's top leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was killed in a coalition air strike in Hibhib, near Balad (see Map 20).³³ It was a promising beginning for 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division's mission to expel Zarqawi's followers from the city, but the task remained a daunting one. The brigade was responsible for an enormous area stretching from Lake Tharthar to Lake Habbaniyah in the south, about the size of the state of New Hampshire, with more than 600,000 inhabitants.³⁴ MacFarland's brigade combat team (BCT) was unlike any other in Iraq. With five maneuver battalions cut from four different brigade-level headquarters, it was nearly twice as large as the legacy brigades that commanders had favored for their additional manpower. The brigade also was unique in its jointness: MacFarland controlled a Marine infantry battalion; Marine, Navy, and Air Force officers served on his staff; Seabee and Marine engineer platoons built his construction projects; and Navy SEALs (sea, air, and land) embedded with his rifle platoons, earning the nickname "Army SEALs."³⁵ Various contingents of special operations forces (SOF) had moved to Ramadi to support the coming fight, but the majority of the manpower came from a SEAL Task Group that had moved its headquarters from Baghdad to Anbar in April 2006—nearly doubling the special operations contingent that had returned to the province in 2005.³⁶ To the SEAL Task Unit that directly supported him in Ramadi, MacFarland gave a simple mission: "Kill Insurgents."³⁷

The situation among Ramadi's local security forces was far less encouraging. Only 120 Iraqi policemen served the city, mostly in stations on the outskirts of town, and many of those were under insurgent influence. The Iraqi Army units in Ramadi were among the least developed in Iraq, both in size and in training. Unlike in Tel Afar, MacFarland had no viable Iraqi civilian authority to pair with, as Ramadi had neither a mayor nor a city council.³⁸

Against this backdrop, MacFarland moved quickly to exploit the leadership vacuum left by Zarqawi's death. A week after assuming control of the Ramadi area of operations, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division launched a two-battalion attack from the south across the old rail bridge in Tamim to seize a foothold in the city. Their concept for securing the city amounted to a tactical reversal of MNF-I's campaign plan: while MNF-I steadily was reducing its presence in Iraqi cities and concentrating its units on large forward operating bases, MacFarland would move his units into Ramadi's neighborhoods, seizing and holding terrain as McMaster and Alford had done the year before in Tel Afar and Al Qa'im.³⁹ MacFarland knew intuitively that even his reinforced brigade could not conduct simultaneous attacks to clear Ramadi as had been done in Fallujah. Instead, he would have to fight his way into the city one neighborhood at a time and establish mutually supporting combat outposts.⁴⁰ This incremental approach was driven, in part, by limitations in the amount of barrier materials and defensive fortifications available and in the number of engineers to emplace them. A single outpost would require 10,000 sandbags,

miles of concertina wire, and truckloads of plywood, among other sundries of supplies.⁴¹ As his brigade reestablished control on the ground, MacFarland would partner and co-locate with Iraqi Security Force (ISF) units, rather than simply handing them responsibility for territory they could not secure on their own. By the end of June, MacFarland's brigade had established four new combat outposts within the city, as well as the heaviest troop density there since the 2003 invasion. The new coalition presence had its intended effect: "Within 48 to 72 hours of us setting up a combat outpost," MacFarland observed, insurgents would "essentially impale themselves on it, and that is why we were able to kill so many."⁴² Even so, with only a brigade to secure a city much larger than Fallujah, MacFarland's plan would hinge on growing capable ISF units that could "thicken" the counterinsurgent ranks, something no unit in Anbar had been able to accomplish on a sustained basis.



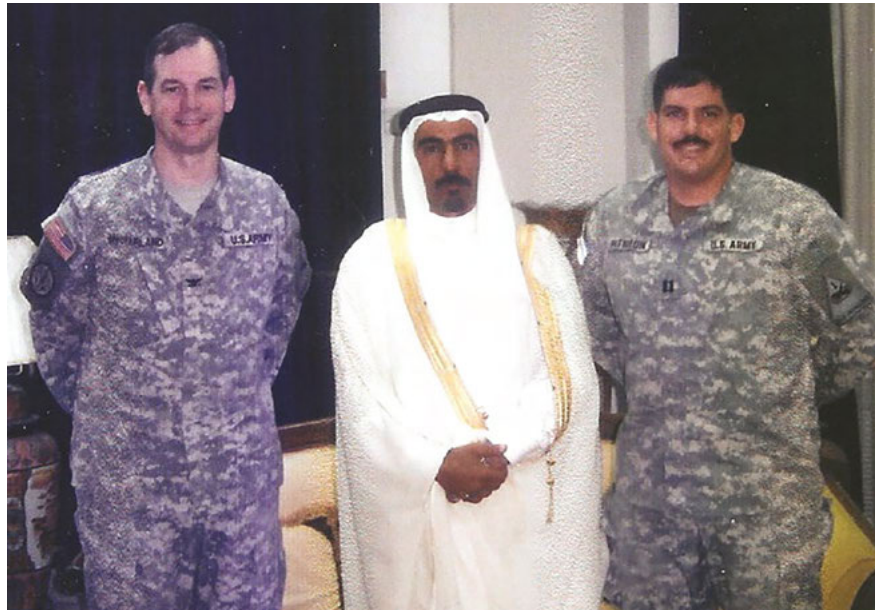
Map created by the official cartographer at the U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC.

Map 20. Battle of Ar Ramadi, June 2006-January 2007.

Patriquin, Deane, and the Tribes

Though MacFarland and 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division did not realize it in mid-summer 2006, their problem in generating reliable ISF would be solved by what seemed at the time to be a completely separate initiative: tribal outreach. Immediately after arriving in Ramadi, MacFarland had tasked his civil affairs officer, Captain Travis Patriquin, with

learning as much as possible about the Ramadi area tribes. The 32-year-old Patriquin was the right choice for the job. An unusual officer, he had served as an enlisted Soldier and had an interest in foreign cultures and aptitude for languages that had served him well as he accompanied special forces missions in Afghanistan. Earlier in his Army career, he had taken an Arabic immersion course in Jordan and had deployed to Kuwait with special forces units. In Ninawa, MacFarland had used Patriquin as a liaison to local leaders, and the young captain had surprised the officers of the 3d Iraqi Division when he rose at a luncheon to inform them in Arabic that he looked forward to working with them. He had used his 4 months in Tel Afar to learn the Iraqi dialect, eventually speaking it well enough that, upon first meeting Patriquin, a stunned Sheikh Sattar of the Albu Risha tribe thought he must be speaking to an Iraqi in an American officer's uniform. Sattar and other sheikhs were equally stunned by the novelty of an American officer who was fully versed in their cultural norms of conversation and socialization.⁴³ Because of his personality and ability to converse in Arabic, Patriquin immediately gained Sattar's trust and became MacFarland's primary interlocutor with the tribes, a weighty responsibility for a captain, but one that Patriquin relished.⁴⁴



Colonel MacFarland (left), Sheikh Abu Risha (center), and Captain Patriquin (right).
Source: Photo courtesy of Amy Patriquin.

Colonel Sean B. MacFarland, Commander, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, Sheikh Abdul Sattar Abu Risha, and Captain Travis Patriquin.⁴⁵

Along with Patriquin, Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Deane, commander of 1st Battalion, 35th Armored Regiment, a unit that had been called forward to Ramadi after sitting in Kuwait for 6 months, also began meeting with local sheikhs and securing their support for 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division's planned police recruitment drives.⁴⁶ The first drive on July 4 immediately came under indirect fire but succeeded in enlisting 80 candidates, and much to Deane's satisfaction, recruitment steadily grew thereafter.⁴⁷ Deane's

outreach paid particular dividends as he developed a relationship through the summer of 2006 with Ahmed Abu Risha and his elder brother Abdul Sattar, the leader of the Albu Risha tribe. Deane was the first coalition commander to realize Sattar's potential influence in Anbar and Baghdad. The Albu Risha long had been active against AQI but had been overlooked in the coalition's Sunni engagement efforts because of the tribe's supposed lower-tier status within Anbar's large Dulaim confederation.⁴⁸ Sattar's father, Sheikh Khamis Bezia, had been friendly with the coalition following the invasion, but AQI murdered him on November 6, 2004, at the outset of Operation AL FAJR for cooperating with U.S. forces.⁴⁹ With his father dead and his eldest brother Abdullah Bezia slain by AQI in August 2004, Abdul Sattar had become the head of the tribe, while another brother, Sheikh Bezia, had become Anbar Province's deputy police chief after serving as a police commander in Ramadi. As one of the few surviving senior members of the ill-fated Anbar People's Committee, Sattar was well-known throughout the tribal system. It also was likely the coalition underestimated his influence because the Albu Risha's connections beyond Ramadi were not well-known. The previous Iraqi Minister of Defense, Sadoun Dulaimi, was a member of Sattar's tribe, and Sattar's brother Ahmed had served as a liaison between Dulaimi and the Albu Mahal sheikhs who formed the Desert Protectors in Al Qa'im in 2005. It was with Dulaimi's support, via Ahmed Abu Risha, that Sheikh Sabah and the Albu Mahal had been able to arm the Desert Protectors.⁵⁰ Sattar also had formed a partnership with one-time insurgent leader Mohammed Mahmoud Latif to seek a political solution to the violence racking Anbar, and both were determined not to allow a repeat of the defeat of the Anbar People's Committee. The lines between the tribes and the insurgency were often hazy, and it was fortuitous for the coalition that the flexible Deane and Patriquin were on hand to navigate these complex ties as Sattar's influence grew during the summer and fall of 2006.

1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, and AQI Collide

Two days before the successful July 4 police recruiting drive, Casey visited Ramadi and came away pleased with what he saw in MacFarland's first month in the city. The 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division had killed 170 insurgents and was killing between 5 and 10 enemies per day, MacFarland reported, and to coincide with the recruiting drive, the brigade had seized the Ramadi hospital that AQI was using as a headquarters because of its dominant height within the city.⁵¹ But the brigade commander also wanted to change the signals Ramadi residents were picking up from the coalition. MacFarland found it unsurprising that Anbaris declined to take risks to oppose AQI when the coalition continued to emphasize American withdrawal. In MacFarland's view, it was important to communicate that the coalition was establishing a presence in the city, that the insurgents would be killed, and that the Americans were there to stay, all themes that ran against MNF-I's message.⁵²

Throughout July, as 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division expanded its presence, AQI prepared to retaliate. On July 24, approximately 200 insurgents simultaneously attacked 20 different Iraqi and coalition locations in and around the city, intending to destroy the police stations located near the North-South Bridge on the Euphrates River and in the peripheral tribal region, but MacFarland's troops and Iraqi police forces repelled the

attacks. Three days later, AQI leaders Abu Salih al-Saudi, Abu Abdallah al-Saudi, and 14 other AQI fighters were killed when coalition aircraft struck a meeting of the group's leadership north of Ramadi, capping a costly 2-week period for AQI in which the group lost an estimated 65 killed, and many AQI members were forced to seek refuge in the city's Tamim district.⁵³ As 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division's outposts and operations began to restrict AQI's movement, the group changed tactics, instead, using mortar and IED attacks against Ramadi's main coalition bases and the government center.⁵⁴ On August 2, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division troops seized Anbar University, a long-time hotbed of insurgent activity where it was estimated up to 30 percent of the students were involved with the insurgency, and a car bomb construction site was located on the university grounds.⁵⁵ By August 10, MacFarland had established two additional combat outposts in the city, and the total of local police recruited in June and July had risen to 355, almost three times the number of police on duty when 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division had arrived.⁵⁶ The tide was beginning to turn.



Source: U.S. Army photo by Staff Sergeant Curt Cashour, Multi-National Corps Iraq Public Affairs (Released).

Sheikh Abdul Sattar Abu Risha.⁵⁷

Throughout August, MacFarland's troops continued to enjoy tactical successes, while Deane and Patriquin expanded their cooperation with the increasingly influential Sheikh Sattar, who had begun organizing a new assembly of tribal sheikhs to oppose AQI. At 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division's higher headquarters, however, Multi-National Force-West (MNF-W) officials had their reservations about the brigade's tribal outreach and about the coalition's overall prospects in Anbar. On August 17, Colonel Peter H. Devlin, the senior Marine intelligence officer in Anbar, produced a bleak assessment that declared the coalition and ISF were "no longer capable of militarily defeating the insurgency in Al Anbar."⁵⁸ According to the report, the coalition had too few troops in Anbar to overcome the stalemate with the AQI-dominated insurgency there, with U.S. units mostly unable to establish sustainable security beyond the perimeters of their bases. In addition, Devlin concluded, both the central and local governments had collapsed in Anbar, leaving AQI to fill the vacuum and become the strongest political force in the province. In Devlin's judgment, it was a situation "beyond repair."⁵⁹ The report quickly was leaked to the American media, where it seemed to cast further doubt on the increasingly unpopular campaign in Iraq. MacFarland noted, "Because Pete Devlin was sounding these cautionary notes up at the MEF Headquarters, it was a little bit more difficult for me to convince my bosses to come down and embrace the sheikhs." He later said:

They were getting a lot of advice of, "Be careful, your job is really to support the governor. It's not really to support these sheikhs. These sheikhs could go rogue on you." I had to overcome that.

Those were valid concerns. I don't belittle them at all. But it did make it a little bit more challenging for me to try to make sure that the Marine leadership in Anbar understood that these guys [the Ramadi sheikhs] really can be trusted.⁶⁰

For his part, Casey found the tone of Devlin's report—and its widespread leak—unwelcome and poorly timed. On September 2, Casey confronted Zilmer in Fallujah, expressing his disappointment in Devlin's "defeatist" attitude. Warriors needed to have a more positive mindset, Casey told the Marine commander, adding that the MEF G-2 should be looking for AQI vulnerabilities rather than assuming the coalition could not win.⁶¹

THE ANBAR AWAKENING

The Founding of the Sahawa

Just 4 days after Devlin's report concluding that Anbar permanently was lost, Sattar's tribal alliance, known as the Anbar Emergency Council, went to war with al-Qaeda, just as the Anbar People's Committee had unsuccessfully done in January. On August 21, AQI leaders Abu Bakr and Abu Uthman ordered an attack on the newly established Jazeera police station north of the Euphrates, an ISF outpost emplaced with the Albu Risha's support. The attack set off a gas explosion that badly injured 6 army soldiers and killed 11 of the 30 police stationed there.⁶² Rather than quit, as had often happened before, the Iraqi police, newly confident in their U.S. military support, insisted on keeping the police station open. On the same day, AQI fighters led by Rasheed Abu Zaayen, a militant who had been released from U.S. detention at Camp Bucca the previous day, assassinated the leader of the Albu Ali Jassim tribe, Sheikh Khaled Ali Albu-Jassim. A former Iraqi general and local political leader, Khaled had at one point cooperated with AQI leaders, but he and his tribesmen had become AQI's enemies when they refused the terrorist group's demand to hand over their weapons. Rather than returning Khaled's body to his tribe for a proper Muslim burial, the AQI leaders left his decapitated corpse in the desert, forcing the Albu Ali Jassim tribesmen to search for several days for his remains. The brazen attack on the tribally connected police station and the desecration of Sheikh Khaled's body were a tipping point for the Anbar Emergency Council.⁶³ Outraged sheikhs from the Albu Dhiab, Albu Assaf, Albu Ali Jassim, Albu Julib, and Albu Risha tribes gathered on August 31 to declare an anti-AQI front.⁶⁴ On September 3, Deane reported to MacFarland that the Anbar Emergency Council and its armed wing, the "Anbar Revolutionaries," were ready to side with the coalition publicly. The Anbar Revolutionaries were a potent group, drawing their fighters from the local police, army officers, and local tribesmen, as well as from insurgent groups including Jaysh al-Haq, the Nu'man Brigade, and Mohammed Mahmoud Latif's branch of the 1920 Revolutionary Brigades.⁶⁵

Clearly recognizing this nascent threat, AQI leaders gathered at least 850 fighters in the Ramadi area by summer's end, including reinforcements from Bayji. With the additional forces, AQI launched a series of attacks in September in an attempt to regain the initiative, leading to spurts of fierce fighting. During one of these engagements on September 27, AQI fighters attempted to overrun a patrol from 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry Regiment in Hit. When his company commander and first sergeant were both hit, 2d

Lieutenant Walter Jackson rushed into the street to help them. Despite being grievously wounded twice, Jackson fought off the insurgents and recovered his commander, an act for which he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.⁶⁶ Two days later in Ramadi, on its last mission before rotating home, a squad of SEALs performing over-watch for Soldiers in the city's Mala'ab District came under intense fire. When insurgents threw a grenade among the SEALs, 25-year-old Master at Arms 2d Class Michael Monsoor, who had already earned a Silver Star earlier in the same deployment, immediately threw himself on the grenade, which killed him when it exploded. Saving his teammates with his sacrifice, Monsoor was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously.⁶⁷

As battles raged across the city during September, MacFarland became convinced that supporting tribal groups like the Anbar Revolutionaries was the best solution for growing the local police who were essential for the city's security. When he reported these developments to the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) headquarters, however, he was met with hesitation and skepticism. The Marine leaders had not discounted the potential for tribal negotiations but were going about it in a different manner. Many of the lineal Anbari sheikhs, heirs by birthright to tribal lines of succession, had fled to Jordan during the 1990s or after the U.S. invasion. These lineal sheikhs, while technically still tribal chieftains, had been replaced on the ground by other members of their clans who had stayed behind. Deane and Patriquin met with the tribal power brokers who had remained in Iraq, while the Marine leadership engaged the more detached tribal figureheads who were in Jordanian exile, creating a tension between two tribal outreach strategies that endured well into the following year. When Brigadier General David Reist, Zilmer's deputy and MNF-W's lead for engagements, learned that 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division had been closely working with Sattar, he told Deane that many at MNF-W considered the sheikh a criminal and that Deane should arrest him. "I'm not arresting him. You arrest him," Deane had defiantly replied, and had been surprised not to receive a reprimand.⁶⁸

On September 7, coalition troops captured senior AQI leader Abu Bakr on his way to meet Abu Uthman near Abu Ghraib, dealing the Ramadi AQI leadership a serious blow at a time when the tense relations between AQI and the tribes were coming to a head. Two days later, on September 9, MacFarland met with Sattar and 20 other sheikhs for the first time, with Sattar presenting the group's 11-point platform for an Anbar "Awakening," or "Sahawa" in Arabic. The sheikhs proposed manning new police emergency response units (ERU) with their tribesmen and declared that any further attacks against coalition troops would be considered assaults against the tribes as well. MacFarland immediately endorsed 10 of the tribes' proposed points but opposed one in which the tribal leaders demanded the removal of Governor Alwani and in which they implied they might use force to expel him. Cognizant of MNF-W's heavy investment in Alwani, MacFarland pressed Sattar and the other sheikhs to abandon their opposition to the governor for the time being.⁶⁹

With coalition endorsement of most of their Awakening platform, on September 14, Sattar and 40 other sheikhs issued an Emergency Council proclamation, acknowledging their decision to work with the coalition against AQI in Anbar.⁷⁰ The Anbar Emergency Council was the largest tribal organization the coalition had yet seen, consisting of 41 sheikhs from 17 Anbari tribes, including 9 sheikhs from the powerful western Anbar Albu

Mahal and Albu Nimr tribes. Meeting near the Jazeera police station north of Ramadi on the same day they issued their proclamation, the council members voted to name Sheikh Sattar as the rightful governor of Anbar Province and proposed to seek Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's support for a plan to reestablish security in the province.⁷¹ In this step, the Awakening had instantly become a rival provincial government, complete with its own alternate security structure. For the Ramadi sheikhs, Sattar was the province's legitimate leader, not Governor Alwani.

The Awakening had an immediate impact on the security situation. As the coalition and the Anbar Revolutionaries stepped up their pressure on al-Qaeda's networks, the number of insurgent attacks declined sharply by 50 percent during September alone.⁷² As the Anbar Revolutionaries and the Emergency Council began to have a serious effect on the battlefield, they received a significant political boost as well when Iraq's state-run television channel began to portray their campaign against AQI positively.⁷³

The Tribes, Baghdad, and the Anbar Police

As the Awakening tribes came forward to form security units, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division worked to overcome bureaucratic obstacles to incorporating the tribesmen into Anbar's formal security structures. The Interior Ministry and MNF-I centrally determined the number of police stations authorized in much of the country and had given Ramadi a cap of 11 stations. The tribes, eager to provide their men for the police force, recommended establishing police stations manned by tribesmen within their own tribal precincts, but MacFarland technically was prohibited from overseeing the hiring and pay of police who were not assigned to one of MNF-I's already-designated stations. To solve this bureaucratic conundrum, the brigade creatively established sub-stations in the tribal areas, each connected to a sanctioned station and with tribesmen brought onto the rolls and paid as if they were assigned to one of the 11 approved stations.⁷⁴ Employing local men to staff these stations quickly paid off; they had a stake in securing their home areas and were well-positioned to provide 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division intelligence about insurgent networks in them.

In addition to the sanctioned police, scores of Anabari men stood ready to form the Anbar Emergency Council's proposed emergency response units (ERU). To gain approval in Baghdad for this new source of counterinsurgent manpower, MacFarland briefed Casey on the ERU concept, while Sattar petitioned Interior Minister Jawad Bolani for support for the ERUs. On October 8, Bolani authorized two ERUs for Sattar and an additional one for Habbiniyah.⁷⁵

The influx of tribal police recruits exceeded all expectations. The tribes quickly became so depleted of men because they were at police training in Jordan that the sheikhs asked MacFarland to pause recruiting in October until some of the recruits returned from training to guard the tribal areas. It was a good problem to have, MacFarland noted, since it indicated the virtual flood of Anbaris now willing to serve. The Awakening received yet another boost when, at Sattar's urging, Anbar Revolutionary leader Brigadier General Hamid Hamad al-Shawqa was appointed Anbar police chief. Under Shawqa's direction, the Anbar Revolutionaries allowed AQI fighters to surrender at the Jazeera police station, turn in their weapons, and not be targeted as long as they did not return to fighting.

With the Interior Ministry's endorsement of Sattar's efforts and the installment of Shawqa as police chief, control of Anbar's security forces was shifting into the hands of Sattar and the Sahawa.⁷⁶ By October, the tribal movement also was becoming a political player, lobbying senior government officials in Baghdad for official recognition. For the Baghdad-based Iraqi Islamic Party, the Awakening was a clear political threat, one that needed to be co-opted or contained if the IIP was to retain its leadership of the Sunni political bloc. In response, Maliki, Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, and Governor Alwani attempted to form a competing tribal council of their own with IIP members. With the Awakening-IIP rivalry growing, on October 10, MNF-I facilitated a meeting between Sattar and Alwani that temporarily eased tensions, but the underlying political competition would remain a potential driver of instability.

Nevertheless, despite the looming power struggle among the Sunni factions, the events of summer and fall 2006 had produced an astonishing turnaround in the state of the ISF in the province. Filling the ranks of the 1st and 7th Iraqi Army Divisions based in Anbar had been an uphill battle, given the reluctance of Sunni men to risk being deployed to another part of the country once they had enlisted. Anbaris also generally did not view the Iraqi Army as theirs, considering it instead, an extension of the Shi'a-led central government, which they still regarded with deep suspicion.⁷⁷ Unique among the division-sized sectors, MNF-W's greatest gains in security force development materialized in the Iraqi police rather than in the army. The police in Anbar grew during Zilmer's tenure, from 2006 through early 2007, from about 2,000—most of whom were posted in Fallujah—to 8,500.⁷⁸ Police recruitment escalated in October with the infusion of Ramadi's tribal levies, and the rapid formation of the three battalion-sized ERUs Bolani had approved, but MNF-W observed progress in recruitment in every city across the province.⁷⁹ Such growth only occurred with the active support of Anbar's tribes.

The Islamic State of Iraq

As Sheikh Sattar's star ascended, al-Qaeda leaders sought to eliminate him as a threat. In early October, AQI Commander Abu Ayyub al-Masri sent Sattar an ultimatum that he had 1 month to pledge support for AQI or he would be killed.⁸⁰ On October 16 and 22, vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attacks struck near Sattar's home, apparently related to Masri's effort to murder Sattar and dismantle the Awakening.

At the same time as these attacks against Sattar, AQI unveiled a new political initiative, the Islamic State of Iraq, which partly was an ideologically driven attempt to establish an Islamic emirate and partly a political response to the Sahawa. In September, Ayman al-Zawahiri instructed Masri to create the Islamic Emirate of Iraq, or Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), and to prove it was an indigenous organization by appointing an Iraqi leader. Masri chose an unknown figure with the nom de guerre, Abu 'Umar al-Baghdadi, to lead the new "state."⁸¹ Al-Qaeda senior leaders also ordered the new ISI to establish a Central Tribal Council to rival the Sahawa and unite Sunni tribes loyal to AQI, an arrangement to which many tribes in Anbar and Mosul agreed because it came with a promise of financial and material support. To celebrate the creation of the ISI, more than 60 AQI fighters defiantly paraded through still-contested east Ramadi on October 18, claiming the city as the capital of their new "caliphate."⁸² Similar demonstrations spread across Anbar, giving

AQI a morale boost when none of the celebrations in Ramadi, Hadithah, Haqlaniyah, Bani Dahir, Rawah, or Rutbah met with ISF or coalition resistance.⁸³ The AQI-led celebratory parades indicated that the battle for Anbar continued.

While MacFarland had made significant progress by reclaiming parts of Ramadi block by block, East Ramadi remained contested territory with tribal influence limited and fragmented in its dense urban community neighborhoods. But the AQI-dominated eastern quarter of the city remained the only area of Ramadi left to be cleared, MacFarland reported to Casey on October 25.⁸⁴ The rest of Ramadi had become calm enough that the brigade commander was able to take Casey on an uneventful hour-long patrol through the city streets to the government center, which had been the scene of intense AQI attacks earlier in the year. MacFarland felt close enough to what he viewed as the conclusion of his decisive operation that his units began the renovation of the government center area, a complex of more than 30 buildings almost completely destroyed after years of fighting.⁸⁵

The Sahawa, the IIP, and MNF-W

As insurgent violence in Ramadi continued to drop, Hashimi and other IIP leaders in Baghdad grew more uncomfortable with the Ramadi sheikhs' new role and the U.S. military's apparent endorsement of them. On October 30, Hashimi and Alwani tried to persuade Casey that the Ramadi sheikhs should be folded into an "Islamic Party Tribal Council" under Alwani's leadership, a proposal Sattar's group already had rejected. However, the MNF-I commander would not allow tribal and provincial government disputes to stand in the way of what he saw as an imminent tipping point against AQI in Ramadi or to slow the success in building a large police force in such short time.⁸⁶ Instead, the general urged the IIP leaders to take full advantage of the tribes' willingness to fight extremists. Insisting on a centrally devised framework for arming and employing the tribes risked alienating them, Casey warned. As if to illustrate how the political ground was shifting, on the same day that Casey was quashing the IIP's plans, Sattar was meeting with Maliki to discuss how to equip the Awakening. Two days later, on November 1, Maliki and Casey met to discuss the tribal movement and its standoff with the unpopular provincial government, and the two leaders even briefly considered the option of holding an early provincial election in Anbar to seat a more legitimate provincial government.⁸⁷

Though the election option would not materialize until 2009, Casey was determined to take advantage of what he perceived could be a decisive opening against AQI in Anbar. He had been unhappy with what he saw as MNF-W's hesitancy to seize the opportunity and had opined in late September that Zilmer and his command should be taking bold steps "more along the lines of Operation SAYAID" from the previous year: large-scale activities "focus[ing] on major muscle movements, such as disrupting traffic across the border [and] controlling the lines of communication."⁸⁸ As if to prod MNF-W into this kind of approach, Casey requested that the U.S. Central Command commit its theater reserve, the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), to Anbar in order to "go for the jugular, take risk, and to be decisive" – in other words, to finish off AQI in western Iraq once and for all.⁸⁹ Arriving in November, the MEU sent two companies to reinforce MacFarland's work in Ramadi, while the remainder fought in Hadithah to disrupt al-Qaeda's

“hub” connecting the Euphrates River Valley with Baiji in the north and Rutbah in the west.⁹⁰ Consistent with his view that Anbar had reached a tipping point, Casey believed the extra weight of the MEU would be decisive and described the continued fighting in MacFarland’s sector as the “final kinetic phase of operations in Ramadi.”⁹¹ As he made these moves, the MNF-I commander emphasized to Iraqi leaders such as Hashimi the importance of staying focused on al-Qaeda rather than getting distracted by internal political disputes. He directed Zilmer to get involved in sorting out a compromise between Alwani and the tribes.⁹²

From MNF-W’s perspective, however, the Awakening still seemed like an unreliable secondary effort that could jeopardize the command’s main engagement strategy with the larger Anbari tribes’ exiled leaders in Jordan, men who retained considerable financial and moral heft. Zilmer hoped to persuade them to return home and use their authority to bolster security force recruitment and unite their tribes against al-Qaeda.⁹³ No significant breakthroughs had come from this line of effort, however, and Sattar’s rise seemed to make such a breakthrough even less likely. Just as tension had developed between the tribes and the provincial government, similar resentment roiled Anbar’s tribal order, where leaders perceived influence as a zero-sum game. As the Awakening’s relationship with MacFarland’s brigade deepened, and the Ramadi violence subsided, Sattar’s capacity for patronage expanded, and the Abu Risha eclipsed larger Anbari tribes such as the Abu Issa, Abu Nimr, and Abu Mahal, whose sheikhs chafed at the U.S. military’s inadvertent reordering of the traditional tribal hierarchy.

Skeptical of what MacFarland’s accommodation with Sattar might ultimately gain and sensitive to what it could potentially cost, Zilmer nonetheless allowed it to continue, hoping the bottom-up approach that tapped into the Awakening would help rather than hinder the top-down track of engagement with the lineal sheikhs in Jordan.⁹⁴ In the hope of forging a connection between Alwani and the tribes, Zilmer instructed MacFarland to engage the governor, but within the MEF, senior officers doubted whether these two feuding factions could be reconciled. “The Sunni elite that once held sway over al-Anbar has been reduced to an ineffectual potpourri of mutually antagonistic special interest groups,” wrote Devlin, MNF-W’s chief intelligence officer, in another pessimistic report in November, seemingly written as though the sharp drop in violence and the explosion in tribal police volunteers had not happened.⁹⁵ Slightly modified from his famously gloomy August assessment, Devlin’s updated report acknowledged Al Qa’im and Ramadi as relative bright spots in an otherwise failed tribal system. Yet he expressed misgivings about their durability given the Iraqi Government’s persistent stinginess vis-à-vis the Sunni province and what Devlin considered the unreliability of tribal militias.⁹⁶ The Awakening led by Sheikh Sattar was a “force to be reckoned with,” Devlin conceded, but associated groups like the Anbar Revolutionaries “could become a power unto themselves.”⁹⁷

Seeing little coming from the besieged provincial government in the way of material assistance, MacFarland ignored these MNF-W warnings to avoid getting too close to Sattar, whom the Marine headquarters still considered untrustworthy.⁹⁸ From the brigade commander’s perspective, MNF-W’s warnings to avoid a rapprochement with Sattar and the tribes were akin to a lifeguard telling a drowning man to avoid a certain flotation device because it was not “U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary approved.”⁹⁹

The Rescue of the East Ramadi Tribes

MacFarland's success in weakening AQI's grip on Ramadi, building local security forces, and gradually placing Iraqi forces in control of sections of the city continued throughout the fall. By November, the police force was growing rapidly. Most areas to the north and west of Ramadi had flipped against al-Qaeda, and even the disinclined Albu Alwan tribe in West Ramadi had joined the Awakening. Still, most tribes east of the city remained neutral or uncooperative due to their intimidation by or alliances with AQI. Lieutenant Colonel Charles Ferry's 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment had recently taken control of East Ramadi from Lieutenant Colonel Ronald P. Clark's 1st Battalion, 506th Infantry Regiment, but it was no stranger to the area. It was a rare unit that returned to the same area of operations as its previous rotation, and, in fact, it had been the battalion that had handed East Ramadi to Clark the previous year. Ferry's area extended east of the city and south of the Euphrates where the river made several pronounced north-south bends known to the troops as the "shark fins." As Ramadi became less hospitable to AQI, the shark fins, containing the areas of Sufiyah and Julaybah, had become key terrain for the insurgents—areas where AQI could continue to train new recruits and stage attacks east to Baghdad or west into Ramadi.¹⁰⁰ The shark fins also were the only remaining locations from which AQI could fire mortars into Ramadi and on coalition locations with easy ingress and egress for insurgents along Route Michigan, the main supply route through Anbar.¹⁰¹

The westernmost shark fin, in Ramadi's Sufiyah District, was home of the Albu Soda tribe, led by Sheikh Jassim Mohammed. Sheikh Jassim had represented the Albu Soda at the September Sahawa declaration but had been reluctant to join the Awakening fully, given AQI's heavy presence in his territory. He and his small tribe had managed to establish checkpoints to control AQI movement and moved to eliminate AQI's mortar firing positions within their tribal area, but AQI had retaliated by killing Jassim's brother and two cousins and dumping their bodies into the Euphrates. In response, the outraged Albu Soda mounted raids against insurgent safe houses and delivered captured AQI fighters by boat across the Euphrates to the nearest police station, after which AQI leaders, intent on retaining their sanctuary, moved to eliminate the Albu Soda altogether.¹⁰² Considering the Albu Soda as one of the weakest elements of the burgeoning Awakening, AQI commanders believed that if they and the local branch of Ansar al Sunna could join forces to destroy the tribe, it might begin a domino effect that could topple the tribal movement.

MacFarland and the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division had planned a final push to wipe out AQI's remaining influence in eastern Ramadi starting with the Mala'ab, the city's eastern urban area, before pushing farther east to seize the shark fins.¹⁰³ But events on the ground changed this approach. On November 24, AQI asked Sheikh Jassim to meet to negotiate the removal of his checkpoints. Nervous about being kidnapped, Jassim had notified Patriquin of the impending meeting, and the American officer had presciently given Jassim a satellite phone to call for help in case the negotiations became troublesome. On November 26, 2 days after Jassim's meeting with AQI, more than 100 AQI fighters attacked the Albu Soda tribal area, and the tribe frantically called Ferry's interpreter for coalition support. The newly arrived Ferry, unfamiliar with the Albu Soda's situation and unsure of Jassim's veracity, had already planned a battalion operation into

the Mala'ab for the following day, an important effort that a detour to help the Albu Soda in the shark fins would disrupt.¹⁰⁴ Learning of Jassim's position from Patriquin, Ferry realized the developing tribal battle was one his unit had to support.¹⁰⁵ Within an hour, Ferry and his men had scrapped their planned operation and began maneuvering their battalion to Sufiyah.

The fight in the shark fins was not an orderly one. From his unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) feed, Ferry's unit was unable to distinguish AQI and Albu Soda fighters, so Patriquin persuaded the Albu Soda men to wave towels so coalition troops could visually separate the tribesmen from the AQI fighters. Soon air strikes and artillery pounded AQI locations, destroying AQI trucks and fighters.¹⁰⁶ As night fell on November 27, discerning an insurgent from a tribesman became increasingly difficult until Ferry convinced Jassim by phone to light a bonfire to mark the sheikh's forward line of troops. After reducing several AQI obstacles and destroying AQI vehicles that were attempting to drag Albu Soda fighters away as trophies, Ferry finally linked up with Jassim on the battlefield and the tribe was out of danger.

By Anbar standards, the battle had been a large one. The Albu Soda lost at least 55 tribesmen, while at least 68 insurgents were killed.¹⁰⁷ Taking quick advantage of the victory, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment established a new combat outpost in the Sufiyah shark fin, and after an additional brief fight near Fishhook Lake in December, the entire Sufiyah District was under U.S. and Awakening control, isolating the remaining insurgents in East Ramadi.¹⁰⁸

The Death of Captain Patriquin

Ferry's battalion would continue to fight significant AQI resistance throughout December and into the new year, finally controlling the second shark fin and establishing another combat outpost to control Julaybah by January 25, 2007. The final clearance of East Ramadi, the Mala'ab, would have to wait for the arrival of 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division's successor unit, Colonel John Charlton's 1st Brigade, 3d Infantry Division, in February. But by any measure, the situation in eastern Anbar had already turned to the coalition's advantage to a degree that had been unimaginable half a year before.

One of the architects of the historic turnaround, however, would not be present to see its completion. By December, Patriquin had become optimistic enough for Ramadi's prospects and the growing Sahawa, that the articulate young officer had begun working closely with Marine Major Megan McClung, MNF-W's chief of public affairs, to engage the many journalists now arriving in Ramadi to get a firsthand view of the Awakening and its impact. On December 6, after escorting Fox News' Oliver North and MSNBC's Sarah Childress around the city, Patriquin and McClung struck an IED that destroyed their HMMWV and killed them instantly.¹⁰⁹

The loss was a difficult one for both MNF-W and 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division. McClung was the first female Marine officer to be killed in Iraq, the first female graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy to have been killed in combat, and the most senior female officer to be killed in the war. It equally was devastating for the Awakening sheikhs, who had grown so close to the ubiquitous Patriquin that they had dubbed him with the tribal name "Hisham Abu Risha." When the American commands held a memorial service

for the officers, scores of tribal sheikhs and Anbari security officers filed into the large hall, with the senior sheikhs taking their place in the first row next to MacFarland in a visual representation of the nascent Anbari-American alliance Patriquin had helped to construct. “No one is going to replace Patriquin,” Sattar lamented.¹¹⁰

Eleven days after his death, Patriquin’s outsized influence was felt as far away as Washington, DC. Interviewed on Meet the Press, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich cited Patriquin’s tribal strategy as an example of what Gingrich thought the United States should be doing to win the war. Gingrich described a clever, stick-figure PowerPoint presentation the irreverent Patriquin had created, entitled “How to Win in Iraq,” to show the logic of tribal outreach. The PowerPoint and Patriquin’s analysis went viral on the Internet. In subsequent years, Patriquin’s instrumental role in bringing to the coalition side tribes that many had come to view as irreconcilable would lead some observers to compare him to T. E. Lawrence.¹¹¹

Back in 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, MacFarland reflected on the captain’s impact on the war. “When the history of this conflict is written, his contributions will loom very large,” MacFarland eulogized. “And I will personally do all I can to make sure he receives the credit and recognition that he deserves . . . he was the architect of one of the [war’s] central, and perhaps the decisive aspect.”¹¹²

* * *

During 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division’s 7 months in Ramadi, the brigade estimated it had killed 1,500 insurgents and detained another 1,500.¹¹³ MacFarland’s units had suffered 96 killed in action, while approximately 150 Iraqi soldiers and police had been killed. During those same 7 months, the Iraqi police force in Ramadi had grown to close to 3,000 strong, occupying stations throughout the city and its tribal belts, and with Sattar’s assistance, an additional 3,000-man ERU brigade also had been established as auxiliary police. Under the force of this new Sahawa-U.S. coalition, insurgent attacks had fallen by 70 percent, and Ramadi even had managed to hold its first mayoral election since 2004.¹¹⁴

These gains had not been achieved easily and had come despite a strategic trajectory in MNF-I and the Iraqi Government that was moving in a different direction. MNF-I’s campaign plan throughout 2006 remained focused on national elections, a reduction in coalition presence, and a steady security transition to Iraqi control. It also was focused upon national-level politics and top-down governance and reconciliation. The change in Anbar, however, had come from the bottom up, on both the coalition and the Iraqi sides. The levers of power in Anbar that turned the province against AQI had emerged from the Sunni tribal structure that had boycotted the national political process. They rose from the tactical, grassroots level rather than the national one. From December 2005 to September 2006, the Anbari tribes and their allies had tried to establish a parallel provincial governing structure that they considered legitimate, and with the Sahawa, they finally had succeeded. This complex tribal system ultimately delivered dedicated police and local security forces that allowed provincial governance to take root.

On the coalition side, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division’s operations were an anomaly among MNF-I’s brigades because they amounted to a distributed small-unit urban

presence at a time when MNF-I pressed toward its goal of reducing U.S. bases to just 50 by the end of the year. Surprised in retrospect at the latitude he enjoyed in going against the strategic grain, MacFarland attributed it to a “joint dispensation.” Had his brigade been under an Army division, the colonel mused, he likely would have been subjected to greater scrutiny and thus more readily challenged by higher echelons that were pursuing different approaches.¹¹⁵

The Awakening also made clear that the lines between insurgents, provincial and national governance, tribes, and security forces were not as distinct as coalition units typically assumed. One of the Awakening’s chief architects behind the scenes, Mohammed Mahmoud Latif, was himself a prominent insurgent leader, while many tribes intermittently supported or opposed the insurgency as the political winds shifted one way or another. Iraqi motivations were often quite localized, as tribes came under AQI enticement or threat to their personal safety and economic livelihood. Despite the coalition’s focus on national unity and governance, local and tribal grievances more often than not were the dominant causes of violence against either insurgents or the coalition. The burgeoning Awakening demonstrated that coalition units that could decipher these motivations could also exploit them, sometimes delivering results that were significant on a regional or national scale. For the moment, the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division approach in Ramadi was an anomaly, but before long, it would become the centerpiece of a new strategy that the U.S. President and other senior leaders were desperately seeking.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 21

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CHAPTER 22

THE FAILED TRANSITION

As Operation TOGETHER FORWARD II wound down in the fall of 2006, General George W. Casey, Jr., considered the disappointments of this latest iteration of the Baghdad Security Plan and determined that the dynamics in the capital had to change. A heated encounter with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki only confirmed this grim realization. Casey returned to Baghdad after a week of consultations in Washington and learned that on the day prior—October 11—Iraqi soldiers stationed west of the Tigris River in the Mansour district had caught 17 men clad in army uniforms in the act of raiding a local Sunni residence. Protesting their arrest, the men identified themselves as members of the Iraqi Army on a secret mission authorized by the Prime Minister. A phone call interrupting their interrogation validated this claim. An irate major general from Maliki's office demanded the release of the soldiers in custody—some of whom were assigned to an army unit based in Sadr City—and threatened to arrest the commander of the brigade holding them.¹

The incident struck a nerve with Casey, who in the previous month had heard similar complaints from Iraqi brigade and division commanders about the Prime Minister's office bypassing the military chain of command and ordering the release of prisoners without explanation. For an American commander whose strategy relied on the capability and professionalism of the Iraqi security forces, such instances of brazen overreach rankled him. Paired with Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, Casey confronted Maliki his first day back in country. When the Prime Minister unapologetically acknowledged his office's role in the operation, the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) commander pointed out just how ugly perceptions of this incident could be. The Prime Minister was essentially orchestrating raids out of Sadr City against Sunni enclaves in the capital. Sectarian overtones aside, the practice of circumventing the Ministry of Defense and the chain of command undermined the military institutions that so desperately needed to be solidified. When Maliki dismissed Casey's concern as "no big deal," the MNF-I commander pushed back more fervently—enough for the Prime Minister to ask if the general was threatening him.²

Returning to his quarters that night, Casey wrote an e-mail to his boss at U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), General John P. Abizaid. Casey related that he understood Maliki's frustration at having limited rapid-response capability to strike at fleeting terrorist targets, and the necessity of coordinating with "too many people" (i.e., the coalition) constantly tested the Prime Minister's patience. However, the fact that Maliki remained "unrepentant and did not appear to grasp the significance or consequences of his actions" deeply troubled the MNF-I commander. "He is clearly frustrated with the slowness of the transition and wants his hands on the controls," wrote Casey, "but he is just as clearly not ready to command the IAF [Iraqi Armed Forces]."³ Maliki wanted control of the security apparatus as quickly as possible, and for his part, Casey was willing—even eager—to grant it. Yet in the fall of 2006, the threats besieging Iraqi society far exceeded the ability of the Iraqi Government and its security forces to deal with them. Casey often made the

case that this gap was closing, but even if that were the case, it was closing too slowly for everyone's taste. Accumulating evidence of the government's complicity in perpetuating the cycle of violence – the kind illustrated by the Maliki-sanctioned October 11 raid from Sadr City – cast a pall over Baghdad's near-term prospects for stability.

THE DETERIORATING SECURITY SITUATION IN BAGHDAD

MNF-I faced an uphill climb. The conflict remained a competition among “ethno-sectarian groups vying for economic power and political influence against the backdrop of a residual insurgency and an increasingly sectarian terrorist campaign.”⁴ Such had been the coalition's basic understanding of the problem since the aftermath of February's Samarra mosque bombing, but conditions had become even grimmer. Shi'a death squad activity – once believed to be the sphere of “rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia” – now appeared to include mainstream elements of Moqtada Sadr's militia and others such as the Badr Corps. Faced with the Shi'a militia onslaught, Sunni neighborhood watches in Baghdad had grown more organized and had even begun to acquire limited offensive capability. Furthermore, the Shi'a-Sunni conflict continued to be characterized by a geographical component. Violence in October mainly occurred in the western part of the city, but it spread beyond the capital itself as Shi'a militias attempted to expand their control of Baghdad's northern and southern lines of communication – often with the assistance of militia-infiltrated Iraqi units. Operation TOGETHER FORWARD II, which had formally ended on October 22, took a toll on al-Qaeda in Iraq, but the growing problem of the Shi'a militias meant that tactical success against Sunni extremists had lost some of its significance.⁵

As Operation TOGETHER FORWARD II concluded, seven of the coalition's 15 U.S. brigade combat teams (BCT) fell under the control of Major General John D. Thurman's 4th Infantry Division, assigned as Multi-National Division-Baghdad (MND-B). At the time, three of these units occupied territory in the northern and southern “belts” just outside the city; four operated inside Baghdad proper. East of the Tigris River, 4th Brigade, 101st Airborne Division focused on pursuing insurgents based in the beleaguered Sunni enclave of Adhamiya while struggling to limit Shi'a militia forays out of Sadr City and across the Army Canal. Two brigades split the western half of the capital, with 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division responsible for the northern sections of Mansour and Kadhimiyah, and 4th Brigade, 4th Infantry Division operating across the breadth of Rashid. The 172d Stryker Brigade served as a strike force operating in trouble spots throughout the city. These American units were joined by elements of two Iraqi Army divisions – the 6th and the 9th – as well as two National Police divisions of dubious utility. Plans had existed since the late spring to move two additional Iraqi Army brigades from the outlying provinces to Baghdad, but the Ministry of Defense had failed to deliver on what would have been a welcome infusion of Iraqi manpower.⁶

As Ramadan ended and October gave way to November, Thurman and MND-B observed a few positive indicators of levels of violence, but the atmosphere was generally gloomy. Militants had carried out an average of 80 attacks per day in Baghdad in October. MND-B reported an average of 76 attacks per day the first week of November, a number that held about steady throughout the month.⁷ “Incidents” tracked as part of the broader

ethno-sectarian conflict followed a more uneven trend during this period. According to coalition estimates, during the week of October 28 to November 3, 274 Iraqis were killed in a total of 147 incidents in Baghdad. Security-related incidents dropped to 99 the following week, shot back up to 158 the next, and then settled down to 137 toward month's end.⁸ The brutality of the sectarian conflict translated into intense fighting for coalition units in and around the capital. During a patrol in the Hurriyah district on October 30, an element from the 172d Stryker Brigade was caught in an ambush with the platoon leader's vehicle disabled by an explosively formed penetrator. Despite being wounded himself, Sergeant Gregory D. Williams, Jr., recovered his wounded lieutenant and provided suppressive fire until assistance arrived. For his actions, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.⁹ Similarly, Chief Warrant Officer David F. Cooper received the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism he displayed on a November 27 mission targeting foreign fighters in the Baghdad belt area between Taji and Lake Tharthar. After one of the other helicopters in his flight from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment was shot down, Cooper set up a defensive perimeter to await the recovery team. Attacked by a massive enemy force that included dismounted personnel and vehicles armed with anti-aircraft cannons, Cooper flew multiple strafing runs and prevented the ground perimeter from being overrun.¹⁰

The intense fighting highlighted that levels of violence remained far above those routinely observed before the February 2006 Samarra mosque bombing. When U.S. forces captured Saddam Hussein in December 2003, the coalition had high hopes that justice served would bring a stabilizing sense of closure to Iraqi society. Nearly 3 years later, however, the Iraqi Government braced itself against an anticipated backlash in the wake of the November 5 announcement that the former dictator had been sentenced to death by hanging.¹¹ A curfew and vehicle ban in Baghdad dampened violence for a short time, but as the month of November progressed, the coalition detected an elevation of suicide attacks. These had averaged 35 per month from January to August 2006 but had risen to above 50 in both September and October.¹² The near-simultaneous explosions of four car bombs in the Shi'a-populated district of New Baghdad on November 19 served as a reminder of al-Qaeda in Iraq's staying power.¹³ Four days later, on November 23, Sunni extremists rocked Sadr City with the detonation of six car bombs in the space of 90 minutes, killing 181 civilians and wounding another 247.¹⁴ The combined attack was the deadliest since the war in Iraq had begun in 2003, and a rattled Casey reported to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he considered the bombings in Sadr City as significant as the Samarra mosque attack the previous February.¹⁵

Indeed, JAM and other Shi'a militias showed signs of striking back hard in retaliation for al-Qaeda's high-profile attacks. Reports surfaced that the militias intended to sidestep the curfew by donning Iraqi security forces uniforms and operating official vehicles. Indirect fire against Sunni mosques mounted.¹⁶ Shi'a militants added to the chaos with a spate of high-level kidnappings.¹⁷ With JAM on the move and al-Qaeda poised to continue its onslaught, the sectarian violence in Baghdad seemed out of control. MNF-I's spokesman repeated assertions that Iraq was not in a state of civil war, but the command's internal assessment painted a different picture. In the wake of high-profile attacks and reprisals, three of MNF-I's four "civil war indicators" pointed in an unfavorable direction (with the fourth inconclusive).¹⁸ The security situation seemed to have deteriorated since

the previous month when a leaked report from CENTCOM depicted the “index of civil strife” in Iraq as edging consistently toward “chaos.”¹⁹

In Search of an “Iraqi Solution”

The central tenet of MNF-I’s strategy was that “enduring success will only be achieved by Iraqis.”²⁰ If, as Casey believed, “Iraqi problems require Iraqi solutions,” then the deployment of additional American troops to the theater would yield temporary and local security gains but fail to supply the leverage necessary to arrive at a long-term solution. As Casey accumulated experience as MNF-I commander, he grew more convinced that there was a subtle danger in “doing too much with your own hands.”²¹ Even as the security situation deteriorated in the fall of 2006, he subjected the question of troop levels to a rigorous test: would increasing the current number of American Soldiers in Iraq move MNF-I closer to the end state of an Iraqi Government securing its citizens or not? Lower-level commanders nervous about the tactical situation were, in effect, challenged to think about the long-term implications. When debates about off-ramps or reinforcements were framed in this way, Casey’s subordinates often demurred.²² If the end state was a self-reliant Iraq, argued Casey, then a foreign military force actively engaged in maintaining order ultimately hampered progress toward that goal. To win—to meet its strategic objectives in the most expeditious manner—the United States had to draw down, he believed, while gradually adapting its force posture to support an increasingly sovereign Iraq.

By late 2006, Casey saw additional reasons to counsel against further U.S. troop involvement. He and other commanders doubted whether the Iraqi Government wanted stability as much as the coalition did.²³ Casey suspected that powerful factions within the government viewed the continuing cycle of violence as advancing their interests, yet the complex interplay of violent actors in Baghdad only bolstered his inclination to shift responsibility toward the Iraqis. Reflecting on this difficult period, Casey later admitted to asking himself whether he should have allowed the U.S. military to shoulder more of the security burden. “If it had been just a counterinsurgency, I probably would have,” he recalled.²⁴ Because the conflict was fundamentally a struggle for political and economic power among diverse ethno-sectarian groups, he judged that an outside actor like the coalition was not in a position to navigate these turbulent waters. The more complex the situation, the less inclined Casey was to put American Soldiers at risk.²⁵ The impending rotation of the U.S. division and brigades in Baghdad also reinforced his predisposition to make only minor adjustments to the military plan and to scale back involvement in favor of allowing the Iraqis to lead.

When it came to the question of bringing in additional American troops, the MNF-I commander felt certain that the domestic U.S. political context militated against this option in any case. Since Casey’s assumption of command in 2004, the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) had prescribed a path to success that entailed drawing down American forces while reducing their role vis-à-vis the Iraqis, an approach to which Casey—as well as Abizaid—generally subscribed. Like Casey, SECDEF Donald Rumsfeld’s opposition to increasing the U.S. presence was rooted partially in his concern that American Soldiers would tend to carry out combat missions themselves rather than risk failure at the hands

of less capable Iraqi units. The downside of the U.S. military's "can-do" attitude was that it undermined the urgency with which the Iraqi Government approached the transfer of security responsibility, Rumsfeld believed. Making Iraqi units too reliant on their U.S. partners would dissuade them from eventually taking the lead in security operations and, in the long run, extend the American military commitment, he concluded. From the beginning, Rumsfeld communicated to Casey that time was of the essence.²⁶ For both, it was not a stretch to associate a rise in U.S. troop levels in late 2006 with "doing too much" for the Iraqis and extending the length of the war.

THE SHI'A SOUTH: "EMBERS UNDER ASHES"

Across the Shi'a south, the British-led Multi-National Division-Southeast (MND-SE) had carried out an economy of force mission under a similar belief that coalition troop levels should diminish over time. British leaders were under increasing pressure to support rising troop commitments in Afghanistan, faced criticism at home over the unpopular Iraq War, and were persuaded that the southern provinces were already sufficiently stable. As such, they made transferring security responsibilities to Iraqi forces the focus for their deploying commanders.²⁷ The transition to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) was an important milestone not only on the road to Iraqi "security self-reliance," but also as a prerequisite for the withdrawal of United Kingdom (UK) troops from the country. Granting PIC status to each of the four provinces in MND-SE was the ticket out of Iraq.

Unfortunately, the perception of comparative calm in the MND-SE sector created a false sense of security that encouraged transition on the basis of wishful thinking rather than actual conditions on the ground. Since the first years of the coalition's Iraq campaign, the United States and Britain had operated under an accommodation of sorts. U.S. commanders were content to leave what they regarded as an economy of force mission to their European allies in the south. British officers, in turn, would manage and resource the mission enough to keep things in Basrah under control, while carrying out a series of incremental force reductions. Nonetheless, while the sectarian homogeneity of the Shi'a south spared the region from a cycle of retaliatory death squad activity, violence and criminality had escalated all the same in 2006, undermining development, governance, and security. The lack of British enthusiasm for the war prevented MND-SE from playing a more active role in securing the population, and Shi'a militias sought to fill the void, with destabilizing consequences. In reality, the informal U.S.-UK accommodation unwittingly made the British "mere observers of the gradual transfer of power . . . to Iranian-backed militias," as one officer described it.²⁸ Maliki acknowledged the worsening problems, particularly in Basrah, and developed a security plan for the city to shore up public confidence, reduce police corruption, confront the militias, and uphold the rule of law.²⁹ He declared a state of emergency there in June 2006, and the following month established a Basrah Security Committee chaired by Major General Ali Hamadi, his senior military adviser. Like much of Iraq in the second half of 2006, the populous southern city was the scene of a communal power struggle involving multiple factions. A besieged governor championed the interests of his own Fadhila Party while competing militias engaged in a campaign to infiltrate or undermine the local state apparatus. Distrustful of the governor and alarmed by deteriorating conditions in the province, Maliki staffed the

Basrah Security Committee with his confidantes. One of them forebodingly characterized the city as “embers under ashes: when the ashes are removed the flames will return.”³⁰

Meanwhile, the 10th Iraqi Army Division wrestled with loyalty and capacity issues due in part to an inept commander, the low priority it received in terms of equipment and funding, and a large number of Basrah natives in its ranks who were vulnerable to intimidation by local militias. The early British decision not to embed advisers with the division’s subordinate units during operations also hampered their development.³¹ Hamadi, Maliki’s man in Basrah, put little stock in the division’s abilities. Only about 50 to 60 percent of the division was reliable, Hamadi judged, and its soldiers were not strong enough to stand up to JAM in any case. He rated the police as far worse, gauging their reliability at 15 to 25 percent. At best, Iraqi security forces in Basrah turned a blind eye to death squad activities. At worst, the local security forces were private militias beholden to political parties engaged in a war among themselves. The solution to the loyalty problem, he argued, was to raise one or two battalions of tribal recruits answerable only to the Basrah Security Committee.³² The penchant for creating a responsive military organization outside of the normal chain of command seemed ubiquitous.

Elsewhere, MND-SE pressed ahead with the transition to provincial Iraqi control. In July 2006, the division transferred security responsibility for Muthanna Province to the Iraqi Army and handed over Camp Smitty, a base outside the city of Samawah, after which the Australian task force that had been posted there relocated to Tallil Airfield near Nasiriyah and assumed an “operational overwatch” role.³³ Days later, however, hundreds of Iraqis overwhelmed the indigenous guard force and stripped the camp almost bare, making off in pickup trucks with everything from air-conditioning units and computers to bedding and kitchen utensils. The looting tarnished the luster of what Maliki had billed as a “great national day,” and threw doubt on Iraq’s readiness to take this first significant step toward “building a stable and democratic future” in the southern provinces, as UK Defense Minister Desmond Browne optimistically described it.³⁴ In nearby Dhi Qar, the battalion-sized Italian contingent had begun to draw down in preparation for the Iraqi assumption of provincial control in September as Italy moved to complete its troop withdrawal. A third southern province – Najaf, in MND-B’s sector – was slated to go to PIC in December.³⁵ These supposed success stories masked internal Iraqi struggles that continued, with varying degrees of violence, long after the transitions occurred. Even in relatively stable Muthanna Province, where the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) controlled the levers of political and military power, the population suffered from JAM intimidation.³⁶

From Salamanca to Sinbad

When Major General Richard D. Shirreff assumed command of MND-SE in July 2006, he brought a new perspective on British operations that challenged the prevailing mindset of transition and withdrawal. He was troubled by the worsening security environment, not least the shortage of resources that seemed to prevent the division from forestalling it. In Maysan Province, bordering Iran, the cities of Amarah and Majar al Kabir were “effectively no-go areas,” where any UK operations resulted in serious fighting.³⁷ Just one battalion covered Basrah city, and that unit was capable of deploying only 200 soldiers

on the streets at any time.³⁸ According to Shirreff, the strategy of gradual withdrawal not only risked failure in Iraq, but also jeopardized the reputation of the British Army, as well as the UK's reputation as a reliable ally of the United States.³⁹ "We had a strategy that involved extraction rather than . . . achieving mission success," he recalled later. "It was, in a sense, an exit strategy rather than a winning strategy."⁴⁰ The general believed that without security, there could be no stability or economic development on which to base the withdrawal. Security, he argued, was the prerequisite for PIC. What he witnessed upon his arrival in Iraq was instead a "cycle of insecurity."⁴¹



British Under Secretary of State for Defence Twigg (left) and Major General Shirreff (right). Source: U.S. Army photo by Specialist Rhonda Roth-Cameron, Joint Combat Camera Center Iraq (Released).

**British Under Secretary of State for Defence Derek Twigg
and Major General Richard D. Shirreff,
General Officer Commanding, MND-SE Visit Basrah.⁴²**

Shirreff envisioned a large-scale, resource-intensive operation to confront the militias and restore security. He developed this concept in conjunction with the British 3d Mechanized Division headquarters and the 19th Light Brigade prior to their Iraq deployment. Adopting a "clear, hold, build" methodology, the plan divided Basrah into 16 districts, each to be tackled sequentially through a series of "pulses" and "pauses." After British troops "pulsed" into a district and conducted clearing operations that targeted criminals and indirect-fire cells, Iraqi forces would follow in order to reestablish their presence in the area during a deliberate "pause." Then would come development projects designed

to deliver quick results and create jobs, Shirreff hoped. A requested surge in support from the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development did not materialize, thus undercutting the comprehensive civil-military approach Shirreff sought.⁴³

To conduct this operation, dubbed Operation SALAMANCA, Shirreff required additional forces, and, given London's reluctance to deploy more troops to Iraq, the MND-SE commander looked for them inside his organization. Visiting Camp Abu Naji on the outskirts of Amarah in late July, Shirreff conferred with the commander of the Queen's Royal Hussars, who convinced the general to close down the base. Amarah's inhospitable security environment kept the battle group bottled up, and frequent mortar fire added to its woes. Furthermore, sustaining the formation required a 3-day round trip by the entire division reserve, involving over 200 logistics vehicles every 2 weeks. Seeing an opportunity, Shirreff agreed to transfer Camp Abu Naji to the Iraqis. Splitting the 1,200-man battle group, he ordered half to exchange their tanks and infantry fighting vehicles for wheeled Land Rovers and conduct a mobile screening operation along the Iranian border. As part of this tactical readjustment, the others would report to Basrah, where they would augment the main effort.⁴⁴

The subsequent events surrounding the British withdrawal from Camp Abu Naji reflected poorly on the Iraqi security forces, as well as on MND-SE. In mid-August, troops from a battalion of the 4th Brigade, 10th Iraqi Army Division mutinied when their leaders informed them of a plan to deploy the unit north to Baghdad for Operation TOGETHER FORWARD. With its ranks infiltrated by both JAM and Badr Corps fighters, the battalion collectively refused to participate and ended the protest only when the brigade commander announced that the imminent move had been canceled.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the Queen's Royal Hussars continued their withdrawal and completed the ill-timed transfer. Within hours of the British leaving camp, a mob of 5,000 Iraqis, including several hundred armed men, demanded entry. The Iraqi guard force, consisting primarily of former mutineers, happily obliged after receiving a promise of safe passage. As they had done at Camp Smitty, looters stripped Camp Abu Naji of all that could be carried away, while the local Sadrist office broadcast over loudspeakers, "This is the first Iraqi city that has kicked out the occupier!"⁴⁶ Militants claimed that indirect-fire attacks had chased off coalition forces, and senior U.S. leaders at MNF-I interpreted the British decision that way as well.⁴⁷

Emboldened, JAM continued its campaign to wrest control of Amarah from the Badr-led local police, enjoying the support of the province's Sadrist governor as it did so. Kidnappings and assassinations escalated dramatically in October when JAM fighters overran a number of police stations, prompting the dispatch of Iraqi Army battalions from Basrah and the deployment of British units to the outskirts of the provincial capital.⁴⁸ While highly embarrassing for MND-SE, the aftermath of the Camp Abu Naji transfer also highlighted the questionable state of the 10th Iraqi Army Division.

When Shirreff briefed Operation SALAMANCA to General Peter Chiarelli in August, he sought U.S. involvement in his plan. In doing so, Shirreff bucked the trend among British commanders of accepting — and even encouraging — MND-SE's treatment as a separate entity within MNC-I.⁴⁹ Approaching Chiarelli as a genuine tactical subordinate, Shirreff asked for American reinforcements to support clearing operations in Basrah. Struck by

the MND-SE commander's unusually aggressive concept, Chiarelli offered a U.S. battalion from his operational reserve, a company of AH-64 helicopters, one unmanned aerial vehicle to close a gap in British surveillance coverage, and \$80 million to supplement development projects.⁵⁰ Casey also agreed in principle with Operation SALAMANCA after Shirreff promised to maintain MND-SE's screen along Maysan's eastern border to discourage Iranian weapons smuggling.⁵¹ Yet the idea of employing U.S. forces to augment the Basrah effort appalled civilian and military leaders in London, who considered it tantamount to an admission of British failure. At Britain's Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ), the UK chief of joint operations instructed Shirreff to turn down the offer, but to compensate, PJHQ agreed to reinforce MND-SE with a battalion from the Staffordshire Regiment and another that had been preparing for a stint in Cyprus. Shirreff welcomed the concession, but deployment timelines for the newly committed units would delay the start of the operation and cause it to extend beyond the end of his 6-month tour.⁵²

The ambitious effort envisioned by Shirreff would eventually be scaled down. If British leaders in the United Kingdom had little inclination to fully support Operation SALAMANCA, the Iraqi Government was also reluctant to confront the Shi'a militias head-on, preferring to seek a political accommodation with the Sadrists and other Shi'a militants. Briefed on the plan in August, Iraqi National Security Adviser Mowaffaq Rubaie rejected it based on the recommendation of Maliki's Da'wa Party adviser on Basrah matters, Safa al-Safi. The Prime Minister requested a modified approach that focused primarily on economic development, with the Iraqi security forces conducting only limited security operations. Shirreff reworked the concept in September 2006, alongside members of the Basrah Security Committee and presented the revised plan—Operation SINBAD—to Maliki, Rubaie, and Casey later that month.⁵³ Skeptical of the MND-SE commander's aggressive approach to put the restive province on a sound footing, senior officers at PJHQ emphasized merely the narrative of success over what could actually be accomplished and derisively labeled the operation "Spinbad."⁵⁴

COMMANDERS IN BAGHDAD TAKE STOCK

While their senior headquarters wrestled with how to change course to dampen the sectarian conflict in Baghdad, U.S. BCTs operating in the city continued to engage in a complex, frustrating, and, at times, befuddling war. Since the January 2005 elections, MNF-I had envisioned a steady transition as coalition units reduced their presence throughout the country and passed control to improving Iraqi security forces. By November 2006, this overarching thrust of the campaign remained, but leaders at the tactical level found it increasingly problematic, particularly in Baghdad. East of the Tigris River, for example, 4th Brigade, 101st Airborne Division witnessed a three-way fight among Sunni insurgents, JAM, and the coalition—with the ill-defined loyalties of local Iraqi security forces obscuring the way forward even more. Determining how U.S. troops participated in this sectarian melee most effectively was murky. Brigade commander Colonel Thomas Vail complained of "the lack of a clear, unified definition of the endstate" and offered the troubling judgment that the Iraqi Government and security forces' goals "are not necessarily aligned with ours."⁵⁵

If the question of how to end the fighting in Baghdad seemed unsettled, BCT commanders were certainly not confused about the nature of the violence. Those posted in the capital in the fall of 2006 were nearing the end of their year-long combat tours. When asked by Casey for their views on the security situation, few held back. All saw the units they led embroiled in sectarian conflict—a struggle far more complicated and demanding, they believed, than a classic counterinsurgency. What made their mission especially difficult was the destructive bias of the Iraqi Government itself. The unanimity among BCT commanders assigned to MND-B was staggering. To a man, they branded the government and its security forces as instigators of sectarian violence. “JAM [Jaysh al-Mahdi] has been [executing] and continues to execute a deliberate, decentralized, campaign to control East Baghdad,” wrote Vail, with death squads operating energetically and publicly and Iraqi security forces in support, either actively or passively.⁵⁶ Colonel Michael H. Shields, commander of the 172d Stryker Brigade, noted that the Iraqi Government “facilitates JAM activities,” including the maintenance of a safe haven in Sadr City.⁵⁷ In the northwest quadrant of the capital, Colonel Robert Scurlock, in charge of 2d Brigade, 1st Armored Division assessed that “most Iraqi people view the militias as the government in most neighborhoods.”⁵⁸ The perception strongly held among Sunnis that local security forces were “heavily influenced” or simply “run” by Shi’a militia leaders only seemed to confirm this close connection.⁵⁹ Iraqi security forces in Rashid District provided both tacit and deliberate support to JAM, and Colonel Michael F. Beech, the brigade commander there, had linked the National Police directly to the mass murder of Sunnis on two recent occasions.⁶⁰ In the rural and largely Sunni belts south of Baghdad, newly arrived Colonel Michael Kershaw, commanding 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, reported observing sectarian violence only “in areas where GOI [Iraqi Government] forces are in the lead” — not a ringing endorsement of Iraqi progress toward stability.⁶¹

While MNF-I balked at characterizing the conflict as a civil war, the brigade commanders in Baghdad were much more inclined to do so. Reflecting on the mobilization of local Sunni militias to confront JAM intimidation in Mansour and Kadhimiyah, Scurlock saw the possibility of a rapidly downward spiral. “To have a true civil war you need to have opposing political and ideological views, backed by population centers and militias,” he wrote. “We are dangerously close to seeing this on a widespread scale.”⁶² In Rashid, Beech feared similar implications of the deteriorating security situation. “The threat of self-sustaining and expansive Iraqi civil war in the capital city is now only being contained by U.S. forces,” he reported.⁶³

How the brigade commanders viewed the character of the conflict affected their judgment on how coalition military power should be applied. Given their widely shared assessment of the fight as a sectarian conflict, several commanders viewed separating the belligerents as the primary role of U.S. forces. “At the tactical level, most of the counterinsurgency principles apply,” concluded Colonel John Tully, commander of 2d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, but adhering to counterinsurgency doctrine at the operational and strategic levels of war was “destined for failure as long as the central government is controlled by sectarian forces.”⁶⁴ Absent a legitimate host-nation government, Tully added, coalition forces had to “mediate the conflict at a local level.”⁶⁵ Posted on the northern outskirts of Baghdad in Taji, Colonel James Pasqualette, the commander of 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, agreed that U.S. troops were typically seen as “honest brokers” in the

ongoing sectarian conflict by both Sunni and Shi'a actors. Pasquarette considered security as foundational to the needs of the population, and – as honest brokers – the Americans were especially well-suited to provide that security.⁶⁶ From his area south of the capital, Kershaw concurred, commenting that where sectarian violence routinely occurred, the job of the coalition was “to prevent two rivals from exterminating each other.”⁶⁷

A separate assessment prepared around the same time by MNC-I officers for Chiarelli took a similar stance. “If the course is not diverted soon,” Chiarelli’s officers warned, “then a large-scale ethno-sectarian conflict (civil war) is assured.”⁶⁸ Their paper called for a “fundamental shift” in the coalition’s approach to one of peace enforcement operations. Forces in and around Baghdad should impose a “forcible separation of belligerent parties,” intervene to restore order, and redouble efforts to retrain civil authorities and enhance government credibility.⁶⁹ “The establishment of physical separation,” they posited, “will force a halt in the cycle of violence, creating time for other . . . methods of conflict resolution to be utilized.”⁷⁰ Of course, undertaking such an approach required more troops.

Troop presence mattered in the eyes of Multi-National Division-Baghdad’s (MND-B) brigade commanders, and it also appeared to matter to Iraqis. A division assessment in November 2006 found beleaguered Sunni residents in Ghazaliyah relieved to see the coalition assuming a more prominent role in providing security. Another assessment brought bad news, but it reinforced the same point: in areas where citizens believed that coalition forces were leaving, they were less likely to engage and pass on information.⁷¹

Troubled by what they saw, the U.S. brigade commanders advocated a new approach. If additional troops were not forthcoming, then U.S. leaders needed to change how they employed those on hand. The commanders pushed for taking a harder line against JAM – “the most significant threat to stability and to coalition forces,” ventured Beech.⁷² Sensing (and lamenting) a reluctance to target high-level JAM fighters, Scurlock advised ramping up operations to disrupt the militia, detaining its leaders, and then ignoring Iraqi demands for their quick release.⁷³ Vail, the commander responsible for Sadr City, proposed a deliberate effort to “fractionalize” JAM in order to drive a wedge between the mainstream elements of the militia and the more radical factions that were emerging.⁷⁴ Causing dissension among JAM’s subgroups might be one way to compensate for a limited number of U.S. troops.

Adjusting the relationship between coalition and Iraqi units was another. All the brigade commanders assigned to MND-B submitted that the Iraqi security forces in their areas of operations bore careful watching. Three officers explicitly recommended revitalized unit partnerships to address this pressing need.⁷⁵ Shields described an arrangement whereby a coalition battalion could cover the same battle space as an Iraqi Army or National Police brigade, as well as the police stations there. Such an arrangement would not only facilitate closer monitoring by the American unit but also establish a means for Iraqi units under distinct chains of command to monitor each other. Shields viewed the partnership as a way to improve Iraqi fighting capability since Iraqi security forces “fight harder when they know the [coalition force] is minutes away.”⁷⁶ In turn, an emphasis on partnership would drive U.S. leaders to “maintain a continuous presence in [the] zone.”⁷⁷ He suggested that a battalion keep one to three platoons forward at all times, ready to respond to an Iraqi unit’s call for assistance within 30 minutes.⁷⁸ Other commanders put

a premium on an American presence in order to “align ISF objectives with our own” and “limit [their] latitude to passively or actively support sectarian violence.”⁷⁹ They proposed encouraging the Iraqis to develop an offensive mindset through more combined operations and urged the adoption of “combat outposts with direct access to the population.”⁸⁰ Kershaw went so far as to admonish, “Get off the roads and on foot and into the hinterlands and side streets.”⁸¹ This last bit of advice would take time to institutionalize. Still, this set of recommendations offered in the fall of 2006 served as a forerunner of concepts to come.

Amid a Flurry of Transitions, MND-B Consolidates

Given the candid and rather dismal views of the U.S. BCT commanders in Baghdad, it was not surprising that Thurman’s 4th Infantry Division saw the situation in a similar light following Operation TOGETHER FORWARD II. With Shi’a militants contesting the mixed areas in western Baghdad and pushing out into the Sunni belts surrounding the city, Thurman considered JAM and other Shi’a militias’ expansion the foremost threat to stability. Thurman recognized that the militias’ activity consisted of far more than reprisals. The Shi’a militants had seized the initiative, and Sunni attacks now appeared retaliatory in nature. Such was the extent of Shi’a aggression as the division saw it. Yet the Iraqi Government appeared unwilling to deal firmly and impartially with the militias. The Prime Minister’s inaction in the face of rising Shi’a-perpetrated violence led Thurman to believe that neutralizing al-Qaeda vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) networks would only slow – not break – the cycle of violence in Baghdad.⁸²

The imminent turnover of U.S. units in Baghdad affected the way ahead as well. Of the four BCTs operating in the city, three were scheduled to hand over their battle space and return home in November. The fourth – the 172d Stryker Brigade – was slated to depart without replacement, leaving a sizable gap in combat power until December when another Stryker brigade would relocate to the capital from Mosul. Two more BCTs posted north and south of Baghdad would also rotate out during this 30-day period – as would Thurman’s division headquarters itself. To keep MND-B’s head above water, Thurman had three battalions that would remain through the unit turbulence. These anchors of continuity were attached to each of the BCT areas in the capital and directed to increase their operational tempo during the transition. The division would also boost its available combat power by adjusting its coverage of the numerous checkpoints inside the city.⁸³ In the coming weeks, MND-B intended to focus its operations west of the Army Canal in neighborhoods where the most violence occurred. This effectively made operations in and around Sadr City an economy of force mission and served as an admission that the coalition had little to gain there – especially given the Iraqi Government’s ambivalent stance toward operating against Shi’a militants.⁸⁴ MND-B’s plan to concentrate only on Operation TOGETHER FORWARD’s “focus areas” seemed a quiet plea for additional manpower. The decision to withdraw from checkpoints, the temporary loss of battalions, and the repeatedly delayed arrival of additional Iraqi Army brigades lent a sense of desperation to the division’s last few weeks in country.⁸⁵

CENTCOM has its Doubts

Skepticism about the Baghdad Security Plan extended to the highest levels of CENTCOM as well. Following a mid-October visit to Iraq, Abizaid determined that the dynamic should change and passed on his impressions to Casey. Abizaid had known Thurman for decades, and hearing the MND-B commander's firsthand report on the disappointing results of the TOGETHER FORWARD operations made a profound, sobering impression. While the threat from al-Qaeda remained serious, the sectarian violence that accompanied the Shi'a militias' campaign to dominate Baghdad could prove "fatal" to MNF-I's mission, in Abizaid's assessment. That the situation seemed "normal" across the rest of Iraq mattered little in the face of rising Sunni-Shi'a tensions in the capital. Whatever happened in Baghdad would be decisive. Besides JAM and other militants' deliberate effort to drive Sunnis from Baghdad's neighborhoods and extend control over the city, Abizaid was also concerned about increasing sectarianism in the Iraqi security forces. Singling out the National Police as especially troublesome—as Thurman had done—he deemed Ministry of Interior units and institutions as "at best dysfunctional and at worst a deep piece of the sectarian problem."⁸⁶ Recent personnel assignments in key Iraqi Army units suggested that the same problem had begun to grip the Ministry of Defense.⁸⁷

The need for the coalition to reverse the alarming trends in the security situation had become even more urgent, but Abizaid believed that any meaningful reversal would require "serious commitment by the Iraqis." By this, he meant "firm Iraqi governmental intervention, particularly against Jaysh al-Mahdi and bad MOI [Interior Ministry] units."⁸⁸ In the short term, Casey's forces could attempt to address the dire situation in the capital militarily. However, for robust military action to have any lasting effect, it needed to be complemented by actions to advance reconciliation and, according to Abizaid, progress in this area depended almost entirely on the Iraqis. Achieving mutually reinforcing progress in the areas of security and governance was the way to reduce sectarian violence in Baghdad, he judged. This was the task before Casey and Khalilzad as the CENTCOM commander saw it.⁸⁹

POLITICAL DEFEAT OF THE BAGHDAD AND BASRAH SECURITY PLANS

Casey and Maliki: A Troubled Partnership

Unfortunately, political progress was far from imminent. Worse, the Iraqi Government seemed to be playing a deliberately disruptive role, but the MNF-I commander had failed to appreciate the extent of its troublesome behavior. As the coalition struggled to check the escalating violence in the summer and fall of 2006, Casey gradually realized that Maliki and his allies interpreted any organized Sunni activity—hostile or otherwise—as the potential forerunner of a broader Ba'athist resurgence. This led the Prime Minister to balk at authorizing operations against Shi'a militias that he and other Shi'a leaders seemed to think they might someday need to defeat the Ba'ath.⁹⁰ This state-sanctioned sectarianism became evident to U.S. troops executing the "clear-hold-build" concept underpinning Operations TOGETHER FORWARD I and II. After clearing Sunni neighborhoods, the Americans noticed a lag in the delivery of basic services that could

not be explained by a simple lack of ministerial capacity. Sectarian bias on the part of the Shi'a-run ministries was clearly at play. A similar unseemly bias affected the behavior of the Iraqi security forces.⁹¹

Casey's experience with Maliki illustrated a complex side of civil-military relations: how should a theater commander approach negotiations regarding military strategy and security operations with a host-nation head of government driven by his own narrow political interests? As Casey saw it, Maliki was the head of a legitimate government that subscribed to civilian control of the military and was due Casey's respect and deference. Although not Casey's boss, he was regarded by the MNF-I commander as a partner. In this partnership, Casey conceived of his role as providing military advice and then letting Maliki lead, not twisting the Prime Minister's arm against his political interests. It was up to Maliki to weigh the risks and make decisions. Casey believed he had little ability to affect the Prime Minister's decision-making calculus in any case, and he was not inclined to do so if it would undermine Maliki's leadership in real and perceived ways.⁹²

Casey had his own views about what was best for Maliki, but he could not know all of the factors that shaped the Prime Minister's political calculus. In late 2006, the general was especially sensitive to Maliki's need to maintain the support of the Sadrist to stay in power, as inconvenient—or even detrimental—as that relationship was for coalition operations at the time. Casey consented to give Maliki space to maneuver since a collapse of the Maliki government could potentially set back the campaign's progress by 6 to 12 months.⁹³ Facing the likely expiration in December 2007 of the UNSCR that authorized the coalition's mission, that was time MNF-I could ill afford to lose. Nonetheless, Casey was much less willing to tolerate decisions that threatened to undermine Iraq's security institutions—especially the army. Iraq could limp along and manage the symptoms of a low-grade civil war, he believed, but if the Iraqi Army itself fractured, the entire edifice of the coalition's transition-based strategy would crumble along with it.⁹⁴

In a sense, the general was in line with then-President George W. Bush's approach. Regarding Maliki, Bush saw assertions of independence and decisiveness as positive signs and instructed Casey and Khalilzad to “nurture his spirit of leadership.” Now that the United States had an Iraqi Prime Minister who appeared eager to lead, it should “work with him” and “hold his hand” through the difficult issues if necessary.⁹⁵ This perspective was consistent with Casey's interpretation of UNSCR 1546, which assigned the MNF-I commander a responsibility to establish a “security partnership” with the Iraqis. As Casey saw it, the UNSCR unconventionally assigned to him—the military commander—a “direct role with the sovereign government of Iraq to coordinate” this partnership.⁹⁶ To those like Rumsfeld who routinely expressed their frustration with Maliki's leadership, Casey counseled, “You need to walk a mile in Maliki's shoes.”⁹⁷ The Prime Minister was under tremendous pressure from all sides, and additionally, the process of hammering out political deals involving diverse stakeholders took time. In early November, the general went so far as to attribute some of the recent improvement he had witnessed in Iraq to Maliki's efforts.⁹⁸ Publicly too, Casey had sung the Prime Minister's praises. In what he considered damage control, Casey had issued a press release in late September to counter criticism conveyed anonymously to journalists by subordinate commanders in MNF-I. Maliki was doing the best he could in a challenging situation, Casey declared, and he remained a reliable partner.⁹⁹

The Temporary “Pulse” of Operation SINBAD

Far from the sectarian politics and death squads of Baghdad, MND-SE’s Operation SINBAD finally commenced on October 28, when two companies from the 1st Battalion, Staffordshire Regiment, pulsed into northern Basrah’s Muftiah University District near the Iraqi Naval Academy.¹⁰⁰ Far from being either ready or willing to participate, the 10th Iraqi Army Division provided a meager two dozen soldiers. The Staffords and the 1st Royal Green Jackets would lead later “pulses,” with assistance from the Danish battle group in a few of the city’s northern districts. Over a period of 3 days, coalition troops cordoned off areas, established vehicle checkpoints, and conducted patrols. They emphasized assessing and strengthening district police stations, expecting that policemen would begin to assert their authority on Basrah’s streets.

As planned, each limited geographical “pulse” was followed by a “pause” of up to a month in order to conduct police training and to initiate quick-impact projects like painting public buildings, constructing soccer fields, refurbishing schools, and restocking medical centers. As the coalition spent development money on one district, citizens in other neighborhoods clamored for similar job opportunities and community improvements. “It underlined the importance of money as a ‘weapon system’ in complex stabilization operations,” one commander recalled, lamenting the dearth of UK-provided funds typically available to MND-SE leaders at the tactical level.¹⁰¹ Still, Shirreff had to remind Maliki in November that Operation SINBAD was not simply about reconstruction. It had a security component as well, and the British commander hoped to extend its impact by pushing into Basrah’s city center during the operation’s next phase.¹⁰² While raids had killed or captured a number of militants, JAM and other militias continued to contest Operation SINBAD’s modest and temporary incursions. Sniper fire met British troops at each pulse, and indirect-fire attacks on coalition outposts intensified over time. Casey, on an early November trip to Basrah, was struck by how the problem of indirect-fire consumed MND-SE commanders and their staffs – not to mention the U.S. and UK civilian-run offices co-located with the headquarters.¹⁰³ Indeed, frequent rocket and mortar attacks effectively drove the British-led provincial reconstruction team out of Basrah Palace in the fall, forcing the team’s relocation to Kuwait until facilities could be prepared for it at MND-SE’s main base outside the city.¹⁰⁴ Casey saw the threat of indirect-fire as a strategically significant issue, distinct from SINBAD’s almost trivial focus on improving “atmospherics” in certain neighborhoods. Alarmed, the MNF-I commander asked Chiarelli to consider directing Shirreff to discontinue the operation and turn MND-SE’s full attention to stopping indirect-fire attacks. JAM, Casey perceived, was attempting to force a UK withdrawal through a rain of rockets and mortars, and he wanted to avoid another embarrassing coalition pullout along the lines of Camp Abu Naji.¹⁰⁵ Indirect-fire attacks across MND-SE continued to rise in December, topping more than 25 per week during the final 2 weeks.¹⁰⁶

In Casey’s view, the British had allowed the situation in the south to get out of control and had failed to adapt their overarching approach once political and military considerations made it untenable.¹⁰⁷ Abizaid had similar thoughts on Basrah’s turn for the worse, but, given the crisis in Baghdad in late 2006, he had little to recommend when it came to improving MND-SE’s prospects. During an October visit, the CENTCOM commander

flew into Basrah and saw Shirreff. He left feeling uneasy. “Basra is a concern,” he wrote Casey, adding that the situation in Iraq’s largest southern city was “probably not as good as Richard thinks.”¹⁰⁸

Operation SINBAD culminated on the night of December 25 with the destruction of the Jamiat police station—the headquarters of Basrah’s notorious Serious Crimes Unit and the site where British troops had fought militia-allied local police the previous year. Thoroughly infiltrated by militia members, the station had become a den of systemic corruption and torture. Three days earlier, the British had arrested seven members of the Serious Crimes Unit for running a death squad. On the night of the raid, Royal Engineers breached the Jamiat station walls, allowing Staffordshire Regiment troops in infantry fighting vehicles to penetrate the compound. As they cleared the buildings, soldiers found 127 prisoners showing obvious signs of torture and took them into protective custody. The Royal Engineers used explosives to demolish the station.¹⁰⁹

Operation SINBAD made local and temporary security gains but failed to achieve its main objective of reversing the deteriorating situation in Basrah over the long term. In the end, militia influence and intimidation of the populace continued, attacks against the coalition in MND-SE rose, and Iraqi forces remained incapable and unwilling to assume responsibility for security even as the British prepared to transfer additional bases in 2007. Shirreff’s plan depended on a host of resources, requiring troops and reconstruction money not only to “clear” an area but also to “hold” and “build.” Civilian and military leaders in London had declined to resource MND-SE adequately, allowing the constraints of politics and army force structure to exert greater influence on troop levels than the logical requirements of a daunting ground campaign.¹¹⁰

While Shirreff’s efforts to employ a comprehensive approach by integrating civilian agencies were well-intentioned, the improved communications it generated mattered little if poor security confined British aid workers to coalition operating bases and prevented their engagement with Iraqis. Similarly, the Maliki administration’s failure to support Shirreff’s plans politically and militarily contributed to Operation SINBAD’s shortfalls. The Prime Minister’s hesitancy to confront Shi’a militias watered down the decisive operation the British commander had envisioned, making it a shadow of its original design. Militia infiltration, a lack of training, and low personnel strength ensured that the Iraqi security forces could not enforce the rule of law on their own. As a result, the British could cobble together enough troops to clear an area, but when the pulse and pause concluded, and coalition forces moved on, JAM and other militias would dominate Basrah’s districts once again.¹¹¹

Backing Down: The Army Canal Checkpoints and Specialist Ahmed al-Taie

The vastly differing views between the coalition and the Iraqi Government about how to address Baghdad’s Shi’a militants and their destabilizing activities came to a head at the end of October with the kidnapping of an American Soldier. On October 23, Shi’a militants seized U.S. Army Specialist Ahmed al-Taie, an Iraqi-born American, during the Soldier’s unauthorized absence from a coalition base to call on his family in the Karada neighborhood of Baghdad. Kidnapped by local JAM members who had previously observed him visiting his Iraqi wife, within hours al-Taie was handed over to

Qais al-Khazali's Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq militia, the most powerful of the Iranian-sponsored Special Groups. Suspecting the missing Soldier was being held in Sadr City, Thurman and MND-B ramped up coalition presence at the Iraqi-manned Army Canal checkpoints on Sadr City's western edge to 24 hours per day. With American troops monitoring their operations, Iraqi National Police units searched every vehicle crossing the bridges over the canal. The measure not only disrupted JAM's freedom of movement, it also accompanied a surge of coalition activity in and around the safe haven that knocked the militia back on its heels. Soldiers from the 4th Brigade, 101st Airborne Division conducted a U.S.-only cordon and search operation targeting a Sadr City mosque and did so unchallenged during daylight hours.¹¹²

Maliki immediately objected to the checkpoints ostensibly because they caused traffic jams and stifled commerce in East Baghdad. In reality, the Prime Minister was under pressure from the Sadrists to persuade MNF-I to relax its presence at the checkpoints. Maliki believed that Moqtada Sadr would call for a nationwide strike if the Iraqi Government allowed the checkpoints to continue.¹¹³ Given his careful efforts to court the Sadrists politically, the Prime Minister took this threat seriously, believing that such a confrontation could trigger the fall of his government.¹¹⁴

After days of chiding from Maliki, Casey directed MNC-I and MND-B on the morning of October 30 to scale back the rigor of the checkpoints, adopting random vehicle checks and thus preventing long queues from forming in and around Sadr City. Some U.S. reports, however, indicated that Taie was still alive and detained in Sadr City and that the combined checkpoints along the Army Canal were keeping his captors from moving him to a more remote location. In an appeal to Casey a few hours later, Chiarelli called the evidence supporting this assessment "overwhelming." Echoing the sentiments of Thurman and MND-B, Chiarelli urged Casey to reconsider his directive and reinstate 100 percent checks. Aside from the obvious advantage of bolstering the chances of Taie's recovery, Chiarelli saw longer-term value in maintaining the Army Canal checkpoints. In the few days the checkpoints had been fully in place, his commanders had seen clear signs that they were disrupting JAM's campaign of sectarian cleansing in mixed areas of the city.¹¹⁵ They were "absolutely essential" in cutting down death squad activity, Chiarelli concluded.¹¹⁶

The next day, October 31, Casey went to see Maliki. Visibly exhausted, the Prime Minister greeted the general with a half-joking query: "Why are you always giving me trouble?"¹¹⁷ He wanted to know how MNF-I could justify the punishment of three million Sadr City residents over the loss of a single Soldier. Taie's Iraqi origin and relation to his uncle Entifadh Qanbar, a Sunni politician and an ally of Ahmad Chalabi, seemed in Maliki's eyes to undermine the coalition's claim on the missing American. "This guy is one of us, not one of you," Maliki added incredulously.¹¹⁸

Casey challenged the Prime Minister's rationale for lifting the checkpoints. Shi'a complaints about excessive traffic congestion in East Baghdad were exaggerated, he said. The general had flown over the city recently and had seen for himself. Maliki admitted as much but reiterated his need to act in order to minimize the incident's political liability.¹¹⁹ Leveling with the Prime Minister, Casey presented the disadvantages associated with lifting the checkpoints. First, he said, relaxing the search criteria at the canal bridges might jeopardize the effort to find Taie and reflect poorly on Maliki in the court of U.S. public

opinion. The Prime Minister slyly retorted that, in an unrelated conversation with Bush, the American chief executive had told him not to fret about what Americans thought about the war in Iraq. Secondly, Casey continued, Maliki would be seen as “caving to the Sadrists” – an especially damaging charge should death squad activity increase as the general guessed it would. Finally, the Prime Minister would be perceived as “caring more about Shi’a than Sunni Iraqis,” the MNF-I commander warned. But the decision rested with Maliki, Casey concluded.¹²⁰ Unsurprisingly, within hours, Maliki announced his order lifting “all barriers and checkpoints and opening all crossing points into Sadr City.” A government press release described the measure as one that would facilitate traffic movement in Baghdad. Future traffic controls, it declared, would take place only at night during curfew hours or in the case of emergencies.¹²¹

Chiarelli had long doubted the Iraqi Government’s evenhandedness in the increasingly bloody sectarian struggle. Even so, the confrontation over the checkpoints left him “stunned” and “angered,” he told historians later.¹²² Sunni Vice President Tariq Hashimi viewed the matter with similar gravity. He heard about the result of Casey’s meeting with Maliki almost instantly and phoned the general, leaving a foreboding message: the checkpoint decision would be catastrophic for the Sunnis of Baghdad.¹²³ It laid bare the meager extent of the coalition’s remaining influence over Maliki.¹²⁴

The incident also spelled the end of Specialist Taie. With the checkpoints effectively lifted, MNF-I lost track of him and his captors. A 10-second proof-of-life video was posted on a Shi’a militant website 3 months later in February 2007, but, otherwise, the United States would see no physical sign of him until Khazali and Asa’ib Ahl al-Haq returned Taie’s remains in February 2012, a few weeks after American troops left Iraq.¹²⁵

Diverging End States

The dispute over the checkpoints was emblematic of the frequent clashes between Chiarelli and Casey. Chiarelli appreciated the fact that the MNF-I commander endured tremendous political pressure, but he could not help but think that the force and corps headquarters were both “disconnected from reality.”¹²⁶ To continue to wage a counterinsurgency hampered by so formidable an obstacle as the host-nation government and its Prime Minister seemed futile to the MNC-I commander. Chiarelli later bristled at charges that he had fought a 9-to-5 war with forces that commuted to their areas of operations each day. Rather than attempt to defend this as the preferred way to conduct operations to secure the population, the general cited the guidance he had received from higher headquarters.¹²⁷ Throughout 2006, MNC-I’s orders had been to close forward operating bases at a steady pace as part of a campaign to transition responsibility to the Iraqis. A corps order published in April had called for a reduction in coalition bases from 110 to 54 by the end of 2006. With just weeks remaining in Chiarelli’s tour, the modified goal looking ahead to 2007 was 30 bases.¹²⁸ “There was no point where I was told to stop shutting down” forward operating bases, he recalled.¹²⁹ Chiarelli later described MNF-I’s plan as one that – after February or March 2006 – “should never have been executed.”¹³⁰ He had voiced his concerns, but Casey had dismissed or downplayed many of them, Chiarelli believed.¹³¹

According to Chiarelli, the inability to influence the Iraqi ministries plagued the coalition throughout 2006.¹³² The corps commander had begun his tour intent on “winning the peace” through largely “non-kinetic” means such as the delivery of basic services and providing economic opportunity for civilians. However, a woefully dysfunctional government was infertile ground for an approach that depended so much on the development of civil capacity. By the end of the year, the disorder plaguing the central government reached its peak. Still embroiled in a crippling and destructive “war of the ministries,” the arms of the executive branch effectively fought as proxies in a struggle for power. The government was collectively held hostage by the cycle of sectarian violence, while various subcomponents worked against each other to exacerbate the cycle.

Ever since the first months of Maliki’s administration, Chiarelli believed he had detected the ruthless implementation of a sectarian agenda in various ministries.¹³³ By fall 2006, his frustration had reached the point of suspecting that the government of Iraq defined progress in starkly different terms than the coalition striving to support it. MND-B saw the same problem and considered it a matter of two parties sharing a common end state but pursuing it by different means. The coalition and the Iraqi Government both desired stability in Baghdad that would lay a foundation for future political and economic development, Thurman’s command judged, but while the coalition sought this goal by eliminating death squads and accelerants of sectarian violence, the government seemed set on doing it by consolidating Shi’a power and running the Sunnis out of town.¹³⁴

In his final weeks in Iraq in November–December 2006, Chiarelli jettisoned MND-B’s attempt at nuance and declared that the coalition and the Government of Iraq were pursuing completely different and increasingly diverging end states. The coalition adhered to a balanced approach, protecting both Sunni and Shi’a neighborhoods, while transitioning security responsibility to what it hoped would be nonsectarian Iraqi security forces. To Chiarelli, it had become clear that Maliki aimed to limit coalition freedom of action while JAM and other Shi’a militias expanded their control in and around Baghdad. The government, he inferred, was not serious about reconciliation, an essential milestone for moving forward. On the contrary, it obstructed the process by tolerating or encouraging the spread of sectarian influence in the army and police. The two end states in Chiarelli’s mind included different sets of “winners” and “losers.” In the coalition’s end state, Sunni, Shi’a, and Kurdish citizens would be regarded equally, while al-Qaeda and Shi’a militias lost out. In the other, the Sunnis collectively fell into the loser’s column, and Shi’a militias emerged as victorious. “While various players in [the] GOI have different visions for Iraq’s future,” he concluded, “dominant players (Shi’a and Kurds) are rapidly moving towards an end state that differs substantially from the end state envisioned and pursued by the coalition.”¹³⁵

Frustrated with Chiarelli’s focus on the political and economic aspects of the conflict, Casey thought his subordinate was too distracted. As the “guys with the guns,” the corps needed to concentrate first and foremost on employing its military power as effectively as possible and to worry less about what the Iraqi Government did or did not do, the MNF-I commander admonished his subordinate.¹³⁶

Nonetheless, Casey himself wondered whether a “Shi’a hand” was manipulating Maliki and pressuring the Prime Minister to rein in the coalition. From the MNF-I

commander's vantage point, Maliki did very little to stop the growth of JAM's power—particularly since that growth benefited him politically.¹³⁷ He would need to be persuaded to modify his approach. Casey agreed with Rumsfeld adviser Stephen Cambone, who suggested that the Iraqis were still “struggling to find their own end state.”¹³⁸ But this was too charitable. MNF-I's efforts in late 2006 to change the dynamic in Baghdad were hamstrung by Iraqi sectarian bias. If reducing violence in the capital required a serious Iraqi commitment as Casey believed, then Maliki and his allies inside and outside the government undoubtedly were committed. They were just pursuing an agenda much at variance with the coalition's aims. Something had to change.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 22

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122. Interview, Rayburn with Chiarelli, Part I, May 6, 2014.
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124. Interview, Colonel Frank Sobchak, CSA OIF Study Group, with Celeste (Ward) Gventer, March 13, 2014.
125. PowerPoint Briefing, MNF-I BUA, February 15, 2007.
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127. Ibid.

128. MNC-I Operations Order (OPORD) 06-01, April 21, 2006, pp. 20-21; MNC-I OPORD 06-03, November 5, 2006, p. 24.

129. Interview, Rayburn with Chiarelli, Part I, May 6, 2014.

130. Ibid.

131. Ibid., p. 41. On page 22 of the same interview, Chiarelli noted that his troubled relationship with the MNF-I commander made his first 2 years as Army Vice Chief of Staff under Casey "very tough."

132. Interview, CSI with Chiarelli, April 28, 2008.

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134. Staff Notes, MNF-I, October 25, 2006.

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CHAPTER 23

CONCLUSION: FROM INSURGENCY TO CIVIL WAR, 2004-2006

From December 2003 to December 2006, the war in Iraq evolved from a relatively loose insurgency against the U.S.-led coalition into a horrific ethno-sectarian civil war that tore at the fabric of Iraqi society and threatened Iraq's very existence as a unitary state. This 3-year period, which began with the false hope that Saddam Hussein's capture in December 2003 would cause the insurgency to evaporate, quickly entered a demoralizing stage caused by the April 2004 uprisings and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. Had it not been for the response of the departing 1st Armored Division as an unplanned operational reserve, the coalition might well have suffered a strategic defeat along the lines of the 1968 Tet offensive in Vietnam. The shock of the April crisis dispelled the coalition's unrealistic ideas that the Iraq mission might be handed off in 2004 to a United Nations (UN) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) peacekeeping force. It also exposed the fact that the coalition had too few troops for the mission, a condition that would persist for most of the war. The uprising made coalition commanders wary for the next 4 years of provoking a war with the Sadr movement. It also bolstered the Sunni insurgency, which promulgated a narrative that it had fought the coalition to a standstill in Fallujah.

The summer 2004 transition of coalition commands from Combined Joint Task Force-7 (CJTF-7) to Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), and of commanders from Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez to General George W. Casey, Jr., appeared to right the ship by bringing new direction and organization to a flagging coalition effort. As Iraq moved into a UN-sponsored electoral process, Casey and MNF-I's "fight to the elections" appeared to deal the Sunni and Shi'a insurgencies a serious blow in fall 2004. The battles in Najaf, Fallujah, and Samarra showed that no insurgent force could hold terrain in the face of a concerted coalition attack and that select Iraqi units such as the 36th Commandos could be integrated usefully into coalition operations. The clearing of insurgent sanctuaries enabled the January 2005 election to take place, and with a new Iraqi Interim Government on the horizon, the strategy – agreed upon by Casey, General John Abizaid, and Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) Donald Rumsfeld – of transitioning security responsibility to the Iraqi Government and its new security forces seemed to promise to stabilize the country.

In hindsight, however, U.S. leaders had misjudged the situation. The fall 2004 battles had left Moqtada Sadr's and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's forces intact enough to fight another day, and the 36th Commandos' performance had given coalition leaders the mistaken impression that the Iraqi Army as a whole was growing quickly enough in capability. The Sunni insurgency in particular was strong enough to produce a Sunni boycott of the January 2005 elections that had far-reaching negative consequences. Coalition leaders had assumed that elections would have a unifying effect through the creation of an Iraqi Government whose popular legitimacy would sap the insurgency of its strength. In actuality, the Sunni Arab boycott froze Sunnis out of the new government formation and constitutional process, leaving them terrified that they had handed political power to Shi'a Islamist parties that meant them harm. In the aftermath of this polarizing election,

the insurgency that had begun in 2003 as a movement to expel the U.S.-led coalition gradually devolved into a conflict between sectarian militant groups on both sides of the Sunni-Shi'a and Arab-Kurd divides, with the election itself serving as an accelerant toward civil war. Within the Sunni insurgency, Zarqawi and his al-Qaeda in Iraq aimed at provoking a sectarian civil war by carrying out a relentless terror campaign against the Iraqi Shi'a community. Other Sunni resistance groups, having realized the strategic error of the January 2005 boycott, began to split from Zarqawi and negotiate to join the political process. However, Iraq's Shi'a population responded to Zarqawi's attacks by turning to its own ruthless militias to protect its communities and strike back against Iraqi Sunnis, further escalating the sectarian conflict. At the same time, in northern Iraq, Sunni militant groups intensified a war against the Kurds along the Green Line in hopes of expelling Kurdish forces and communities from territories occupied by the Kurdish parties in 2003.

Coalition leaders were slow to recognize these changes in the character of the conflict and did not reexamine the fundamental assumptions of the campaign. Instead, they continued to formulate plans and conduct operations as though Sunni and Shi'a militants were fighting mainly to expel the coalition rather than fighting each other for power and survival. After the seating of the government of Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'afari in spring 2005, many of the Iraqi governance and security institutions the coalition was helping to build came under the control of sectarian parties who used those institutions for sectarian ends. In the Baghdad region, in particular, Shi'a death squads aligned with the Iraqi Government and Sunni insurgent death squads each began to prey on civilians from the opposing sect, creating a growing sense of fear among the populace.

In summer 2005, as these dynamics grew stronger, the United States was undertaking two initiatives designed to disrupt the Sunni insurgency in its Syrian sanctuary and to give the new Iraqi Government the means with which to secure the country itself. The first initiative involved the deployment of teams of military advisers to embed within and mentor the multiplying Iraqi Army and police units—a mission the U.S. Army had not conducted on a large scale since the Vietnam war. The additional requirement to deploy several thousand senior officers and noncommissioned officers as advisers fell on a U.S. Army already stretched thin by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet U.S. Army leaders did not seek a significant increase in the Army's end strength and did not halt the modernization (or transformation) of the Army's brigades, a process that made a large number of active units temporarily unavailable for deployment. In the place of these active units, the Army chose to deploy large contingents from the National Guard, resourcing the 2005 rotation of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM with almost 70,000 reserve component troops. As a result, during the pivotal 2005 election year, nearly half of the coalition's total force was from the reserve component.

The same summer, Casey undertook a second initiative, this one to disrupt the Sunni insurgency's car-bomb campaign against Baghdad by shifting almost a division's worth of coalition combat power to the Iraq-Syria border zone. While this shift succeeded in disrupting the flow of foreign fighters across the border, hard-won tactical victories in Tel Afar and Al Qa'im obscured the reality that at the operational level the campaign was heading in the wrong direction. Those successes had come by pulling critical combat power away from central Iraq and removing the most effective brake on sectarian violence just as the conflict among the warring Iraqi factions was accelerating there. With death

squads from sectarian militias and rogue sections of the government working to cleanse the Baghdad region of rival sects, the cycle of violence in central Iraq was approaching the point of civil war.

The October and December elections of 2005 left coalition leaders with the sense that Iraqis, especially Sunnis, were choosing the democratic political process over the insurgency and that the Iraqi security forces that had secured the voting were ready to begin taking responsibility for security. For Casey and MNF-I, the time seemed right to begin the U.S. troop drawdown that he had believed since August 2004 would be the eventual path to success in Iraq, and to accelerate the transition of responsibility and bases to the Iraqis. MNF-I's assessments were clouded by the fact that violence against coalition troops was decreasing as AQI and other militia groups became more focused on killing fellow Iraqis. They were also clouded by the coalition's flawed evaluations of the Iraqi security forces, which often failed to capture intangible factors such as Iraqi units' will to fight. Finally, in retrospect, coalition leaders and strategists should also have recognized far earlier the danger that Iraq would descend into ethno-sectarian civil war in the aftermath of the collapse of the Iraqi state in 2003. They should also have predicted that hastily organized elections held amid a violent ethno-sectarian power struggle were almost certain to be destabilizing rather than stabilizing events. In contrast to the generally homogeneous United States, which needed 13 years to write a constitution, ratify it, and seat an elected government after declaring independence, the heterogeneous Iraq would have less than 2 years to accomplish the same tasks after the transition of sovereignty. Recognizing these factors might have led the coalition to act with greater caution as it sped toward Iraqi elections and the erection of a new state.

These dynamics came to a head in the aftermath of the Samarra mosque bombing in February 2006. In the days following the attack, Casey and MNF-I mistakenly perceived only a temporary spike in violence and judged that the Iraqi political process would stabilize the country. MNF-I leaders' denials that Iraq had fallen into civil war echoed the coalition's 2003 denials of an active insurgency and stifled conversation about whether the coalition's fundamental strategy needed to be changed. Also as in 2003, MNF-I in 2006 believed the situation could be resolved by tactical responses. As the situation continued to deteriorate, however, Casey came to realize that the conflict had shifted from an insurgency against coalition forces to a complex war among Iraqis for political and economic power. Even so, Casey maintained that Iraqis needed to resolve their sectarian problems themselves, a conclusion that validated his decision to continue with MNF-I's campaign plan of transitioning authority and bases to the Iraqis and reducing his force to 10 U.S. brigades by the end of 2006. The seating of a national unity government under Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, the killing of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and the promising outreach to Sunni insurgents seemed to validate Casey's decision as well.

In actuality, the shrine bombing did not mark the start of the Iraqi civil war, but rather the point at which MNF-I's perception of the conflict began to catch up with the reality that resistance to the coalition was no longer the principal cause of Iraq's violence. In truth, Iraq's violent power struggle had begun with the fall of Saddam and only intensified during the tenure of the Ja'afari government. The four major groups Casey perceived as defining the security environment in the post-Samarra period—Sunnī extremists, Shi'a extremists, the Sunnī resistance, and Iran—had all been competing fiercely in Iraq's

communal struggle since mid-2004, if not earlier. By the end of Operation TOGETHER FORWARD II in October 2006, the assumptions underpinning the coalition's transition strategy had crumbled: neither the seating of a 4-year government, nor the receding of U.S. troops from the Iraqi population, nor the death of al-Qaeda in Iraq's (AQI) leader had created a stabilizing effect. Pressured by militants on all sides, the Iraqi Government ministries had virtually ceased to function, rendering reconstruction plans moot. As U.S. commanders were forced to cancel their planned withdrawal of combat brigades in mid-2006, then-President George W. Bush lost faith in the coalition's transition strategy and began to seek a new one. Simply put, the transition had failed.

EXPLAINING THE FAILURE OF THE TRANSITION STRATEGY

The key reasons for the failure of the transition strategy begin with the coalition's understandable but mistaken decision to focus on operations against insurgent groups in 2004-2006 rather than on preventing the emerging Iraqi civil war. In the context of an Iraqi civil war, the elections of 2005 proved to be destabilizing events that handed control of the state and its resources to one party in that war, to be used against another warring party. In addition, the coalition leaders' assumption that the presence of foreign troops created antibodies and insecurity in Iraq was counterproductive. As coalition forces began withdrawing from the Iraqi population in 2005-2006, they left a security vacuum that the warring parties' militants filled, to the detriment of the population. As Casey instructed his units to consolidate on larger bases, they began to lose awareness of the security situation in the streets and neighborhoods of their areas of operations, undermining Casey's own guidance for MNF-I units to conduct counterinsurgency operations. This loss of situational awareness masked the growing danger of sectarian violence, a danger that coalition leaders compounded by deciding to off-ramp two full brigades scheduled to arrive in 2006. By the time MNF-I finally realized in mid-2006 that the character of the conflict had changed, it was too late—the coalition did not have enough forces to suppress the escalating violence.

The coalition leaders' antibody theory was paired with the assumption that reducing the coalition footprint was necessary to prevent the Iraqis from developing a dependency on coalition forces that would slow the Iraqi security forces' growth. Taken together, these concepts produced continual pressure from senior U.S. leaders and commanders to reduce forces. At the operational and tactical levels, these factors meant that coalition units were constantly starved of manpower, and that CJTF-7 and MNF-I went 3 years without a true operational reserve. The predictable result was the opening of geographic gaps in security that insurgent groups recognized and exploited.

Another key component of the transition strategy was the premise that Iraqi security forces, which coalition commanders assumed would not create the same antibodies as foreign troops, could be quickly and effectively built, thereby enabling coalition forces to withdraw. Several factors hindered the coalition from developing Iraqi military capabilities sufficiently to take over security tasks and achieve this goal. First, the sheer scope of the security force assistance mission in Iraq went far beyond what the U.S. military was prepared to accomplish and vastly exceeded the capacity of the U.S. Special Forces that traditionally executed such missions. The ad hoc transition teams were an inadequate

substitute, with their size, composition, and command relationships with tactical commanders all proving to be challenges that degraded their effectiveness.

The coalition's early decision that the Iraqi security forces should be designed without capabilities that could be threatening to Iraq's neighbors compounded these problems, given the danger of Iraq's surrounding region. More importantly, perhaps, it resulted in an Iraqi Security Force (ISF) that was unable even to maintain internal security. In addition, the decision to use contractors to provide the ISF's logistics hobbled the ISF's long-term development while creating the temptation and opportunity for corruption that corroded Iraq's new security institutions.

These deficiencies were masked by Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq's (MNSTC-I) and MNF-I's focus on flawed metrics for ISF effectiveness. Rather than subjectively evaluating Iraqi units' ability to fight, the Transition Readiness Assessment (TRA) primarily focused on quantifiable factors such as the number of soldiers present and equipped. It also missed the crucial issue of each Iraqi unit's ethno-sectarian makeup, which might have served as an indicator of whether the ISF was truly a national force or a politicized one. Nevertheless, the TRA became a key component of determining progress in the coalition campaign plan and in making decisions to drawdown coalition forces.

Beyond political and security transition, the coalition undermined its own counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations by its incoherent detention policies and operations. The decision to treat captured insurgents under the Geneva Conventions as civilian detainees rather than enemy prisoners of war meant the issue of detention was convoluted and challenging for the duration of the war. The United States never solved this problem, and insurgents and terrorists took advantage of the dead space and legal loopholes that existed between the two Geneva Conventions categories. These challenges, coupled with constant political pressure to reduce detainee population, resulted in overcrowding and insurgent recruitment in detention facilities, as well as a dysfunctional review system that repeatedly released large numbers of the enemy back to the battlefield. The coalition's own detention system gave the enemy breathing space in which to mature and to make the battlefield a more dangerous place for coalition troops.

Finally, the coalition's transition strategy never satisfactorily addressed the issue of destabilizing interventions by Iraq's neighbors in 2004-2006—especially the Syrian and Iranian regimes. The Syrian regime allowed its territory to become a base for Ba'athist militants and militant jihadists who infiltrated into Iraq and fueled a sectarian terror campaign there—a decision that would later have consequences for the survival of the Syrian state itself. Meanwhile, on Iraq's eastern border, Iran funneled support to Shi'a militant proxies fighting U.S. and coalition forces and conducting large-scale sectarian cleansing in central Iraq. Washington policymakers recoiled from addressing the serious threat these twin insurgent sanctuaries posed to MNF-I's campaign. This policy failure resulted in inadequate operational-level answers to a strategic problem, such as the misguided shifting of coalition combat power from Baghdad west to the Syrian border in 2005.

INNOVATIONS, ADAPTATIONS, AND SIGNS FOR THE FUTURE

Despite the failure of the transition campaign, the years 2004-2006 saw considerable innovation and change, some of which developed from the bottom up and some that were the result of strategic decisions. General Peter Schoomaker's choice to continue Army transformation amid the strains of two wars represented one such strategic decision that had an operational impact in the Iraq theater for the entire war. Army transformation was beneficial in pushing key resources such as intelligence assets and analysts down to the brigade level, where they were useful in the decentralized Iraq operating environment. At the same time, however, the troop strength of Army brigades decreased considerably, which was problematic in population-centric counterinsurgency warfare. As a result, the net benefit of transformation for the Iraq War is unclear.

In the realm of civil-military operations, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad's and Casey's decision to transplant the concept of provincial reconstruction teams (PRT) from Afghanistan to Iraq represented another substantial innovation. In principle, the injection of PRTs aimed to integrate different elements of national power into the struggle to improve Iraq's ability to govern, which presumably would improve its legitimacy. In practice, U.S. Government agencies were slow to execute and manage this integration in 2006. Most non-Department of Defense agencies lacked the resources to make a considerable contribution and lacked the authority to force government personnel to take dangerous PRT assignments. A lack of familiarity with interagency operating procedures and a lack of Arabic language capacity further hindered effective operations as the PRTs got underway. Only later in the war would PRTs begin to have a significant operational impact.

More beneficial than these strategic initiatives was the increasingly effective integration between special operations and conventional forces from 2004 to 2006. Whereas during the earliest phases of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, special operations forces (SOF) had been given their own battle space, by 2004 SOF elements were consistently operating in the battle space of conventional forces. As traditional SOF-conventional stereotypes and misperceptions began to break down, new relationships and operating procedures began to develop. By 2006, special operators and conventional units were learning to operate symbiotically, taking advantage of each other's strengths and compensating for each other's weaknesses. Using the joint doctrinal relationship of "supported" and "supporting" elements, MNF-I effectively integrated SOF units into its campaign plan, at times even making the SOF units the supported element and assigning conventional forces to assist them. As the war progressed, the personal relationships and improvised operational procedures that had developed from 2004-2006 paid significant dividends.

SOF also underwent a revolutionary internal innovation during this period, learning how to fight networked insurgencies more effectively. Before the war, special operations doctrine held that direct-action missions—raids or ambushes—should be based on highly detailed intelligence and meticulously planned, with the executing unit often spending days preparing for a mission that might last minutes or hours. Given the fleeting nature of insurgent targets in Iraq and Afghanistan, however, SOF upended conventional wisdom and doctrine, planning missions based on a minimal amount of intelligence and launching them with little preparation. Special operators often relied on a playbook to

determine tactical options and launched multiple missions per night, aiming to obtain the additional intelligence needed to launch follow-on raids and to create a compounding effect through repeated blows on the insurgency. By inflicting significant losses in short periods of time, the special operators sought to induce shock in the insurgents' organizational networks and rob them of the initiative. Stuck in a reactionary cycle, insurgent groups experienced difficulty generating operational effects, thereby providing space for conventional forces to advance the objectives of the larger campaign plan. Such innovations, in their infancy in 2004-2006, came to have significant operational effects in the later years of the war.

At the same time that SOF units were learning how to dramatically increase the tempo of their operations, some conventional units were rediscovering and employing traditional counterinsurgency tactics, as in Tel Afar and Al Qa'im in 2005 and Ramadi in 2006. In those cases, counterinsurgency tactics, extensive partnership with Iraqi units, and U.S. military support for grassroots reconciliation paid dividends. So did the coalition troops' increasing skill in dealing with factions that had formerly fought them but whose motivations could be leveraged against al-Qaeda in Iraq and other irreconcilable insurgents. Though these approaches were successful at the tactical level, they did not have a strategic impact in 2005-2006 because they ran counter to MNF-I's focus on national elections, a reduction in the coalition military presence, and steady transition to Iraqi control.

Nevertheless, as the failure of that MNF-I campaign plan in late 2006 led President Bush and other senior U.S. leaders to search for a new strategy, the examples of local success in Tel Afar, Al Qa'im, and Ramadi would loom large. Counterinsurgency tactics, partnership with Iraqi units, and reconciliation with former insurgents would become the centerpieces of the coalition's thinking and operations in 2007, under new commanders with a new campaign plan.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY AND GENERAL EDITOR'S NOTES ON SOURCES

With respect to the wars of the post-9/11 era, the Department of Defense (DoD) has not yet emulated Chief of Staff of the Army General Dwight D. Eisenhower's directive of November 20, 1947, that the Army should accomplish "the maximum downgrading of all information on military subjects" pertaining to World War II. "The Army possesses no inherent right to conceal the history of its affairs behind a cloak of secrecy," Eisenhower wrote 2 years after the end of World War II, adding that:

the historical record of the Army's operations as well as the manner in which these were accomplished are public property, and except where the security of the Nation may be jeopardized, the right of the citizens to the full story is unquestioned. Beyond this, the major achievements with which the Army is credited are in fact the accomplishments of the entire nation. The American public therefore should find no unnecessary obstacle to its access to the written record. The history of the Army in World War II, now in preparation, must, without reservation, tell the complete story of the Army's participation, fully documented with references to the records used. The preparation of this history does not, however, constitute any reason or excuse for denying to the public immediate access to facts and records, where they deal solely with the operations of the Army, and where the security of the Nation is not involved.¹

Eisenhower's directive made the U.S. Army's records accessible to researchers and led to the Army's famous "Green Book" series of histories of the war, as well as a host of other important studies. By contrast, accessing the U.S. military's operational records and internal analyses of the Iraq War is difficult for today's historians. It will be some years before the U.S. military's archival records are available and in a coherent enough state for scholars and the public to systematically delve into them. What follows is a select list of sources used for this volume, along with the general editor's notes about the operational records and oral history interviews the Chief of Staff of the Army's (CSA) Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) Study Group used, and the current state of access to the most important repositories. The primary sources used in Volume 1 of *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War*, including more than 30,000 pages of documents declassified for this project, will reside in a research archive at the Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC) in Carlisle, PA, with digital copies also at the Center of Military History (CMH) in Washington, DC, and the National Defense University (NDU) at Fort McNair, DC.

OPERATIONAL RECORDS

The U.S. military commands in Iraq generated hundreds of terabytes of digital operational records from 2003 to 2011. As this volume went to press in 2018, this vast database was in disarray, with no clear prospect for cataloging it and making it accessible to researchers in the near term. The largest digital collections are at CMH and at U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), which, between them, hold more than 300 terabytes of classified and unclassified records pertaining to the Iraq War. Both organizations continually increase their holdings as units contribute records that in some cases have languished for years. CMH and CENTCOM hold a similar amount of Afghanistan war records as well. To organize and mine this material properly would require far more people and

resources than CMH and CENTCOM can currently support. At the existing pace of processing, it will be several years before the full holdings are accessible to military researchers, and longer still before they are available to the public. Not until the U.S. Government invests the appropriate level of resources and time in these records will Americans be able to fully distill the lessons of the Iraq War – or even to fully exploit the information the government already possesses to gain important insights about the enemy in Iraq with whom, in 2018, we are still at war.

Despite its vast size, the records that CMH and CENTCOM hold are incomplete. The U.S. Army went to war in early 2003 with a detailed plan for retaining records from the period of the invasion, but when Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) left Iraq in summer of 2003, no authority in the Iraq theater was responsible for retaining the military records generated there and no theater plan instructed units how to do so for themselves. Consequently, many units between mid-2003 to mid-2005 destroyed their operational records as they left the theater, meaning that the U.S. military's records for that period have extensive gaps. The documentary record was also damaged by a large-scale loss of data servers at CENTCOM during the same period. Not until the Army began deploying military history detachments to support the major operational commands in mid-2005 did a systematic collection of records at those commands take place.

The CSA OIF Study Group spent thousands of hours sifting through the data held by CMH, CENTCOM, and other organizations. This research yielded many important documents and insights from CJTF-7, Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I), United States Forces-Iraq (USF-I), the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq, MNC-I, CFLCC/Third Army, CENTCOM, and subordinate commands, including a wealth of digital materials produced at the division level and below. These resources include a broad range of records, such as internal memorandums and e-mails, communications between military and civilian leaders, records of commander's conferences, operations orders and fragmentary orders, planning documents, information papers, command briefings, intelligence assessments, periodic command assessments, weekly reports to the secretary of defense (SECDEF), battle update assessments, Iraqi security forces development updates, security transition plans, detention policies and reports, and after action reviews. The study group used these materials to develop an understanding of how operational-level decisions were made, implemented, and perceived.

The personal papers of senior U.S. commanders provided a unique glimpse into command decision-making processes and commanders' intent at the operational and theater strategic levels of the Iraq War. The papers of General John P. Abizaid and Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez at the AHEC Military History Institute (MHI) offered many insights into the conduct of the Iraq campaign in 2003-2004. These were particularly valuable because there was no systematic archiving of records from CJTF-7 during that period. The papers of General Tommy Franks, housed at CENTCOM, are rich with detail from 2001 to 2003 but are largely inaccessible to researchers; they remain classified in the compartment that protected the security of the long-since-completed planning for the 2003 invasion, with no sign as to when the Department of Defense (DoD) might declassify them.

The richest collection of command papers is that of General George W. Casey, Jr., which is housed at the NDU at Fort McNair, DC, and covers his entire career as a general

officer. These extensive, well-organized records provided an invaluable journal of events and assessments inside MNF-I during 2004-2007. General David H. Petraeus's command papers from MNF-I, CENTCOM, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) International Security Assistance Force are also held at NDU, but unfortunately U.S. authorities suspended access to a large portion of the classified segment of this collection in 2013 and thus far have taken no steps to restore it. General Raymond T. Odierno's extensive papers from his command tenures in Iraq and his tenure as CSA provide a valuable record of MNF-I and USF-I from late 2008 to August 2010, and these will be archived at AHEC.

The study group also accessed archival materials and operational records at a number of military organizations. The Combat Studies Institute (CSI) at Fort Leavenworth, KS, has a large collection of source documents for volumes I through VI of *On Point*, four volumes of which have not yet been published. The Center for Army Lessons Learned, also at Fort Leavenworth, has an extensive collection of analyses and unpublished references mostly focused at the tactical level. The Center for Army Analysis at Fort Belvoir, VA, and the Joint Improvised Threat Defeat Agency at the Pentagon, Washington, DC, both have unique collections of operational data gathered by their analytical teams in Iraq and outside Iraq, and the study group was able to access products from both organizations during its research. Additionally, the study group had access to special operations forces archives and publications at Fort Bragg, NC, and MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL. The archives at Special Operations Command, in particular, are superb and capture nearly every aspect of the joint special operations force across the breadth of the war. Unfortunately, declassifying this material is difficult, limiting its usefulness for scholarly studies.

For portions of this study, the records held by DoD's Conflict Research Records Center (CRRC) were useful. The CRRC's holdings included documents captured from Saddam's regime and from al-Qaeda and its associated movements (AQAM), including the Islamic State of Iraq, the forerunner to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which the CRRC translated and made available to researchers. The CRRC's 63,000 pages of translated documents from Saddam's regime represented fewer than 10 percent of its collection regarding the Iraqi dictator.

Unfortunately, the CRRC was defunded and shut down in June 2015, and its work on translating additional documents ceased. Its holdings were transferred to the Institute for Defense Analyses in Alexandria, VA, for safe keeping, but, as this volume went to press, DoD had not yet settled on a new means of making the records accessible again or of restarting the work of translating documents from AQAM and the Saddam regime—even though there are indications that those records hold important insights about the origins and composition of ISIS.

Finally, for records related to the United Kingdom's (UK) role in the Iraq War, the OIF Study Group found the extensive public records assembled by the British Government's Iraq Inquiry to be essential. The Iraq Inquiry's records include both operational documents and detailed interviews with key British military figures from the Iraq War. At the UK Ministry of Defence, the Army Historical Branch in London, United Kingdom, also holds a near-complete set of operational records from British units and commanders that served in Iraq. Though the vast majority of the Historical Branch's records remain classified, it is by far the best organized of the major collections of operational documents.

INTERVIEWS

Department of Defense organizations collected thousands of oral history interviews during the course of the Iraq War, most of which have not yet been examined by historians. The OIF Study Group had access to many of these, though the collection of interviews is so vast that only a small portion has been transcribed. The study group also conducted over 200 interviews of its own, many of which have been transcribed and will reside in the group's archive at AHEC. The largest collection of oral history interviews is at CMH, which holds thousands of largely uncatalogued interviews conducted by military history detachments throughout the war. The vast majority of CMH's interviews have not been transcribed, and in mining this collection, the OIF Study Group had to narrow its research to interviews with several hundred key leaders. In addition, many of CMH's interviews were considered classified at the time they were conducted for operational security reasons, and, though there is virtually nothing in them that remains operationally sensitive today, there is no process underway to review them for declassification, other than the small portion that the OIF Study Group was able to declassify during the course of its work. Another large collection of several thousand interviews resides at the Joint Center for Operational Analysis (JCOA) at Norfolk, VA. As at CMH, however, many of the JCOA's interviews remain classified, and the JCOA does not allow easy access to, or use of, these materials, though the vast majority of them are no longer operationally sensitive.

The best-organized collection of oral history interviews is at the CSI. CSI provided the OIF Study Group with unfettered access to its hundreds of transcribed, unclassified interviews, many of which were of high quality and historical significance. Also at Fort Leavenworth, the Center for Army Lessons Learned has a collection of over 200 interviews with personnel from the Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq conducted during 2012-2013 that offer important insights into the difficult tasks that confronted that organization as Iraq's security situation unraveled. At the USAWC, the MHI archive includes division commander lessons learned documents and oral history interviews from many senior commanders who held important positions in Iraq. At CENTCOM, the command history office has dozens of important interviews with commanders and key staff officers, some of which were conducted at an unclassified level. Finally, in the course of his important research for the Institute for Defense Analyses on operations in Anbar Province, William Knarr accumulated scores of important interviews with U.S. and Iraqi military and civilian leaders.

What follows is a list of the interviews referenced in Volume 1 of *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War*.

Interviews Conducted by the CSA's OIF Study Group

General (Ret.) John P. Abizaid
Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Martin Adams
Colonel (Ret.) John Agolia
Robert Alberts
Lieutenant General Joseph Anderson
Lieutenant Colonel Charles Armstrong
Rick Atkinson
General Lloyd Austin
Amatzia Baram
Colonel (Ret.) Kevin Benson
Major General William H. Brandenburg
Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III
Lieutenant General Robin Brims
Brigadier General (S) Scott Brower
Major General Jeffrey Buchanan
Major General (Ret.) Aziz Swady Noor
al-Bukhutree
President George W. Bush
General (Ret.) George W. Casey, Jr.
Lieutenant General Robert Caslen
General (Ret.) Peter W. Chiarelli
Lieutenant General Marco Chiarini
Colonel Ronald F. Clark
Lieutenant General Charles Cleveland
Colonel Chris Connor
Major General Anthony Cucolo
Dan Darling
David Dawson
Lieutenant General Keith W. Dayton
Colonel Edmund J. Degen
Colonel Manny Diemer
Lieutenant Colonel Michael Donahue
Major General Edward Donnelly
Major General Paul D. Eaton
Colonel Lee English
Brigadier General Billy Don Farris
Major General Barbara Fast
Major (Ret.) Thomas S. Fisher
General John D. "Jack" Gardner
Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates
General Frank Grass
Colonel (Ret.) Robert Green
Lieutenant Colonel Mark Grdovich
Brigadier General John Gronski
Celeste Ward Gventer
National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley
Lieutenant General David Halverson
Colonel Jeff Hannon
Commander Rebecca Harper
Colonel (Ret.) Derek J. Harvey
Colonel (Ret.) James Hickey
Major General (Ret.) Patrick Higgins
Major General William C. Hix
Brigadier General Frederick "Ben" Hodges
Colonel Dan Hodne
Lieutenant General David Hogg
CW4 Charles Hof
Gregory Hooker
Colonel (Ret.) Bjarne "Mike" Iverson
Colonel Bill Ivey
Iraqi Major General Najim Jabouri
General (Ret.) John M. "Jack" Keane
Lieutenant General (Ret.) Francis "Frank"
Kearney
Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Robert Kelley
Lieutenant General Poul Kiaerskou
Colonel Randy Lane
Colonel Kevin Leahy
Ambassador Douglas Lute
Major Kevin Bruce Marcus
General (Ret.) James N. Mattis
General (Ret.) Stanley McChrystal
Colonel (Ret.) Michael McCormick
Colonel (Ret.) Kevin McDonnell
General (Ret.) David D. McKiernan
Lieutenant General Herbert Raymond "H.
R." McMaster
Regis Matlak
Lieutenant General Thomas F. Metz
Lieutenant General (Ret.) Paul T.
Mikolashek
Colonel Charlie Miller
Colonel Steven Miska
Colonel Mark Mitchell

Lieutenant Colonel Pat Morrison
General (Ret.) Richard B. Myers
Major General Richard Nash
Douglas Nolen
Lieutenant General Michael Oates
Lieutenant Colonel David Oclander
General Raymond T. Odierno
Brigadier General Mark O'Neill
Colonel Paul Ott
Brigadier General Hector Pagan
General Sir Nicholas R. Parker
Colonel Dave Pendall
General (Ret.) David H. Petraeus
Colonel Louis B. Rago II
Kathleen Reedy
Major General Michael Repass
Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
Brigadier General Rick Rife
National Security Advisor Mowaffaq
Rubaie
Lieutenant General (Ret.) Ricardo Sanchez
General (Ret.) Peter J. Schoomaker
Kalev "Gunner" Sepp
Abram Shulsky

Colonel Steve Sifers
Emma Sky
Colonel (Ret.) Marty Stanton
Colonel Michael Steele
Lieutenant Colonel Kent Strader
Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Adam Such
General (Ret.) Gordon R. Sullivan
Brigadier General Sean Swindell
Colonel Zsolt Szenthiralyi
Major General Joseph J. Taluto
Major General James D. Thurman
Lieutenant General Kenneth Tovo
Lieutenant General John Vines
Major General Rick Waddell
General (Ret.) William S. Wallace
Lieutenant General Marshall B. Webb
Lieutenant General William G. Webster, Jr.
Colonel (Ret.) Richard Welch
Brigadier General (Ret.) Thomas White
Rear Admiral (Ret.) Edward Winters
Major General (Ret.) Walter Wodjakowski
Ambassador Paul Wolfowitz
Lieutenant General Richard Zahner

West Point Center for Oral History

Major General Robert Abrams

Lieutenant General Rick Lynch

Institute for Defense Analyses

Colonel Julian Dale Alford
Ayad Allawi
Colonel Ralph Baker
Captain Jim Calvert (pseudonym)

Colonel Casey Haskins
Mullah Nadhim Mahmoud Khalil Jabouri
Sheikh Kurdi Rafee Farhan al-Mahalawi
Sheikh Ahmed Bezia Fteikhan al-Rishawi

Combat Studies Institute

General (Ret.) John P. Abizaid
Colonel Robert Abrams
Brigadier General Rod Barham
Colonel Peter Bayer
Lieutenant Colonel Chris Beckert
Colonel Kevin Benson
Major General Daniel P. Bolger
Brigadier General Robert B. Brown
Major Stephen Campbell
Colonel Edward Cardon
General George W. Casey, Jr.
Lieutenant General Peter W. Chiarelli
Major Mark Cloutier
Colonel Donald Currier
General Martin E. Dempsey
Major Michael Doherty
Major General Paul D. Eaton
Colonel (Ret.) Todd Ebel
Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Joseph Fischer
General (Ret.) Tommy Franks
Colonel Bruce Gant
Lieutenant Colonel Michael Gibler
Lieutenant Colonel Glenn Goddard
Brigadier General Carter Ham
Colonel Bill Hickman
Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad
Colonel Chris King
Major Jeremy Lewis

Major Chris Liermann
Colonel Sean MacFarland
Major General John P. McLaren
Lieutenant General Thomas Metz
Brigadier General Mark A. Milley
Lieutenant General Richard Natonski
Lieutenant Colonel Peter A. Newell
Colonel John Norris
Lieutenant Colonel Wesley Odum
Brigadier General Peter J. Palmer
Lieutenant General Joseph Peterson
General David H. Petraeus
Brigadier General Dana Pittard
Lieutenant Colonel James Rainey
Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Reed
Lieutenant Colonel Tom Rickard
Colonel Sean Ryan
Colonel Steven Salazar
Major Craig Schuh
Colonel Robert E. Scurlock
Brigadier General Richard Sherlock
Major General (Ret.) Charles "Chuck"
Swannack, Jr.
Colonel Jeffrey Terhune
Major Sean Tracy
Colonel Thomas Vail
Lieutenant General John R. Vines
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Frank Miller
Lieutenant Colonel Wesley Odum
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Major General John Batiste
Lieutenant General Peter W. Chiarelli
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Colonel Stephen Hicks
Major Kevin Bruce Marcus
Major General James "Spider" Marks
General (Ret.) David D. McKiernan

Lieutenant General (Ret.) Paul T.
Mikolashek
Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Terry Moran
General David H. Petraeus
Major General James D. Thurman
General William S. Wallace

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| American Forces News Service | <i>Los Angeles Times</i> |
| Australian Broadcasting Corporation | <i>National Guard Magazine</i> |
| <i>Baltimore Sun</i> | National Public Radio |
| BBC | NBC News |
| <i>Billings Gazette</i> | <i>Newsweek</i> |
| Bloomberg.com | PBS |
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| <i>Christian Science Monitor</i> | <i>Shafaq News</i> |
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| <i>Foreign Policy</i> | <i>The New York Times</i> |
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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------|---|
| ACR | Armored Cavalry Regiment |
| AHEC | Army Heritage and Education Center |
| Amb | ambassador |
| AOB | Advanced Operational Base |
| AOR | area of responsibility |
| AQAM | al-Qaeda and associated movements |
| AQI | al-Qaeda in Iraq |
| ARCENT | U.S. Army Central (U.S. Army component of CENTCOM) |
| BCT | Brigade Combat Team |
| BIAP | Baghdad International Airport |
| BOG | boots on the ground |
| BTT | border transition team |
| BUA | Battle Update Assessment |
| C4ISR | command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance |
| CAG | Civil Affairs Group, Commander's Action Group, or Commander's Advisory Group |
| CENTAF | U.S. Air Force component of CENTCOM |
| CENTCOM | U.S. Central Command |
| CERP | Commanders' Emergency Response Program |
| CEXC | Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell |
| CFACC | Coalition Forces Air Component Command |
| CFC | Combined Forces Command |
| CFLCC | Coalition Forces Land Component Command |
| CFMCC | Coalition Forces Maritime Component Command |
| CFSOCC | Coalition Forces Special Operations Component Command |
| CG | Commanding General |
| CID | Criminal Investigation Division |
| CJCS | Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff |
| CJSOTF | Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force |
| CJSOTF-AP | Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–Arabian Peninsula |
| CJSOTF-N | Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–North |
| CJSOTF-W | Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–West |
| CJTF-7 | Combined Joint Task Force Seven |
| CJTF-I | Combined Joint Task Force–Iraq |
| CMATT | Coalition Military Assistance Training Team |
| CMH | U.S. Army Center of Military History |

| | |
|---------|--|
| CMOC | Civil Military Operations Center |
| CMTC | Combat Maneuver Training Center |
| CO | commanding officer |
| COIN | counterinsurgency |
| CONPLAN | Contingency Plan |
| CONUS | Continental United States |
| COSAT | Chief of Staff Assessment Team |
| CPA | Coalition Provisional Authority |
| CPATT | Civilian Police Assistance Training Team |
| CRRB | Combined Review and Release Board |
| CRS | Congressional Research Service |
| CSA | Chief of Staff of the Army |
| CSI | Combat Studies Institute |
| CSIS | Center for Strategic and International Studies |
| DCI | Deputy Chief of Intelligence |
| DCSINT | Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence |
| DCSPER | Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel |
| DEPCOM | Deputy Commander |
| DIA | Defense Intelligence Agency |
| DoD | Department of Defense |
| EASB | Effects Assessment Synchronization Board |
| EFP | explosively formed penetrator |
| EJK | extrajudicial killing |
| EPW | enemy prisoner of war |
| ERU | Emergency Response Unit |
| ESB | enhanced separate brigades |
| EUCOM | U.S. European Command |
| FAS | Federation of American Scientists |
| FID | foreign internal defense |
| FIF | Free Iraqi Forces |
| FM | field manual |
| FOIA | Freedom of Information Act |
| FORSCOM | U.S. Army Forces Command |
| FRAGO | fragmentary order |
| GAO | U.S. General Accounting Office |
| GOC | general officer commanding |
| GWC | George W. Casey |
| HMMWV | High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle (aka "Humvee") |




















| | |
|--------|--|
| HVT | high-value target |
| I MEF | I Marine Expeditionary Force |
| IA | Iraqi Army |
| IAG | Iraq Assistance Group |
| IBCT | Interim Brigade Combat Team |
| ICDC | Iraqi Civil Defense Corps |
| IED | improvised explosive device |
| IIG | Iraqi Interim Government |
| IIP | Iraqi Islamic Party |
| IIS | Iraqi Intelligence Service |
| IMK | Islamic Movement of Kurdistan |
| IntSum | intelligence summary |
| IO | Information Operations |
| IP | Iraqi Police |
| IPB | intelligence preparation of the battlefield |
| IPLO | international police liaison officer |
| IPR | In-Process Review |
| IRGC | Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran |
| ISF | Iraqi security forces |
| ISG | Iraq Survey Group |
| ISI | Islamic State of Iraq |
| ISIS | Islamic State of Iraq and Syria |
| ISO | in support of |
| ISOF | Iraqi Special Operations Forces |
| ISR | intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance |
| ITF | Iraqi Turkoman Front |
| ITG | Iraqi Transitional Government |
| JAM | Jaysh al-Mahdi (aka Mahdi Army) |
| JCOA | Joint Center for Operational Analysis |
| JDAM | Joint Direct Attack Munition |
| JIATF | Joint Inter-Agency Task Force |
| JSOTF | Joint Special Operations Task Force |
| JSTARS | joint surveillance target attack radar system |
| JTF-4 | Joint Task Force 4 |
| KADEK | Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress |
| KDP | Kurdistan Democratic Party |
| KRG | Kurdistan Regional Government |
| LOAC | law of armed conflict |

| | |
|---------|---|
| MARCENT | U.S. Marine Corps component of CENTCOM |
| MCLC | Military Coordination and Liaison Command |
| MCR | main conference room |
| MEF | Marine Expeditionary Force |
| MeK | Mujahedin e Khalq |
| MEU | Marine Expeditionary Unit |
| MHI | Military History Institute |
| MiTT | Military Transition Team |
| MNB-NW | Multi-National Brigade-Northwest |
| MNC-I | Multi-National Corps-Iraq |
| MND | Multinational Division |
| MND-B | Multi-National Division-Baghdad |
| MND-CS | Multi-National Division-Central South |
| MND-N | Multi-National Division-North |
| MND-NC | Multi-National Division-North Central |
| MND-NE | Multi-National Division-Northeast |
| MND-NW | Multi-National Division-Northwest |
| MND-SE | Multi-National Division-Southeast |
| MNF-I | Multi-National Force-Iraq |
| MNF-W | Multi-National Force-West |
| MNF-NW | Multi-National Force-Northwest |
| MNSTC-I | Multi-National Security Transition Command-Iraq |
| MYA | Mohammad Younis al-Ahmad |
| MOI | Ministry of the Interior |
| MOD | Ministry of Defense |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NAVCENT | U.S. Navy component of CENTCOM |
| NDU | National Defense University |
| NPR | National Public Radio |
| NSC | National Security Council |
| NTC | National Training Center |
| NTM-I | NATO Training Mission-Iraq |
| ODA | Operational Detachment Alpha |
| OIF | Operation Iraqi Freedom |
| OPSUM | operation summary |
| OPFOR | opposing force |
| OPLAN | operation plan |
| OPORD | operation order |

| | |
|----------|--|
| ORHA | Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance |
| OSD | Office of the Secretary of Defense |
| OST | Office of Security Transition |
| PIC | Provincial Iraqi Control |
| PJHQ | Permanent Joint Headquarters (United Kingdom) |
| PKK | Kurdistan Workers Party |
| PM | Prime Minister |
| POTUS | President of the United States |
| PRT | Provincial Reconstruction Team |
| PTT | police transition team |
| PUK | Patriotic Union of Kurdistan |
| QRF | quick reaction force |
| RCT | regimental combat team |
| RFF | request for forces |
| RMA | revolution in military affairs |
| ROE | rules of engagement |
| RPG | rocket-propelled grenade |
| RSTA | reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition |
| SBCT | Stryker Brigade Combat Team |
| SCIRI | Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq |
| SECDEF | Secretary of Defense |
| SIAP | Saddam International Airport |
| SIGACTS | significant activities |
| SOCENT | Special Operations component of CENTCOM |
| SOF | Special Operations Forces |
| SOUTHCOM | United States Southern Command |
| SPTT | Special Police Transition Team |
| SSI | Strategic Studies Institute |
| STRATCOM | Strategic Communications |
| SVTC | Secure Video Teleconference |
| SWET | sewer, water, electricity, and trash |
| TF | Task Force |
| TPFDD | time-phased force and deployment data |
| TPFDL | time-phased force and deployment list |
| TRA | Transition Readiness Assessment |
| TRADOC | U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command |
| TRANSCOM | U.S. Transportation Command |
| UAV | unmanned aerial vehicle |

| | |
|---------|--|
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UIA | United Iraqi Alliance |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNAMI | United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq |
| UNOSOM | United Nations Operation in Somalia |
| UNSCR | United Nations Security Council Resolution |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| USAREUR | United States Army, Europe |
| USAWC | U.S. Army War College |
| USSOCOM | U.S. Special Operations Command USIP |
| USIP | U.S. Institute of Peace |
| USMC | U.S. Marine Corps |
| VBIED | vehicle-borne improvised explosive device |
| VCJCS | Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff |
| VTC | Video Teleconference |
| WERV | Western Euphrates River Valley |
| WMD | weapons of mass destruction |
| XTF | Exploitation Task Force |

MAP SYMBOLS

| | |
|---|---|
| Armor |  |
| Cavalry |  |
| Cavalry (Armored) |  |
| Field Artillery (Self-Propelled) |  |
| Infantry |  |
| Infantry (Airborne) |  |
| Infantry (Air Assault) |  |
| Infantry (Mechanized) |  |
| Infantry (Stryker) |  |
| | |
| Battery, Company, or Cavalry Troop | I |
| Battalion or Cavalry Squadron | II |
| Regiment or Group | III |
| Brigade | X |
| Division | X X |
| Corps | X X X |
| | |
| I Corps |  |
| II Marine Expeditionary Force |  |
| Multi-National Division-Baghdad |  |
| 1st Armored Cavalry Division |  |
| 82d Airborne Division |  |
| 2d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) |  |
| 6th Brigade, 2d National Police Division (Iraqi) |  |
| 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment |  |
| 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division (Stryker) |  |
| 2d Battalion, 114th Field Artillery |  |

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JOEL D. RAYBURN is a U.S. Army colonel (COL) with 25 years of experience in intelligence and political-military affairs. A 1992 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, he served in a series of assignments as an artillery officer in Germany, Bosnia, and Kuwait before transferring to the military intelligence corps in 1996. From 2002-2005, COL Rayburn taught British and Middle Eastern history at West Point, NY. From 2005 to the present, he has focused on political-military affairs in the greater Middle East, including several combat deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan and multiple assignments at U.S. Central Command. From 2013-2016, he directed the Army's Operation IRAQI FREEDOM study group, which is tasked with writing the Army's history of the Iraq War. COL Rayburn is the author of *Iraq After America: Strongmen, Sectarians, Resistance* (Hoover Press, 2014). He holds master's degrees from Texas A&M University and the National War College.

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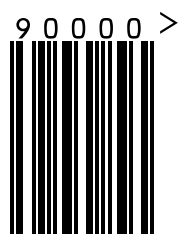
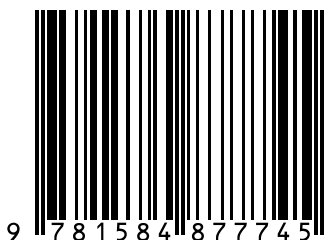
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