

IRAQ REPORT

Iraqi prime minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki responds to a Sunni tribal chief in Ramadi during a March 13 visit to Anbar Province.

(Photo by Robert Nickelsberg/Getty Images)



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The Anbar Awakening: Displacing al Qaeda from Its Stronghold in Western Iraq

by **KIMBERLY KAGAN**

For Americans, the war's most important events from August to December 2006 occurred in Baghdad. For al Qaeda and other Sunni Islamic extremist enemies in Iraq, equally important events in that same period occurred in Ramadi, the capital city of Anbar Province. Al Qaeda terrorism provoked many of Anbar's sheiks actively to cooperate with U.S. Forces, oppose all terrorists in the province, support the Iraqi Police and Army, form an effective city government and strengthen the provincial council. The sheiks called their movement "The Awakening." The hostility of the local population changed Ramadi from an al Qaeda stronghold into an area effectively contested by U.S. and Iraqi forces.

The presence of U.S. forces conducting counterinsurgency missions to secure the population made the local rejection of al Qaeda possible and effective. The leadership and example of the sheiks of Ramadi inspired other sheiks in neighboring cities to cooperate with U.S. and Iraqi forces. As a result of their efforts, especially in late 2006 and early 2007, al Qaeda no longer controlled Ramadi or Fallujah. By February 2007, U.S. and Iraqi forces were pushing the enemy from the other cities in the province. U.S. forces conducted deliberate counterinsurgency operations to secure the population from terrorism. Together with the Iraqi Security Forces, they cleared, controlled, and retained cities in the Euphrates River Valley. U.S. forces exploited opportunities created by the enemy and by the local population.

Al Qaeda's attacks, including suicide bombs and car bombs, did not aim at random targets. Often, these spectacular attacks occurred against very specific targets and conveyed very specific messages. Al Qaeda was trying to disrupt U.S. and Iraqi preparations for decisive operations in Baghdad and escalate the conflict by inciting sectarian violence in and around the capital. Al Qaeda was also trying to dissuade the population of the Euphrates River Valley from participating in the Awakening.

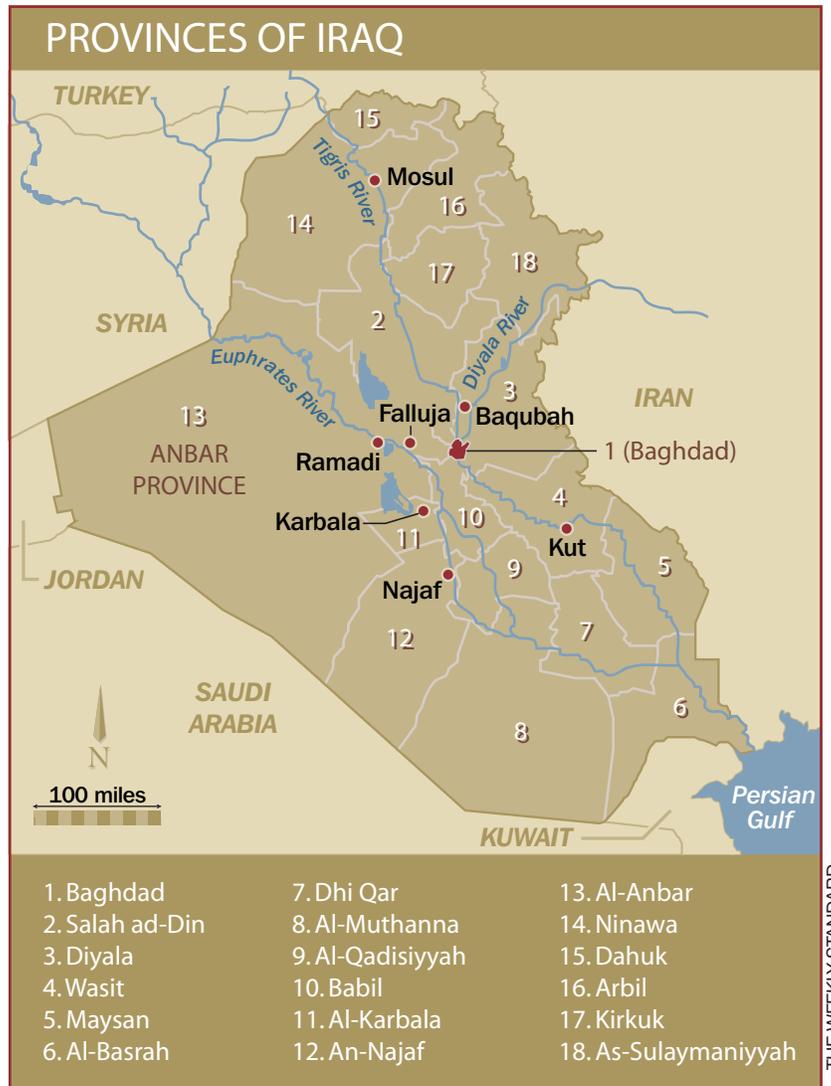
Cooperation among U.S. forces, Iraqi Security Forces, and many of Anbar's sheiks deprived the terrorist organization of its most secure base in Iraq. As U.S. and Iraqi efforts to clear, control, and retain Baghdad and the cities of Anbar progressed, al Qaeda faced the choices available to any hard-pressed enemy, conventional or unconventional: surrender, counterattack, or move operations elsewhere. Al Qaeda pursued two policies in February and March 2007: counterattacking in Baghdad and Ramadi, and shifting and moving its bases elsewhere in theater. Al Qaeda lashed out at specific targets in Ramadi and Fallujah in order to attempt to win back their bases in the western part of Anbar Province. Al Qaeda used bases in western Baghdad in order to foment violence against Shiite and mixed neighborhoods, and in order to link the violence in Fallujah with that in Baghdad. And some al Qaeda and Sunni extremists regrouped in Diyala Province. From there, the enemy launched attacks there and in northern Iraq to incite sectarian violence and undermine the ongoing security plan.

Military doctrine distinguishes between decisive operations and shaping operations. Decisive operations directly accomplish the objectives set by a headquarters.¹ Shaping operations “create and preserve conditions for the success of the decisive operation. . . . They support the decisive operation by affecting enemy capabilities and forces, or by influencing enemy decisions. . . . They may occur before, concurrently with, or after the start of the decisive operation.”² Securing Baghdad is the decisive operation planned in 2007, though that operation is still in its early phases. At the same time, extensive shaping operations occurred in Anbar and Diyala provinces in the first quarter of 2007.

Anbar: from Decisive Operations to Shaping Operations

Anbar province, to the west of Baghdad, once was the location of U.S. decisive operations. Anbar contains the cities of Falluja and Ramadi. In 2004, U.S. forces conducted decisive operations in Falluja, where the Sunni Arab insurgency had emerged in the summer of 2003. U.S. Marines besieged the city for six weeks from March to May 2004. At that time, U.S. forces turned control of Falluja over to its local leaders, who used the opportunity to develop a broader-

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based insurgency in the city. They colluded with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, then the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, who established his headquarters in Falluja and used the city as a base for exporting violence to other areas of Iraq. In November and December 2004, U.S. Marines again attacked the city, clearing it of insurgents.³

Zarqawi and the core al Qaeda leadership escaped from Falluja before the November 2004 attack, organized the Samarra Mosque bombing in February 2006, and provoked the sectarian violence that escalated afterwards. Ultimately, some of that leadership, including Zarqawi, based itself in Baqubah, in Diyala province, to the north of Baghdad and northeast of Falluja. Other al Qaeda leaders and operatives relocated themselves in Anbar

province, across the Euphrates River in the city of Ramadi, to the west of Falluja. Many local leaders supported al Qaeda elements, and the insurgency in Anbar province resumed forcefully in the spring of 2006.

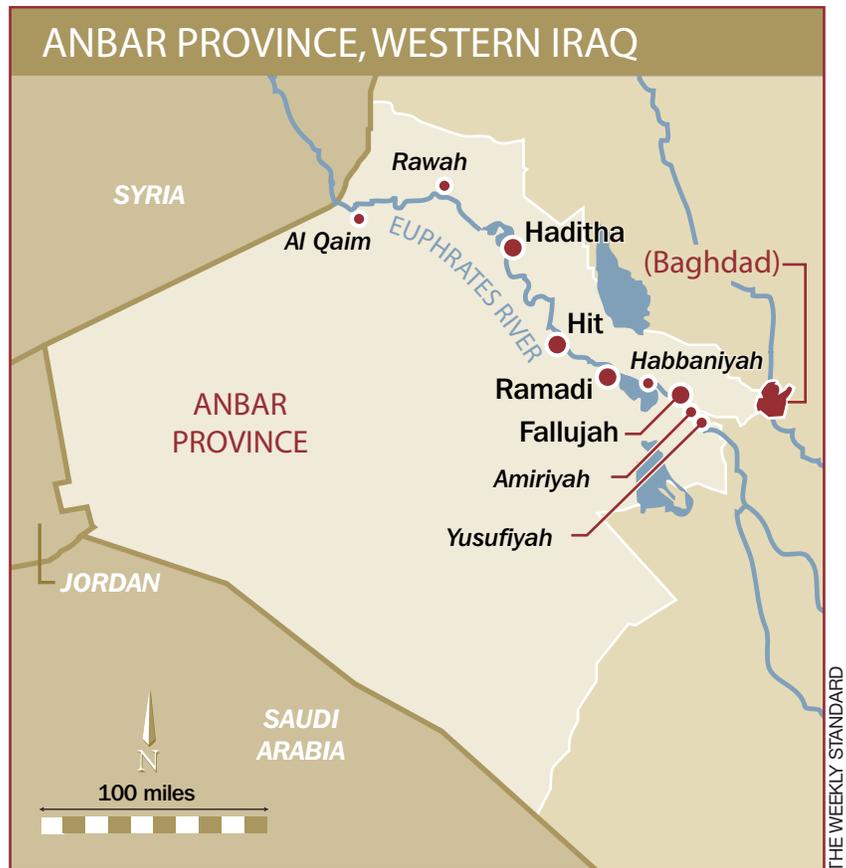
As the violence in Baghdad increased in 2006, U.S. forces shifted decisive operations from the provinces to the capital. By summer 2006, Anbar was no longer the main effort. Rather, U.S. units in Anbar conducted shaping operations to support the main effort in Baghdad.⁴

Despite Anbar's ancillary status for U.S. and Iraqi forces in 2006, Ramadi turned increasingly hostile to al Qaeda and its post-Zarqawi offshoot, the Islamic State of Iraq. In February and March 2007, operations in Anbar province shaped events in Baghdad by disrupting the enemy. The events in Anbar since August 2006 had a profound impact on al Qaeda in Iraq, the Islamic State of Iraq, and recent events in Baghdad and the provinces.

Terrain and Communications in Anbar Province

Anbar province stretches west of Baghdad to Iraq's borders with Syria and Jordan. Foreign fighters flow from those borders toward Baghdad. The Euphrates River Valley constitutes the main line of communications in Anbar province. Numerous cities and settlements line the lush Euphrates River, which flows across the province through the cities of Al Qaim, Rawah, Haditha, Hit, Ramadi, Habbaniyah, and Falluja.

Some of these cities are hubs for the road network in Anbar. Roads from Syria, running along the south bank of the Euphrates, converge in the town of Al Qaim, about twenty-five miles east of the border. Alternatively, fighters can follow a road along the north bank to Rumiya, and then sixty miles to Rawah, at which point they must cross the river. Haditha is the next major town along the route for foreign fighters, whether they travel through Al Qaim or Rawah. Fighters then follow roads through Hit and Ramadi, which is the next choke-point along

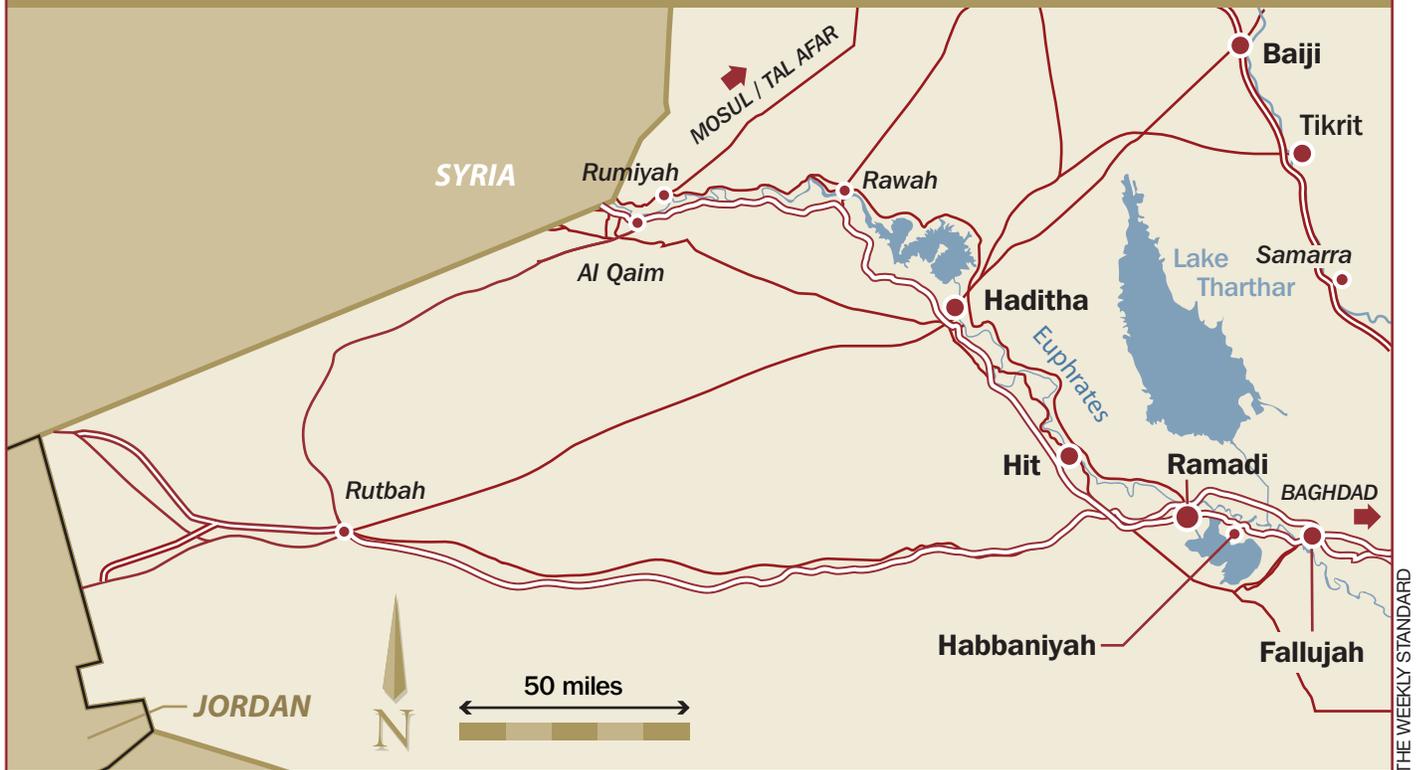


the road network. They may continue to Falluja, from which roads lead east to Baghdad. Or they may leave Ramadi on roads to the southeast to Amiriyah, Yusufiyah, and Mahmudiyah on the outskirts of the capital.

Foreign fighters can bypass the Euphrates routes by crossing the sparsely inhabited Syrian Desert south of the river along a few main roads that ultimately lead to the vicinity of Baghdad. Major roads from the Jordanian and Syrian borders converge at the desert town of Rutbah (about 250 miles west of the capital). From Rutbah, a major highway runs through Ramadi (about 60 miles west of the capital), and thence to Abu Ghraib, just west of Baghdad. Highway 10, a roughly parallel main road, runs from Rutbah to Falluja (36 miles west of the capital), and to Abu Ghraib. Rutbah also sits astride other, smaller roads through the western desert.

Fighters and facilitators can bypass towns like Rutbah, Hit, Haditha, and Al Qaim by taking the numerous desert roads that defy effective blockade. But there are reasons for fighters to follow roads through those cities, from which road networks lead

MAJOR ROADS OF WESTERN ANBAR PROVINCE



to the northeastern portion of Iraq. Roads from Rumiyah lead north through the desert to Ninawa province. They terminate at the east-west road connecting Syria with the cities of Sinjar and Tal Afar, and from there a highway leads to Mosul. Roads from Rawah transverse the desert and lead to Highway 1 south of Mosul and north of Baiji (where a primary oil refinery is located) in Salah ad Din province. Roads from Haditha skirt Lake Tharthar and lead ultimately to Baiji and Tikrit. Roads also connect Ramadi and Baiji.

These lines of communication link the major towns of the western Euphrates with the cities of northern Iraq in which former Baathist regime elements and al Qaeda once operated and still operate. Former Baathists, including the sons of Saddam Hussein, based out of Mosul in 2003; Saddam Hussein was captured near his hometown of Tikrit; Tal Afar became an al-Qaeda safe-haven in late 2004, was cleared of insurgents in 2005-06, and was recently the site of a horrific suicide bombing; U.S. and Iraqi forces protected the Baiji oil refinery in February and March 2007 to prevent al-Qaeda

from manipulating the oil supply to finance the insurgency.

Though insurgents can fan north and east to Nineweh and Salah ad Din provinces from Qaim and Rumiyah, they more often traverse the Euphrates River Valley to Baghdad. The river provides excellent cover and concealment for enemies. Outside of the major cities, thick brush and palm trees generally line the river banks. The enemy can easily hide in the brush along those routes. The cities provide ways of linking to others in the network. And the Euphrates is a major weapons supply line for foreign fighters.

During Saddam Hussein's regime, the Euphrates River Valley in Anbar province contained large ordnance dumps. Habbaniyah airfield and the former Republican Guard compound east of Falluja lie more or less on the Euphrates River and were stocked with munitions. One can only speculate on how much explosive material was stolen from these facilities before the Coalition brought them under its control.

The Euphrates River Valley has consequently served for many years as a supply and communica-

tions line for incoming foreign fighters and Iraqi insurgents. Foreign fighters crossed the border unarmed, evading arrest. They then proceeded along the cities of the Euphrates to rural training camps or staging areas, such as those near As Zaidon, south-east of Falluja; Karma, toward Lake Tharthar;⁵ or Wadi Sakron, near Barwanah in the Haditha Triad.⁶ Insurgents supplied trained fighters from large weapons caches in the Euphrates River Valley. The valley contained ample stocks of ordnance they needed to carry out attacks in Baghdad and elsewhere. For example, U.S. Marines discovered two huge caches near the Euphrates in December 2006 that contained a wide variety of munitions and command-and-control devices, including a surface-to-air missile and launcher, radios, grenade fuses, cell phones and chargers, thousands of link rounds, binoculars, and mortar sights.⁷ Such caches served as warehouses from which insurgents drew weapons. They brought the weapons to smaller bases and hid them in local caches.

The first Iraq Report documented the movement of fighters and supplies (particularly car bomb networks) through safehouses along the Euphrates to Yusufiyah to Mahmudiyah and Salman Pak, and from those staging points to Baghdad. As U.S. forces moved into western Baghdad in March, they captured or killed al Qaeda operatives in Abu Ghraib, just west of Baghdad, and in the capital's Mansour district. Al Qaeda was likely still using the east-west route from Falluja to Baghdad in March, to stage attacks in both areas.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RAMADI FOR AL QAEDA

Ramadi (population approximately 400,000) is the capital city of Anbar province, housing its provincial government offices and two-thirds of the province's population.⁸ Ramadi also occupies

an important site along the road network. Traffic from the borders to Baghdad must funnel through Ramadi. Whether the enemy comes in along Route 10 from Jordan or down the Euphrates by way of Al Qa'im-Haditha-Hit, eventually he must decide how to cross Ramadi. He can take Route 10 straight through, risking exposure to the largest percentage of Coalition/Iraqi forces, or he can take Route 1 north of the city. To avoid these routes, the enemy must drive south of Lake Habbaniyah, where the Coalition also patrols.

From June 2006 to March 2007, one U.S. BCT controlled not only Ramadi, but a large area beyond the city extending "along the western shores of the three large lakes to the west to the capital... about a hundred miles north to south, about 85 miles east to west."⁹

Ramadi is a predominantly Sunni city in a predominantly Sunni province. One major tribe, the Dulaimi, comprises most of the population. (The Dulaimi tribe also extends in an arc from Anbar to Salah ad Din.) Locals belong to different subtribes of the Dulaimi. So Ramadi and Anbar province escaped much of the sectarian violence that characterized

Baghdad and Baqubah in 2006.

Nevertheless, Ramadi was violent. By summer 2006, al-Qaeda and other insurgents prevented government from functioning in Ramadi. Colonel Sean MacFarland, commander of the 1st BCT, 1st Armored Division stationed there, remarked in July 2006, "About a dozen buildings around the government center have become really little more than shells of buildings and don't serve any purpose other than to hide snipers and IED triggermen."¹⁰ Government workers would not come to work regularly. Insurgents maintained sniper fire at the government compound, despite its fortifications and U.S. Marine guard. By August 2006, the province's governor, Maamoun Sami Rashid al-Awani, had evaded thirty attempts on

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his life. Insurgents had killed four members of the Anbar Provincial Council over the summer. COL MacFarland referred to al-Awani as “a government of one.”¹¹ When Al Qaeda moved into Ramadi, it disrupted the local population and increased residents’ antipathy for government. “They intimidated, through murder and other acts of violence, the people of Ramadi and forced them into their homes, away from their places of employment, and really have turned Ramadi into a battleground.”¹²

Several types of enemies operated in Ramadi in summer 2006. Foreign fighters in Ramadi comprised a small but important segment of the enemy, including nearly all suicide bombers. “Local AQ sympathizers” were “relatively small in number...but...a very lethal part of the insurgency.” Most enemies rejected the government of Baghdad and aided the insurgency for that reason, or else engaged in criminal activities that lack of government permitted.¹³ Locals harmed by al Qaeda organized retaliatory attacks against the enemy.¹⁴

Mission: Clearing Ramadi in 2006

The 1st Brigade, 1AD and other units, conducted successful counterinsurgency operations in Ramadi from June 2006-February 2007. According to COL Sean MacFarland, the brigade commander, the mission of the 1st BCT, 1st Armored Division when it arrived on June 11, 2006 was “to partner with the Iraqi security forces and to conduct combined counterinsurgency operations to neutralize the enemy and to set the conditions for the transfer of security operations to the Iraqi security forces, and also to support the transfer of governance to provincial control...in Al Anbar, Ramadi being the capital of the province.” To do so, he identified four key tasks: 1) form the BCT into a coherent team; 2) “set the conditions for victory, first by isolating Ramadi from enemy resupply and reinforcements,” and second, by preparing “the Iraqi security forces for the challenges ahead;” 3) “fight the enemy”; 4) “consolidate... gains,” especially by building the Iraqi Army and Police.¹⁵

The operational concept behind the counterinsurgency effort in Ramadi is in some respects the

model for Operation Enforcing the Law, a modified inkspot approach to clearing, controlling, and retaining a hostile city. In the first month, U.S. forces established control over the entry points along the roads into the city and “five new...Combat Outposts (COPs) and patrol bases in and around the city.” They moved from their Forward Operating Base (FOB) into the COPs, clearing and holding neighborhoods as they went.¹⁶ Controlling access was important not only to prevent insurgents from moving through Ramadi, but also because insurgents based themselves in the suburbs of Ramadi, from which they orchestrated attacks into the city.¹⁷ Al Qaeda facilitators in Ramadi also helped operatives stage attacks in nearby cities. One such terrorist provided money, weapons, and propaganda to organize and publicize an October suicide car-bombing in Habbaniyah.¹⁸

Four weeks into the operation, COL MacFarland reported, “These [COPs] have had a very disruptive effect on the enemy. Most importantly, though, it’s given us the opportunity to engage the people of Ramadi.... And we’ve established real relationships with the people in parts of the city that we hadn’t been able to in the past.” He noted that progress was slow, and that the population’s feeling toward “these combat outposts has been changing from hostile to neutral and neutral to good, but in some places it’s moving faster than others. It’s a process, and it’s going in the right direction, but we still have a way to go.”¹⁹

Residents helped Coalition and Iraqi people develop intelligence about the enemy. “Once people...near these new combat outposts and patrol bases understand that the Iraqi security forces are there to stay and they’re not just sweeping through the neighborhoods, they begin to open up a little bit more and provide us...with intelligence, and they start to talk to us about their concerns, their needs and their desires that we can then address” during the build phase.²⁰

The transition to provincial control presupposed the existence of Iraqi Security Forces to maintain security in the area once it was achieved. Few Anbaris, however, joined the Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army in the first half of 2006, deterred largely by Al Qaeda’s destruction of every police

station in Ramadi on the same day early in that year.²¹ Monthly recruiting consequently slowed to a trickle; March 2006 generated no recruits; twenty or thirty volunteered in each of the summer months.²² In August, Ramadi had only 300 policemen of the 3,000 that the Iraqi government authorized.²³ After months of violence and counterinsurgency operations in Ramadi, a major effort throughout the Euphrates River Valley produced 950 new recruits in August. They began their training on August 21.²⁴

The Turning Point

On that same day, al Qaeda operatives assassinated Sheik Abu Ali Jassim, who had encouraged many of his tribesmen to join the police forces. They angered local tribesmen and sheiks further by hiding the body in a field, rather than returning the corpse for swift burial as prescribed.²⁵ Al Qaeda made a grave error. In retrospect, U.S. commanders recognized the assassination as a turning point. Local sheiks organized a movement, called “The Awakening,” to fight al Qaeda and all terrorists in Ramadi. By early October, eleven sheiks participated in the movement.²⁶

In late September, tribal leaders demanded that Prime Minister Maliki recognize Iraq as an Arab state, fairly distribute oil revenues, and release political prisoners.²⁷ (Saddam Hussein had not been convicted or executed at that time.) They also demanded that the U.S. withdraw its forces. The government of Iraq offered, instead, to consider ways for Sunni Baathists who had not engaged in terrorism to return to government offices, which their past allegiances legally prevented them from holding.²⁸

U.S. forces, local civilians, and al Qaeda each responded to the others’ actions and pursued their own objectives. The situation in Ramadi changed gradually at first. At the end of October, insurgents led a demonstration in Ramadi proclaiming the Islamic State of Iraq.²⁹ The Islamic State of

Iraq emerged from al Qaeda elements after the death of Zarqawi and aimed recreate the caliphate. The leaders of this movement declared successive capitals for the Islamic State of Iraq from

which they based themselves in 2006 and 2007. They sent emirs, or military commanders, to various provinces to establish the writ of the Islamic State of Iraq there. The emirs and their colleagues established councils to impose their extreme interpretation of Shariah, or Islamic law, on the local population. This group retained ties to al Qaeda networks in Iraq and beyond. It used terrorist tactics to compel the local population to obey their law and decisions, rather than those of the government of Iraq. The determination of the group to enforce a

radical interpretation of Islamic law, and to use terrorist tactics to enforce compliance, induced more sheiks to oppose the insurgency and join the Awakening.³⁰

As the sheiks organized themselves and their population in the fall, U.S. and Iraqi forces conducted a variety of counterinsurgency operations to oust insurgents from Ramadi. First, they conducted targeted raids against high value targets. The Tame’en neighborhood, in the west of Ramadi, posed particularly grave challenges. U.S. forces killed a significant facilitator and captured and members of a terrorist ring in October responsible for making car-bombs. During that operation, friendly forces found the insurgents’ weapons cache, which also included a sniper rifle.³¹ In subsequent operations, a precision airstrike killed an emir (military commander) in eastern Ramadi,³² and Coalition forces raided an al Qaeda meeting place and captured forty-eight suspects.³³ At the end of October, U.S. and Iraqi forces established a Security Station in central Ramadi, bringing the total number of new fortified positions in the city to eight.³⁴

The establishment of this security station apparently enabled U.S. forces to achieve a goal

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that they had had since July: demolishing the destroyed buildings around the government center that harbored terrorists. The goal was “accelerating the urban renewal and rejuvenation of Ramadi.”³⁵ Destroying and rebuilding the government center was a necessary prerequisite for establishing provincial government in the future. Provincial government employees needed to be able to work safely downtown in the provincial capital. Coalition forces fought to clear the area for at least three months. In early October, terrorists still controlled the government center in Ramadi and prevented employees from coming to work.³⁶ By November, U.S. forces controlled the area sufficiently. They demolished the wrecked buildings and haul away millions of tons of rubble, leaving room for a new common area for Ramadi’s citizens.³⁷ Reconstruction of the area began on November 18, when Anbar’s deputy governor and a Coalition Civil Affairs Team began to repair a broken water pump that caused flooding at the government center. Iraqi Army units every day searched and secured the Iraqi workers and equipment repairing the facility.³⁸

In November, December, and January, sheiks in Ramadi urged their own tribesmen to join the Iraqi Police. As a result, four hundred new recruits from Ramadi joined the force in November.³⁹ A thousand recruits joined in December, approximately 800 in January; a subsequent recruiting drive in Anbar generated 2,000 volunteers.⁴⁰ Recruits received their training at a police academy in Jordan.⁴¹ U.S. forces enhanced their recruiting and retention of Iraqi Security Forces in Anbar by providing them with pay and supplies, which they did not receive from the central government. Though the government provided far less funding than needed, Al Qaeda diverted much of the money that Baghdad did disperse.⁴²

Recruits had to be able to read and write—a requirement that rendered only fifty-percent of applicants qualified for the job.⁴³ U.S. and Iraqi forces set up a basic literacy program in Ramadi in spring 2007 to educate recruits who had initially been rejected.⁴⁴ Recruits also needed to meet certain medical standards.⁴⁵ They were vetted to ensure that they had not participated in recent insurgent activity or retained ties to the Baath Party.⁴⁶

The Iraqi Army, meanwhile, worked alongside U.S. forces and gradually incurred greater responsibilities in the city.⁴⁷ Together, they took a census in Ramadi, one neighborhood at a time.⁴⁸ Taking a census can be an important part of counterinsurgency, as it identifies and registers the local population, distinguishing it from insurgents who are outsiders. A census creates ways to control movement, and, ultimately, to support government institutions and elections.

Security and practicality enhanced the recruitment of police. For example, the danger of traversing roads from villages to Ramadi prevented one town from supplying recruits for local police forces. Consequently, these towns did not have police forces. In January, U.S. Marines transported forty applicants along the Euphrates River so that they could join the police forces. Recruits trained for six weeks, and then returned to their home town for duty. These actions helped to spread legitimate government authority in Anbar, and to connect cities with neighboring towns and villages.⁴⁹

Enemy Reaction to the Awakening and Counterinsurgency Operations

As U.S. and Iraqi forces moved into Ramadi’s government center in November, Al Qaeda tenaciously defended its territory in the city’s northern and northeastern sectors, including Tameen, Sofia, and Hamaniyah. As counterinsurgency operations continued, the enemy also vigorously counterattacked, targeting Iraqi Security Forces, Coalition Forces, and Ramadi’s civilians.

Al Qaeda launched a coherent campaign targeting the Iraqi Police in Ramadi, in order to deter further recruiting efforts. Two to three weeks after November’s police recruiting drive ended, Al Qaeda targeted Iraqi Security Forces as they took responsibility for new missions. The enemy engaged in coordinated and repeated attempts to attack one tribe, which were repelled at a checkpoint first by Iraqi, then by U.S. forces.⁵⁰ They kidnapped and murdered Iraqi Police to deter recruitment efforts.⁵¹ They attacked police stations.⁵² They murdered a policeman and killed or wounded members of his family in their home in northern Ramadi.⁵³

Insurgents routinely ambushed Coalition patrols by visibly emplacing IEDs on roads. While U.S. forces cleared the IED, insurgents attacked them with small arms fire. Al Qaeda used homes with children as safe houses, and fired small arms from mosques at Coalition Forces.⁵⁴

In December, al Qaeda kidnapped university students in Tameen. The Iraqi Police quickly came to rescue the hostages, and al Qaeda engaged them, the Iraqi Army, and Coalition back-up in a three-hour firefight.⁵⁵ The enemy might have kidnapped the students in order to ambush the Iraqi Security Forces based nearby in the Huriyah security station. Alternatively, the hostages might have had particular symbolic value. For example, the Islamic State of Iraq might have been reminding the residents of Ramadi that it objected to secular education or to the education of particular students. The kidnappings might also have been a reprisal for an earlier action. U.S. forces had cleared al Qaeda from a major stronghold at Anbar University (in southwestern Ramadi) at the end of August, before classes were in session. These are speculations only. Al Qaeda might simply have kidnapped students randomly or opportunistically. But this seems unlikely. The enemy otherwise coordinated its attacks against Iraqi civilians in order to achieve specific aims.

U.S. AND IRAQI FORCES CONTINUE TO CLEAR AND RETAIN RAMADI

U.S. and Iraqi forces nevertheless continued to sweep neighborhoods in north-central Ramadi. Operations throughout December cleared weapons caches from central Ramadi and from terrain to its north and east.⁵⁶ Four new tribes joined the Awakening after this clearing operation.⁵⁷ U.S. and Iraqi Forces also secured government buildings once

occupied by terrorists and construct police stations from which they could routinely patrol the city.⁵⁸ By early January, they moved into the violent Tameem neighborhood and established a police station.⁵⁹ By the middle of the month, Iraqi forces manned fourteen police stations through Ramadi, and eight more police stations were planned to so that the newly trained recruits could work in the city.⁶⁰ Next, they constructed a police station in Ramadi's Sofia district, which U.S. forces had cleared in December.⁶¹ Beginning in January, the Mayor of Ramadi, Latif Obaid Ayadah, police chiefs, and U.S. forces met routinely to coordinate the large police force and plan future security operations.⁶²

The dramatically expanded Iraqi Police Force discovered numerous weapons caches in January and February. Citizens' tips and foot patrols provided them with intelligence about their locations. The average number of discovered caches rose to two a day, instead of two a week. One large cache in eastern, containing 300 mortar rounds, represented approximately six months' supply of that ammunition at the enemy's average pace of one to two rounds per day. The Iraqi Police discovered 300 more mortar rounds that month in various caches.⁶³ In January, police recruits finished their training at the Phoenix Academy in Camp Ramadi. Construction began in March for a large police training facility in Habbaniyah.

Exploiting Success in Ramadi: U.S. and Iraqi Forces Expand Operations in the Euphrates Valley

While some U.S. forces cleared Ramadi, others interdicted insurgents in the areas north and west of the city. In December, U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces began also to roust al Qaeda from the Haditha Triad (consisting of three adjoining cities, Haditha, Barwanah, and Haqlaniyah).⁶⁴ At this time, they found major warehouse caches

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in Haqlaniyah. Most importantly, U.S. and Iraqi forces took control of the Euphrates River itself. They trained Iraqi Police to patrol the river by boat, denying the enemy freedom of movement along that major line of communication.

*Enemy Reaction to the Anbar Awakening:
The First Chlorine Gas Attacks*

In the first months of 2007, Al Qaeda attempted to use chemical weapons against Iraqi civilians. The first known attempt to detonate a vehicle bomb with chlorine gas occurred in Ramadi on January 28. The explosion killed sixteen people, though the chlorine gas apparently did not cause casualties.⁶⁵ That bombing might have been a reaction to the Baghdad Security Plan. It might also have been an experiment prior to the later attacks in Anbar and Baghdad. But the chlorine vehicle bomb also made sense in the context of al Qaeda's violent campaign against Ramadi's police. The bomber drove the dump truck of explosives into the post housing the police quick reaction force in Ramadi.⁶⁶ The first attempted chlorine bomb attack apparently aimed to kill and terrorize police and recruits.

The Baghdad Security Plan Begins

When Operation Enforcing the Law began on February 14, 2007, Major General Gaskin was the commander of Multinational Forces West (Anbar province) and the II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward). His mission was to interdict foreign insurgents who "are coming into the country, mainly using the Euphrates River Valley," and to support the Baghdad security plan by preventing insurgents from traveling between Anbar and Baghdad. Maj. Gen. Gaskin and his forces performed the following tasks: securing the Euphrates River, securing six major cities in Anbar province, and interdicting foreign fighters traveling into and out of Baghdad.⁶⁷

The number of troops in Anbar province rose even before "the surge" began. Some units in Anbar had their tours extended when the BSP was announced. In Ramadi, the number of U.S. troops rose in December, January, and Febru-

ary, after the mid-tour leave program ended.⁶⁸ On February 19, COL MacFarland and the 1BCT of the 1st Armored Division relinquished command of Ramadi to COL John Charlton and the 1BCT, 3rd Infantry Division, and a full, pre-leave compliment of soldiers.⁶⁹ By February, the Ramadi sheiks' recruitment drive had also produced 4,500 new policemen, where previously there had only been 300.⁷⁰

Maj. Gen. Gaskin noted that the increased troop levels enabled him to expand operations in Anbar while also supporting efforts in Baghdad. The operations in Anbar built upon those in Ramadi, and worked synergistically with the Baghdad Security Plan. The combination helped to interdict and disrupt terrorist movements and supplies through the province into Baghdad.⁷¹ Furthermore, in November, U.S. Marines moved into position at al Rutbah to interdict foreign fighters traversing the desert roads. They closed the borders for the first days of the Baghdad Security Plan. They also protected the border cities such as Al Qaim.

*Enemy Movements Between
Anbar, Diyala, and Baghdad*

Al Qaeda launched a series of car, truck, and suicide bomb attacks in and around Baghdad shortly after the BSP began. Some of these targeted Shiite civilians and, apparently, aimed to incite sectarian violence by inviting reprisal attacks. The Jaysh al Mahdi as did not respond to these provocations as a coherent organization, nor did the Shiite population of Baghdad. Others were attempts to terrorize civilians broadly, even more than typical suicide bombs.

Al Qaeda detonated the next chlorine gas suicide bomb in Ramadi on February 19.⁷² Another bomber detonated a chlorine tanker truck, exploded in Taji, the site of a large city and major U.S. base north of Baghdad, just a few days later.⁷³ A third followed in a mixed neighborhood in Baghdad on the next day, on the road linking Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) with the western part of the city.⁷⁴ Shortly thereafter, U.S. forces found a large quantity of chlorine and other chemicals in Karma, a loca-

tion near Falluja where al Qaeda terrorists also staged and constructed vehicle bombs.⁷⁵ The Karma staging area was a convenient location for attacks against Anbar, Baghdad, and Taji, as the western highways lead from Falluja east to BIAP (along the most direct route) or east to Taji (along a northerly route). U.S. forces later discovered another chlorine vehicle-bomb making operation just north of Taji.⁷⁶

The chlorine bomb attacks in Taji were part of a wider offensive by al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq in February and March. These enemies aimed to disrupt Coalition operations and destabilize the civilian population in Diyala province, where it meets Salah ad Din and Baghdad. The Islamic State of Iraq, which formed after the death of Zarqawi, occupied the region south of Balad Ruz in November 2006. The group used terrorism to enforce its interpretation of Islamic law through terrorist acts. The establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq near Balad Ruz temporally corresponds to the displacement of al Qaeda and Islamic State of Iraq from Ramadi by the Awakening movement.

The Islamic State of Iraq in February and March, having been pushed from some of its key bases, attempted to hold terrain between Anbar, Diyala, and Salah ad Din so that they could retain staging areas for counterattacks. U.S. forces displaced the al Qaeda elements from their Diyala base in Turki Village in January, and conducted follow-on operations in February and March. During those months, U.S. and Iraqi forces contested al Qaeda strongholds north of Ramadi. The Awakening in Anbar seems to have driven fighters north into Diyala, west into Baghdad, and into the northeastern fringes of Diyala province. Maj. Gen. Mixon, the commander of MND-North and Maj Gen. Gaskin, the commander of MND-West each made this speculation on different occasions. Other al Qaeda militants left Baghdad for Diyala in January.⁷⁷

■ Al Qaeda increased its intense attacks against Anbaris shortly after Prime Minister Maliki's visit, and they attempted to use chemical weapons several times a week in the last half of March.

PRIME MINISTER MALIKI VISITS ANBAR

Promoting ties between central, provincial, and local governments is a major objective of state building and counterinsurgency operations. This is especially a problem for Anbar province, which is nearly all Sunni. The ties between the central government in Baghdad, the ministries, and the provincial government in Anbar were exceptionally weak in 2006. De-Baathification laws and policies prevented many Sunnis from participating in government and military service. Because Sunni leaders boycotted the 2005 elections, they did not obtain strong

political representation in Parliament. As sectarian violence spiraled, some ministries in Baghdad ignored the province's needs further, and could not deliver funds or services.

On March 13, Prime Minister Maliki made his first personal, official visit to Ramadi. He had last traveled to Anbar province in 1976, when he worked there as a teacher before fleeing Saddam Hussein's regime.⁷⁸ Sheiks

and other leaders came from all parts of Anbar to meet with him. The Anbar provincial governor and other officials met him on the tarmac.⁷⁹ The meetings were civil, but argumentative and voluble.⁸⁰

"At a news conference, Mr. Maliki praised the tenaciousness of the province's residents and thanked those tribal leaders who opposed the creeping influence of Al Qaeda. He assured them that the central government would not ignore their demands for improved public services, development aid and support for the security forces here. He promised to open factories, deliver food to the needy and hold provincial elections as soon as possible."⁸¹

Al Qaeda Escalates its Attacks against Anbaris

Al Qaeda increased its intense attacks against Anbaris shortly after Prime Minister Maliki's visit, and they attempted to use chemical weapons

several times a week in the last half of March. Insurgents tried to coordinate three chlorine bomb attacks against residents of Ramadi, Falluja, and Amariya on March 18. One aimed at a tribal sheik who supported the Awakening and the people of his tribe who came to visit him. That bomb detonated at its target in the Albu Issa tribal area, three miles south of Falluja.⁸² The two other bombs exploded at security checkpoints outside of Amariyah, a city on the Euphrates between Falluja and Yusifiyah, and another northeast of Ramadi. Though these explosions inflicted casualties, they did not reach their intended targets.⁸³ Next, Al Qaeda launched coordinated, conventional attacks on Iraqi police stations in the tribal areas supporting The Awakening. On March 20, for example, insurgents attacked a police station in Amariyah with mortars for an hour. Iraqi police engaged the insurgents in a firefight for several hours, and U.S. forces terminated the engagement by bombing and strafing the insurgents' position.⁸⁴ On March 23, Ramadi police apprehended a potential suicide bomber driving a truck of chlorine toward a new Iraqi police station. The bomb did not detonate.⁸⁵ And on March 30, insurgents in three separate trucks rigged with explosives and chlorine attempted to penetrate the fortified perimeter of Falluja's government center, partially rebuilt since the Marine's fought through the city in spring 2004. As in Amariyah and Ramadi, the Iraqi Security Forces in Falluja prevented the trucks from entering the compound, and caused the explosives to detonate preemptively.⁸⁶

*Iraqi Security Forces
Continue Counterinsurgency Operations*

In the wake of these attacks, Iraqi Security Forces worked aggressively to clear more neighborhoods. On March 20, Brig. Gen. Khalil Ibrahim Hamadi, police chief in Ramadi, led 500 Iraqi policemen during a ten-hour operation to clear an area of central Ramadi.⁸⁷ On March 26, Coalition and Iraqi forces began a separate, major clearing operation in western Ramadi.⁸⁸

CONCLUSIONS

In any counterinsurgency operation, one must separate the reconcilable population from the irreconcilable. To accomplish that mission, the counterinsurgent force and the host nation work together to strengthen and protect the institutions of civil society: markets, government, economic, and religious institutions. The goal of the counterinsurgent is to convince the population to oppose the insurgents and support the government. When the population would rather support the government, the population expels the hard core enemy from its midst.

A combination of military operations and reconstruction is necessary to achieve these ends, because the population must have a basic level of security in order to cooperate with the government and expel the enemy living amidst them. In March 2006, al Qaeda controlled Ramadi and Anbar in the doctrinal sense. U.S. forces slowly spread through many of Ramadi's neighborhoods through security stations and combat outposts. They cleared al Qaeda from the government center, which was its stronghold in Ramadi. In March 2007, al Qaeda no longer controlled Ramadi, and in fact, U.S. and Iraqi forces controlled many parts of the city in a doctrinal sense.⁸⁹

A critical mass of the civilian population in Ramadi supported counterinsurgency efforts. Ramadi's tribal sheiks organized and led a movement, the Awakening, when they decided to expel al Qaeda from their city. They led their population not only to reject al Qaeda, but also actively to oppose the organization. They recruited thousands of Anbaris to join the Iraqi police, effectively increasing force presence in the city and throughout the Euphrates River Valley. Their efforts, combined with U.S. efforts, spread the al Qaeda opposition movement from Ramadi, the capital city, into other cities in the provinces.

Urban counterinsurgency efforts aim to expel the enemy from the cities, so that hard core insurgents regroup on rural terrain. When they do, counterinsurgent forces then aim to prevent the insurgents from reinfiltrating the cities. It is

easier for counterinsurgents to fight insurgents on rural terrain, where they cannot conceal themselves as readily among the population. After November 2006, al Qaeda regrouped in rural areas in Anbar, such as Karma and Lake Tharthar. It also regrouped in rural Diyala and Salah ad Din provinces. In February and March, the counterinsurgent forces in Ramadi prevented al Qaeda from re-entering many areas of the city.

Al Qaeda first reacted to the Awakening by reasserting the Islamic State of Iraq and terrorizing the civilian population from within Ramadi.

Al Qaeda's effort failed, in part because U.S. and Iraqi counterinsurgency operations continued to push the enemy out of more parts of the city. The major police recruiting drives forced al Qaeda further out of Ramadi.

In late February and in March, Al Qaeda launched a new campaign to win back Anbar. It attacked police stations in a deliberate campaign to deter civilian support for the Awakening, particularly police recruitment. Al Qaeda's suicide car and truck bombers targeted Iraqi police stations, the homes of tribal sheiks who supported the Awakening, and the areas in which their tribesmen gathered to meet with them. The Iraqi Police stopped several car and truck bombs at checkpoints in March.

Though some of these detonated and caused casualties, they did not reach the crowded and significant targets at which their drivers aimed.

Al Qaeda did not sow random violence in Anbar, but rather targeted its violence very specifically—even when it used indiscriminate methods like car bombs to harm innocent civilians. Al Qaeda used chemical weapons against the Sunni population as part of its early 2007 campaign. The use of chemical weapons could simply have been a new tactic, technique, and procedure, but it seems more likely that it had symbolic value. The trial of Saddam Hussein in 2006 detailed

the specific, horrific effects that the dictator's use of chemical weapons had on victims at the time and subsequently. The chemical weapons attack against the Kurds at Halabja occurred on March 16, 1988, and the government of Iraq marked the occasion this year with a moment of silence for the victims. Several chlorine gas attacks occurred on this anniversary, and it is proper, therefore, to speculate about the connection between the chlorine bombs and Saddam Hussein's attacks.

Saddam Hussein's attack on Halabja, and the

military campaign that followed, displaced 5,000 inhabitants of Kurdistan.⁹⁰ Al Qaeda's chlorine attacks echo that event, but this time, the chemical weapons targeted Sunni. Al Qaeda thereby implied that it will target Sunni just as Saddam Hussein targeted Kurds and Shiia in order to displace them from Anbar and foment its radical Islamist revolution. The chlorine gas attacks also hint at the scale of devastation that some al Qaeda might hope to achieve, even if they have not done so already. If the terrorists aim to replicate Halabja, they intend for their spectacular attacks to cause casualties as numerous as those they inflicted on the United States on September 11, rather than a tragic market bombing

that kills and wounds hundreds. These deductions about al Qaeda's intentions are based on reasoning and speculation. Al Qaeda's recent terrorist attacks against the Sunni population demonstrate that the organization is willing to target all civilians, not just Shiites, in order to achieve its goals.

Counterinsurgency operations in Anbar helped reintegrate the cities of the province. Poor security, including insurgents' control of the Euphrates River and the roads, isolated Anbar's cities from Ramadi in 2006. As U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces secured the river, Ramadi, and the other cities

■ Al Qaeda first reacted to the Awakening by reasserting the Islamic State of Iraq and terrorizing the civilian population from within Ramadi. Al Qaeda's effort failed, in part because U.S. and Iraqi counterinsurgency operations continued to push the enemy out of more parts of the city. The major police recruiting drives forced al Qaeda further out of Ramadi.

of the river valley, smaller towns and villages were able to contribute to police recruiting drives and improve security in outlying areas. Linking the cities within the province is a necessary prerequisite for ensuring that the provincial government can

govern and assist the entire province. Prime Minister Maliki's visit was a symbolic and practical first step toward establishing a working relationship between the provincial government in Anbar Province and the central government in Baghdad.

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