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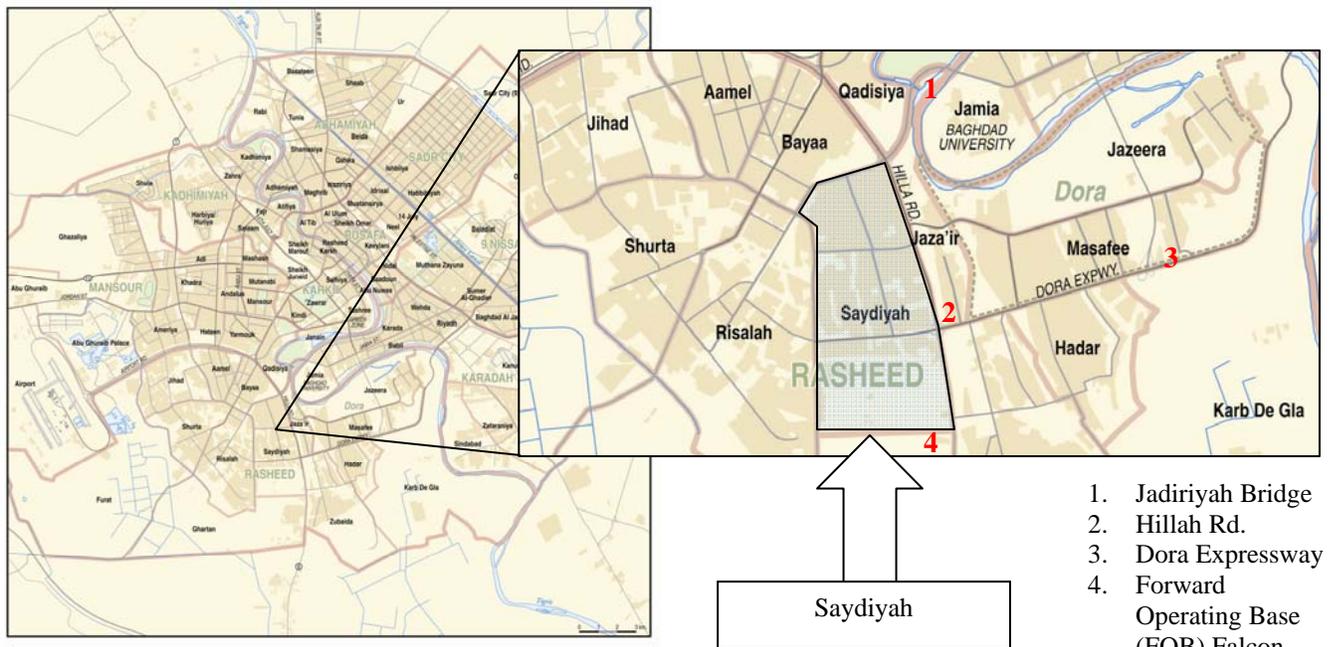
## Backgrounder #15

### Baghdad Neighborhood Project: Saydiyah

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#### Overview

Gen. Ray Odierno, the commander of Multi-National Corps - Iraq, has argued that even as security improves in Baghdad, neighborhoods on the fault lines between the Shia and Sunni communities will be among the “last to settle.” The neighborhood of Saydiyah, located in southwestern Baghdad, is such a place<sup>1</sup>. Over the last year, it has become one of the principal battlegrounds for the territorial war between Shia militias and Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in Baghdad. Located in the western end of the Rashid Security District, Saydiyah was formerly a mixed neighborhood, with a Sunni majority. Prior to the invasion in 2003, many officials in Saddam’s government lived in the area, and following the outbreak of the war, it became a stronghold for the Sunni insurgency. Although Al-Qaeda and other Sunni insurgent factions initially cooperated in Saydiyah, it appears that Al-Qaeda slowly pushed out the other Sunni



groups, while simultaneously intensifying violence against the Shia residents of the neighborhood. The reaction from Shia militias and Shia-dominated government security forces led to extraordinary violence during the summer of 2007. US forces have sponsored an Awakening group in the Sunni community to protect them from Shia predation and remove the need for Al-Qaeda's protection services. They have also worked to sponsor sectarian reconciliation through local notables and tribal elements, but it appears that these efforts have not yielded the kinds of success witnessed further to the south in Mahmudiyah, or the Abu Disheer-Hawr Rajab area.

The ethno-sectarian balance in Saydiyah is shifting, perhaps rapidly, towards a Shia majority. The area has likely been depopulated substantially by violence targeted at both the Sunni and Shia, although systematic operations by Shia militias and Shia-dominated security forces have likely pushed the Sunni into the minority. This is consistent with the Shi'fication of the small neighborhoods to the north and west, as well as southeast, of Saydiyah.

U.S. forces have one battalion in the area, the 1-18<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry (1-18<sup>th</sup> IN) operating out of Forward Operating Base (FOB) Falcon just to the south. Commanded by LTC George Glaze, the 1-18<sup>th</sup> IN replaced another battalion, the 2-6<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry (2-6<sup>th</sup> IN), in the fall of 2006 before the beginning of Operational Fardh al-Qanoon in February 2007. There is also a National Police Brigade in the area, the much-feared Wolf Brigade (2<sup>nd</sup> BDE, 1<sup>st</sup> NP Division), which had a reputation for kidnapping and executing Sunni civilians.

### **Saydiyah: Strategic Significance**

The violence in Saydiyah has been driven by the ethno-sectarian balance as well as the geographic location of the neighborhood within the city. Saydiyah is located at the junction of several key communications and travel routes within the city. It sits astride the highway running from the south into the capital, thus controlling a key access route for Al-Qaeda based in sanctuaries in and around Hawr Rajab, Mahmudiyah, Yusufiyah, and Iskandayirah. Shia militias also rely on this road for access to central Baghdad from strongholds in Najaf, Karbala, Hillah, and Diwaniyah. Saydiyah also sits alongside key roads for US access to areas in West Rashid like Bayaa and Aamel, making it important for Shia militias that have sought to conduct cleansing operations in these areas without interference from US forces. Furthermore, Saydiyah is adjacent to the former Al-Qaeda stronghold in Dora, Masafee, Mechanics, and Asia, neighborhoods in the eastern end of the Rashid District. US forces have been engaged in intensive clearing operations targeting Al-Qaeda remnants in these areas since the beginning of Operation Fardh al-Qanoon, especially in the Masafee area located directly to the east on the Dora Expressway.

Additionally, Saydiyah sits at the terminus of the off-ramp for the Jadiriyah Bridge, linking the Karrada Peninsula with West Baghdad. In order to "clear" Sunni residents from mixed neighborhoods, the Shia militias require access to the mixed populations in West Rashid from strongholds in Kadhamiyah and Sadr City. Access through Dora has been limited by the strength of Al-Qaeda there. Central Mansour has long been a source of strength for Sunni groups. The Jadiriyah Bridge provides a plausible access route that does not traverse Mansour or Dora.

## **Sectarian Conflict and U.S. Operations in Saydiyah**

### **2003: The Opening Days**

Prior to the invasion in 2003, Saydiyah had been a Sunni-majority district, and given its position on the key southern access road, it was to have played an important role in the defense of Baghdad itself. Ultimately, this proved unnecessary, and after the fall of Baghdad, Saydiyah witnessed the revenge attacks against Ba'athists and other regime figures that were typical of other neighborhoods in the city after the invasion. In particular, the head of Baghdad's bomb disposal unit was attacked and seriously wounded in December 2003, prefiguring the targeting of personnel with specialized counter-IED skills.<sup>2</sup>

### **2004: The Sunni Insurgency Takes Root in Saydiyah**

In 2004, Sunni insurgent groups, along with Al-Qaeda, became increasingly embedded in Saydiyah, as the Sunni insurgency strengthened across Al-Anbar province, and within Baghdad itself. In February, in Saydiyah, Iraqi special police commandos arrested a senior Ba'ath Party official, Muhammad Zimam Abd al-Razaq, the four of spades from the famous "deck of cards."<sup>3</sup> A car bomb targeted a US patrol in the area in June.<sup>4</sup> A reporter for Al-Sharqiyah, a TV station associated with the Az-Zaman newspaper, was killed in August, following the assassination of her husband, a translator for U.S. forces.<sup>5</sup> In November, a roadside bomb targeted an Iraqi Police patrol, although it did not kill any policemen.<sup>6</sup>

This violence was relatively sporadic compared to later years. The low level of violence may have been a function of the fact that U.S. and Iraqi forces did not move aggressively against Sunni insurgent groups and Al-Qaeda elements that were building a stronghold in the area, and there were not, therefore, any confrontations.

In December, the strength of Al-Qaeda became manifest when it claimed responsibility, in conjunction with the 1920s Revolution Brigade, for a major attack against an Iraqi police station in Saydiyah.<sup>7</sup> A force of fifty gunmen, using coordinated rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) and small-arms fire, overran the station, killing fifteen policemen, releasing prisoners, and seizing the entire stock of the armory.<sup>8</sup> This prompted some of the first major U.S./Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) operations in the area. Following the attack, the Sunni Islamic Party in Iraq (IIP), now led by Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi, complained that U.S. and Iraqi forces had detained 112 of its members in Saydiyah.<sup>9</sup> While this claim may have been dramatized for effect, it demonstrates that U.S. and Iraqi forces recognized, in the wake of the attack on the police station, that Al-Qaeda had developed a sanctuary in this area.

### **2005: Conflict over Elections and the Rise of Al-Qaeda**

The growing strength of Al-Qaeda had political effects in the area; since the transition of power from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to the Iraqi government in May 2004, US and Iraqi officials worked to lay the basis for elections in January 2005 that would select a transitional Iraqi National Assembly. This assembly would be responsible for seating a transitional government and writing a permanent constitution. Al-Qaeda and the Sunni community generally were desperately opposed to this process.

Shortly before the elections in January 2005, Sunni groups, perhaps Al-Qaeda, distributed flyers in Saydiyah, as well as in the Sunni areas of Jihad and Ameriyah, warning residents to stay away from polling centers and security forces in the neighborhood.<sup>10</sup> While there were no attacks in Saydiyah itself, these information operations were accompanied by attacks on polling places elsewhere in the city, including the use of a mentally-retarded man as a suicide bomber at a polling center in the west Baghdad neighborhood of Iskan.<sup>11</sup>

The United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), the main Shia list that included the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI/ISCI), the Sadrist Trend, and the Da'awa Party, swept these elections in the face of low Sunni turnout, and several key ministries were taken by leaders from these parties, including the powerful Ministry of the Interior. Bayan Jabr, a SCIRI leader with close ties to SCIRI's militia wing, the Badr Corps, became Interior Minister, and immediately began reshaping the Ministry of the Interior into a sectarian weapon for the Shia majority.

Perhaps because AQI had developed a stronghold in the neighborhood, this transition period was accompanied by an uptick in violence between the Sunni and Shia residents of Saydiyah, as Shia-dominated security forces went on the offensive. By March 2005, intense distrust had developed between the sects, as SCIRI militia elements were actively targeting Sunnis across West Rashid, and Sunnis feared that their Shia neighbors were informers for militias or the security forces.<sup>12</sup> This violence broke out into the open in May 2005, when Al-Qaeda and other Sunni groups began actively targeting the Shia in the area. In early May, a prominent Da'awa Party activist, Masar Sarhan, was killed after returning home from a party celebrating the new government of Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'afari.<sup>13</sup> The resulting protests by Shia students targeted the Sunni dean at Baghdad University and they were sufficiently intense to close down the college in Bab al-Muathem for several days. Press coverage of Saydiyah at the time characterized the area as having confronted an assassination campaign against Shia residents, with a counter-campaign of assassinations targeting former Ba'ath Party figures and former officers from the intelligence services.<sup>14</sup>

Al-Qaeda and its allies made a determined effort to target both the security apparatus and civilian targets, especially using various types of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). On May 9<sup>th</sup>, two car bombs exploded near an Iraqi Police (IP) checkpoint, killing six and wounding nine, all police officers.<sup>15</sup> A week later, a roadside bomb targeted an Iraqi Army (IA) convoy, killing two, followed by an ambush the same day targeting an Iraqi Army Brigadier General.<sup>16</sup> A car bomb targeted Al-Mahdi Al-Muntadhar Prayer Hall, a Shia target, on the 19<sup>th</sup>, killing two and wounding five.<sup>17</sup> The hall was closed at the time of the attack, limiting the casualties. Two roadside bombs struck US convoys on the 25<sup>th</sup>, killing nineteen civilians.<sup>18</sup> Sunni groups also engaged in extra-judicial killings that would later become the hallmark of the Shia militias; on the 29<sup>th</sup>, two bodies were found near Forward Operating Base (FOB) Falcon, one a police officer, the other a civilian.<sup>19</sup>

Attacks on ISF and extra-judicial killings were the hallmark of AQI/Sunni operations over the summer of 2005 in Saydiyah. In June, gunmen launched coordinated attacks on multiple police stations in Saydiyah, combining small arms and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fire, killing six police officers and wounding twenty-one.<sup>20</sup> This attack echoed the December 2004 attack on a

Saydiyah police station six months earlier. It is likely that these attacks were terribly destructive to the capacity of the Iraqi police in the area, and strengthened the role of both Shia and Sunni militias as providers of authority. Sunni groups were also likely behind attacks on employees at a prison in Saydiyah run by the Ministry of Justice in July.<sup>21</sup> In August, taking advantage of the sanctuary they had developed, AQI claimed credit for the targeted killing of Haidar Ali Dujaili, the office director and press official for Iraqi National Congress leader Dr. Ahmad Chalabi, a member of the UIA.<sup>22</sup> According to eyewitnesses, twenty gunmen broken into Dujaili's home in Saydiyah and shot him in front of his family.<sup>23</sup>

U.S. and Iraqi forces began a new push against Al-Qaeda and other Sunni insurgent groups in the neighborhood in the fall of 2005. On September 1<sup>st</sup>, Interior Ministry forces captured two "terrorists" in Saydiyah after they attacked a police patrol using small arms and hand grenades.<sup>24</sup> The next day, Task Force (TF) Baghdad soldiers detained seven suspected terrorists in a raid in Saydiyah, seizing weapons, \$600,000 worth of Iraqi dinar, and fake Iraqi Police uniforms in Operation Baler Resolve.<sup>25</sup> Documents and letters seized on the terrorists linked them to Al-Qaeda in Iraq.<sup>26</sup> In October, U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces detained terrorists from an IED fabrication cell in Saydiyah, including a physics professor who led the cell. US forces seized chemicals, electronic circuit boards, circuit testers, car alarms, spools of wire, and small arms during the raid.<sup>27</sup> Several days later, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi National Police (NP) Division, the much-feared "Wolf Brigade," conducted a raid against another bomb-making cell in the area, detaining seven and seizing bomb-making materials.<sup>28</sup> This was followed by a series of joint nighttime raids between TF Baghdad and the Wolf Brigade targeting Al-Qaeda elements in the area.<sup>29</sup>

Al-Qaeda and its allies did not remain passive in the face of U.S. strikes. A car bomb targeted a U.S. convoy in Saydiyah in early September, apparently damaging only one U.S. vehicle thanks to the incompetence of the bomber, but leaving several Iraqis critically wounded.<sup>30</sup> They killed Abbas Kadhim Murad, the director of the Institute for Training and Education Development in the Ministry of Education as he was leaving his home on September 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>31</sup> Colonel Saad Abbas Fadhil, a senior official in the Ministry of the Interior, was gunned down on October 17<sup>th</sup> in front of his home by unidentified gunmen.<sup>32</sup> Adnan Jarrah, a former aide to the interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, was killed in his car in Saydiyah on November 24<sup>th</sup>.<sup>33</sup> Both the Education and Interior Ministries were controlled by Shia parties at the time, Da'awa and SCIRI respectively.

These assassinations occurred in the context of major political developments that began to bring the Sunni community into the political process. The draft constitution was approved by a referendum held in October 2005, and elections for the first "permanent" Council of Representatives were held in December 2005. Marking a departure from past elections, the Sunni community participated in December 2005 and the Iraqi Accord Front (IAF – Tawafuq) won 44 seats, roughly 15% of the total allotment. Some Sunni insurgent groups went so far as to protect polling places in Sunni areas and escort voters to the polls.<sup>34</sup> While the elections were not bloodless – a policeman and a civilian were killed by an IED several days before the voting began – they were considerably more peaceful than the January 2005 elections that had been marred by violence across the city.<sup>35</sup> While there was no violence in Saydiyah on Election Day, Iraqi police and army units did clash over the presence of police vehicles in Saydiyah with large "555" stickers – signaling support for the United Iraqi Alliance.<sup>36</sup> Apparently U.S. forces were

able to defuse the situation successfully, but the episode underscored the difficulties of building an Iraqi police force free of political and sectarian influence.

It is possible that these elections marked a turning point in the relationship between Al-Qaeda and its Sunni insurgent allies in the Saydiyah neighborhood. An anonymous resident of Saydiyah, whose identity cannot be confirmed, argued in an interview with a website generally sympathetic to the Sunni insurgency that Al-Qaeda began a campaign in this period to push all other insurgent groups out of Saydiyah and establish total control over the Sunni parts of the neighborhood.<sup>37</sup> These groups included so-called “resistance factions” linked to Harith al-Dari of the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS) and the 1920s Revolution Brigades. It is possible that as elements of the Sunni community began pursuing a dual-track policy of fighting as insurgents while simultaneously establishing a foothold within the government, Al-Qaeda was moving to consolidate its gains by eliminating future rivals.

#### **2006: Al-Qaeda Pushes Out Sunni Competitors, Targets Shia Civilians**

It is possible, therefore, that the upsurge in violence over the course of 2006 was a result of three simultaneous conflicts – one between Al-Qaeda and coalition forces, another between Sunni groups and Shia militias, and another within the Sunni insurgency itself. In Saydiyah, this conflict played itself out in a relentless campaign of roadside and VBIED bombings targeting both security forces and Shia civilians, especially those working on the key commercial arteries in the neighborhood.

In January 2006, Iraqi police found and defused two vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED) with US assistance after a tip from a local residence.<sup>38</sup> Shortly thereafter Iraqi special police commandos targeted “terrorists” in Saydiyah, detaining two.<sup>39</sup> This was followed by a roundup of 31 terrorists in Saydiyah at the end of the month by Ministry of Interior forces.<sup>40</sup> In February, U.S. soldiers found and safely detonated a large IED placed next to a mosque in Saydiyah, reminiscent of previous strikes on Shia prayer halls and perhaps linked to the targeting of the Shia shrine in Samarra that has been widely marked as the beginning of intense sectarian violence in Iraq.<sup>41</sup>

In March, Iraqi security forces found a cache of 60mm mortars and mortar rounds in Saydiyah, and Sunni gunmen staged a morning attack on a popular bakery, killing five.<sup>42</sup> Many of the bakers in the neighborhood fled following this incident, relocating to Shia-dominated Kadhamiyah or Karrada. This was characteristic of a broader AQI campaign against Shiite bakeries in other mixed areas; AQI drove out Shiite owners and employees and reopened the facilities under Sunni management.<sup>43</sup> This served an interesting function for insurgents. Since many families need to visit bakeries every day for bread, control over the bakery gave Sunni insurgents, and in many cases, AQI, an informational advantage about the composition and activities of a given neighborhood, while simultaneously denying this information to Shiites who might be informers for militias or the government.

MNF-I also dedicated a new battalion to west Rashid, including Saydiyah, in April. The 2-6<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry, part of the CENTCOM theater reserve in Kuwait, was deployed to FOB Falcon as part of Operation Scales of Justice, designed to secure Baghdad during the Shia

holiday of Arbaeen and the formation of a new Iraqi government. While the deployment was originally intended to be temporary, the 2-6<sup>th</sup> IN remained in Baghdad, responsible for Saydiyah, until after the conclusion of Operation Together Forward II in October 2006.<sup>44</sup>

In April, the brother of Tariq al-Hashemi, the new Sunni Vice-President, was killed by unidentified gunmen.<sup>45</sup> While this type of attack might look sectarian on its face, it is possible that he was targeted by Al-Qaeda elements as part of a bid to eliminate Sunni rivals within Saydiyah. This would be consistent with reported efforts, starting in late 2005 and extending over the course of 2006, to consolidate the Sunni resistance in Saydiyah under Al-Qaeda's leadership.

By May, the independent Iraqi wire service, Voices of Iraq, characterized Saydiyah as the site of routine assassinations and explosions.<sup>46</sup> Al-Qaeda, or perhaps other Sunni insurgent groups, continued to plant IEDs on important arteries within the neighborhood – perhaps targeting U.S. or ISF patrols but with the effect of killing civilians. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, Iraqi forces discovered and safely detonated an IED along the main commercial street in central Saydiyah, followed by an IED attack on the same road on May 21<sup>st</sup>, killing five civilians, including several schoolchildren.<sup>47</sup> Unidentified gunmen also conducted targeted killings during this time, in broad daylight, on the same street.<sup>48</sup> This focus on this commercial area suggests that the conflict between Al-Qaeda and its former Sunni allies, or perhaps between Al-Qaeda and the Shia militias, centered on this particular piece of territory.

In June, Sunni groups, likely increasingly AQI by this point, continued their bombing campaign against the Shia. A car bomb exploded on a commercial street in Saydiyah on the 17<sup>th</sup>, killing twenty.<sup>49</sup> The next day, a Kia microbus exploded, killing three.<sup>50</sup> On the 20<sup>th</sup>, a car bomb exploded on a commercial street; no casualty information was provided in press reports, but it apparently did significant damage to nearby businesses.<sup>51</sup> This was followed by two roadside bombs in July, killing three Iraqi civilians and wounding five others.<sup>52</sup>

Consistent with trends elsewhere in the city, the violence in the summer and fall of 2006 was increasingly characterized by conflict between Al-Qaeda and Shia militias and Shia-dominated security forces. In August, a battalion commander in the Shia-dominated National Police was killed along with two of his men by Sunni gunmen using a mosque as a fighting position.<sup>53</sup> The level of sectarian violence in August was so high that ordinary citizens no longer dared venture out during the day, and Jaysh al-Mahdi reportedly became more active in targeting Sunni civilians.<sup>54</sup> The Iraqi Accord Front (IAF-Tawafuq) also entered in discussions with the government, ultimately without success, concerning the disarmament of Jaysh al-Mahdi.<sup>55</sup> This level of violence prevented the provision of any municipal services; by October 2006, major trash piles in Saydiyah were responsible for the spread of infectious diseases amongst the population.<sup>56</sup>

In October, Al-Qaeda targeted Shia civilians in a suicide bombing at a popular fish market in Saydiyah, killing two and wounding nineteen, followed by an SVBIED attack against a National Police checkpoint there, killing two and wounding nine.<sup>57</sup> The use of a SVBIED, a relatively scarce asset, demonstrated the importance of the NP as a target for AQI during this period, likely because of NP collaboration with sectarian death squads.

Kidnapping were rampant in Saydiyah in this period, and while there was not yet any direct evidence of NP involvement in these kidnappings and killings, it would be consistent with the activities of the NP in west Baghdad generally, especially in the fall of 2006. After Operations Together Forward I and II nominally cleared areas of West Baghdad, and especially the Rashid District, National Police elements were tasked with holding these areas against Al-Qaeda re-infiltration. They instead facilitated widespread cleansing of Sunni civilians, and an entire NP Brigade, the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 2<sup>nd</sup> NP Division, was pulled off the line due to sectarian abuses.<sup>58</sup>

In light of major AQI car bomb attacks against Shia in Sadr City in November 2006, Saydiyah was strangely quiet during this period. An IED exploded on the road marking the southern border of Saydiyah, killing three civilians, likely Shia, but the neighborhood experienced no car bomb attacks.<sup>59</sup> This lull was only temporary, as AQI returned with a vengeance in December, targeting a popular market with a car bomb that killed five, including several children.<sup>60</sup>

### **2007: Al-Qaeda Triumphant and the Sunni-Shia Territorial War**

Over the course of 2007, Saydiyah devolved into one of the most violent areas of the city, even as the 1-18<sup>th</sup> IN set up a combat outpost in the neighborhood early in Operation Fardh al-Qanoon. The increasing use of car bombs, a signature technique for AQI, suggests that reports of AQI's ascendancy in 2006 were probably correct.

In January, gunmen, probably Shia, broke into a carpentry workshop, killing seven workers who had sought refuge there.<sup>61</sup> Several days later, three car bombs, probably built by AQI, delivered the Sunni response at the Al-Wat Al-Rashid market, killing ten, wounding thirty, and causing widespread damage to the shops in the area.<sup>62</sup> In February, the violence intensified, as two car bombs targeted Shia civilians in Saydiyah; the first exploded at an intersection on February 5<sup>th</sup>, killing three and wounding nine, and the second exploded on the 20<sup>th</sup>, killing three and wounding ten.<sup>63</sup> These were accompanied by attacks against National Police checkpoints, commonly viewed by the Sunni as collaborators with Shia militias.<sup>64</sup>

In response to these continuing provocations by Al-Qaeda, the Shia militias continued their sectarian cleansing campaign across West Rashid. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, Iraqi Special Forces, with coalition advisors, detained an "extremist death squad" leader in southern Baghdad, responsible for targeting Sunni civilians in Aamel, Bayaa, and Saydiyah.<sup>65</sup> With a force of twenty men, the cell leader was responsible for conducting illegal vehicle control points and kidnapping and burning civilians alive. In addition to these crimes, he was responsible for torturing and murdering a school principal after he refused to allow the group to conduct interrogations and extra-judicial killings in the school.<sup>66</sup> Interestingly enough, the use of schools by death squads as bases in West Rashid is not uncommon. Several months later in June, according to IP sources, the IP conducted a raid on a school in Saydiyah that yielded a major weapons cache, along with bomb-making materials, and five unidentified dead bodies.<sup>67</sup> In this case, the cache likely belonged to a Sunni group, as a Sunni MP complained that the Wolf Brigade took part in the raid and killed several civilians.<sup>68</sup>

Al-Qaeda stepped up its car-bombing campaign against the Shia in March and April, targeting both civilians and the security forces responsible for protecting them. On March 7<sup>th</sup>, a car bomb killed seven Iraqi police officers deployed to protect Shia pilgrims heading through Saydiyah south to Karbala.<sup>69</sup> On the 24<sup>th</sup>, an IED killed three civilians on the Hillah road running down the east side of the neighborhood, wounding three.<sup>70</sup> Another IED targeted a civilian car on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, killing two, followed by a car bomb in a Saydiyah market on the 8<sup>th</sup>, killing five and wounding another twenty.<sup>71</sup> An SVBIED targeted the Iraqi police on the 18<sup>th</sup>, killing two and wounding eight, followed by another car bomb several days later, for which no casualty figures were available.<sup>72</sup> On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, an IED targeted a police vehicle on the Hillah road, killing one officer and wounding several more.<sup>73</sup> On April 28<sup>th</sup>, gunmen targeted a commuter bus, probably Shia, killing at least five civilians.<sup>74</sup> The month was rounded out by the assassination of a senior officer in the Iraqi Army, Colonel Fawzi Alwan, who was shot as he left his house in Saydiyah. The assassination came a day after the kidnapping of a senior security official and nine of his colleagues in the Shia neighborhood of Sha'ab, suggesting that the killings may have been linked.<sup>75</sup>

Based on publicly available reports on IED attacks and discoveries, it appears that the usage of IEDs increased slightly in the month of May, along with a jump in the number of unidentified bodies. It is likely that the construction of a combat outpost in Saydiyah by the 1-18<sup>th</sup> IN, and the rise of presence patrols as part of the Baghdad Security Plan, drove Al-Qaeda to alter its tactics in the neighborhood. Rather than targeting Shia civilians with large car bombs, they may have focused on laying IED traps for US and Iraqi forces. It is also possible that preparatory operations for Operation Phantom Thunder in June may have disrupted the supply of car bombs available to AQI. Over the course of the month, there were no car bomb attacks anywhere in Saydiyah, but on a single day alone in May, Iraqi explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) technicians found and defused six different IEDs in the neighborhood.<sup>76</sup>

As US and ISF operations pushed Al-Qaeda back on its heels, Shia death squads may have exploited the opportunity to access Sunni populations, as at least eleven unidentified bodies were found dumped in Saydiyah over the course of the month.<sup>77</sup> In the absence of a reliable baseline, it is impossible to characterize the trend line in sectarian killings, but qualitative characterizations of sectarian violence in Saydiyah during this period suggest that these figures probably understate the magnitude of the problem.<sup>78</sup>



Photo 1: Soldiers from the 1-18<sup>th</sup> Infantry Patrolling in Saydiyah in May, 2007  
(Photo: SPC. Olanrewaju Akinrunmi, Joint Combat Camera Center)

The 1-18<sup>th</sup> IN continued to press Al-Qaeda in June, patrolling alongside elements from the 2<sup>nd</sup> BDE, 1<sup>st</sup> NP Wolf Brigade. There is considerable evidence that the Wolf Brigade has engaged in sectarian abuse of Sunni civilians, and evidence suggests that the relationship between the 1-18<sup>th</sup> Infantry and the NPs has been tense.<sup>79</sup> The most significant joint operation of the month, involving a detachment from the 1-38<sup>th</sup> Stryker Infantry, targeted two Sunni mosques, which were found to contain several weapons caches.<sup>80</sup> One of these mosques had previously come under attack by Shia militias in the area.<sup>81</sup> Al-Qaeda and Sunni remnants in the area continued to fight back; especially against fuel stations. An SVBIED targeted a gas station in Saydiyah on the 10<sup>th</sup>, followed by two SVBIEDs against a gas station on the road between Saydiyah and Mahmudiyah on the 18<sup>th</sup>.<sup>82</sup> These were likely direct attacks against Jaysh al-Mahdi, which reportedly had established control over the gas stations in the area to divert revenue to militia activities.<sup>83</sup>

The 1-38<sup>th</sup> Stryker Infantry was part of a major redeployment of US forces in the Rashid Security District in May, in preparation for clearing operations focused on Dora and East Rashid in June. Both the 1-38<sup>th</sup> Stryker Infantry and the 2-23<sup>rd</sup> Stryker Infantry battalions were deployed to supplement three infantry battalions and a cavalry squadron that had been deployed across the district from Aamel to Dora.<sup>84</sup> These forces conducted clearing operations in eastern and southeastern Rashid in June, while at the same time, operations by the 2<sup>nd</sup> BCT, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division “Dagger Brigade” pressed Al-Qaeda north of Route Irish in Mansour, particularly in Ameriyah, Hateen, and Yarmouk.<sup>85</sup>

These operations likely squeezed Al-Qaeda south from Mansour and west from Dora into the Saydiyah area, resulting in a major surge in violence in July, when veteran Iraq correspondent John Burns described Saydiyah as “one of the city’s most violent war zones,” as Sunni extremists and the Jaysh al-Mahdi clashed across the neighborhood.<sup>86</sup> On July 1<sup>st</sup>, a car bomb exploded in Saydiyah, just as another car bomb exploded simultaneously in Dora.<sup>87</sup> It is likely these attacks were coordinated by AQI. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, an IED attack wounded three civilians in the neighborhood, followed by a roadside bomb that killed two Iraqi police officers and wounded

four others.<sup>88</sup> On the 12<sup>th</sup> alone, 17 bodies were found in Saydiyah, 60% of all those found in capital.<sup>89</sup> According to a researcher at IraqSlogger.Com, eighty four unidentified corpses were found in Saydiyah between mid-June and mid-July.<sup>90</sup> On July 12<sup>th</sup>, Sunni groups struck back with a car bombing on a commercial street, killing two, wounding six, and damaging a number of shops.<sup>91</sup> A Sunni reporter for the New York Times, Khalid Hassan, was killed on the 13<sup>th</sup>, and it was a mark of the intensity of the violence that it was difficult to determine whether he had been killed by Jaysh al-Mahdi or by Sunni extremists.<sup>92</sup>

Allegations of Shia militia activity during this period picked up, as the New York Times reported that Shia militiamen were entering the area in police uniforms and then changing to conduct extrajudicial killings. The National Police Brigade in Saydiyah, the Wolf Brigade, apparently facilitated access to the area by Shia militias, including JAM.<sup>93</sup> Insofar as the Wolf Brigade was originally drawn from the Badr Organization, the military wing of SCIRI, it is interesting that they have apparently cooperated with JAM to facilitate sectarian cleansing here. The relations between these groups have been hostile elsewhere in the city.<sup>94</sup>

At least one battalion of the Wolf Brigade was replaced by an Iraqi Army unit in late summer, but it appears this rotation did not have the desired effect.<sup>95</sup> Adnan al-Dulaymi, the former head of the IAF, claimed in the end of July that attacks in Saydiyah against Sunnis were on the rise, driven by Shia militias with allies in the Iraqi security forces.<sup>96</sup> Although al-Dulaymi was clearly a motivated source, these claims were consistent with other reporting from this period. These targeted killings were matched by Katyusha rocket attacks against Shia areas, killing two, and an attempted SVBIED bombing at the end of the month, foiled only by a quick response from the Iraqi police.<sup>97</sup> Bodies continued to appear daily for the remainder of the month.<sup>98</sup>

The violence continued unabated in August. The number of bodies found in Saydiyah, according to public sources, dropped slightly from the high in July, but they continued to appear regularly.<sup>99</sup> On August 1<sup>st</sup>, an Iraqi police officer was killed by a sniper as he searched for dumped bodies in the western side of the neighbourhood.<sup>100</sup> A mortar attack, probably by Sunni groups, killed two civilians the same day.<sup>101</sup> Six Shia pilgrims travelling to Karbala along the Hillah road adjacent to Saydiyah were shot and killed on the 26<sup>th</sup>.<sup>102</sup>

Despite the establishment of a Combat Outpost (COP) by the 1-18<sup>th</sup> IN, Saydiyah remained extremely dangerous. Shia militias, working hand in glove with Iraqi Security Forces, were rapidly shifting the sectarian balance in their favor, establishing clear lines of demarcation between Sunni and Shia areas. Bodies appeared regularly on the streets and Sunni families were moving out rapidly; some to Zafraniyah across the river or north to Mosul, others to nearby Karrada, a Shiite area but notably less violent.<sup>103</sup> Shia militiamen were conducting illegal vehicle control checkpoints, dragging Sunnis out of their cars, and killing them. At one point in September, a real estate agent in Karrada estimated that he met with fifteen families a day, most of them Sunnis fleeing the intense sectarian violence in Saydiyah.<sup>104</sup> Some of these refugees had been displaced before, having fled sectarian death squads in Aamel, Bayaa, or Risalah for Saydiyah, only to be forced to move again.<sup>105</sup>

Sometime in July, US forces began recruiting local Sunnis for a Concerned Local Citizens movement in Saydiyah, which became a so-called "Awakening Battalion."<sup>106</sup> Nominally formed

to fight Al-Qaeda, the movement was also intended to protect the remaining Sunni residents of the area from Shia predation. This group was composed of between 200 and 250 local volunteers, and they apparently had some success in stopping sectarian actors in the security services, including the Wolf Brigade.<sup>107</sup> In late September, Shia militias, with the assistance of the Wolf Brigade, tried to evict twenty-five Sunni families from the neighborhood, only to be stopped by American forces that received a call from the Concerned Local Citizens.<sup>108</sup>



Photo 2: Andrew Passen, US DoS, talks with a member of the volunteer security group in Saydiyah – the “Saydiyah Guardians” on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007 (Photo: Maj. Kurt Luedeke)

Apparently the establishment of an Awakening group in a mixed area, especially a strategically important area, struck a nerve with Shia political groups. On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, “thousands” of Saydiyah residents staged a protest, demanding the dissolution of the Awakening Battalion.<sup>109</sup> While there is no direct evidence on this point, it is reasonable to assume that this demonstration was sponsored by the local representatives of one of the major Shia parties. Several days later, between 600 and 1000 residents demonstrated in favor of the Awakening Battalion, arguing that it had helped to secure the Sunni areas of the neighborhood.<sup>110</sup> Shia political parties pressed the issue; Shiite MP Ali al-Adib argued in early October that the Saydiyah Awakening was composed of Anbari tribesman, not locals, and that they are involved in the kidnapping of Shia citizens in the area.<sup>111</sup> Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s media advisor slammed the Saydiyah Awakening several days later, alleging that they have kidnapped, murdered, and blackmailed innocent civilians.<sup>112</sup>

## Conclusions

The establishment of an Awakening Movement in Saydiyah is encouraging. Similar tribal movements elsewhere have led to local reconciliation, even cross-sectarian reconciliation. Multi-National Force Iraq has promoted reconciliation in other neighborhoods in West Rashid, sponsoring a meeting of notables from Furat, Jihad, Aamel, and Bayaa. This meeting generated a non-violence pact that covered Furat and Jihad, but excluded Aamel and Bayaa. Saydiyah did not even participate.<sup>113</sup> Violence in Saydiyah has been so intense that reconciliation efforts there

have been handled independently – on October 6<sup>th</sup>, a reconciliation meeting was held in Saydiyah and Baghdad’s Shiite mayor was targeted for assassination after leaving the meeting.<sup>114</sup> US forces have worked hard to bring Sunni residents of Saydiyah into the local government, but it is unclear whether such steps really address the underlying dynamics driving the violence.<sup>115</sup>

In those areas in which Awakening or Concerned Local Citizens movements have been able to promote cross-sectarian reconciliation, they have established security within homogenous Sunni areas that were previously home to Al-Qaeda. By driving Al-Qaeda out of these areas, they reduced the threat to nearby Shia neighborhoods without simultaneously presenting a new threat to the Shia. This has been the case just south of Baghdad, where Concerned Local Citizens in Hawr Rajab and Arab Jabour have fought to clear the areas of Al-Qaeda, who had previously targeted the Shia residents of neighboring Abu Disheer. This was accompanied by the strengthening of tribal relations between the two areas. When Al-Qaeda struck back against the CLCs, Shia-dominated Abu Disheer, a stronghold for Jaysh al-Mahdi, welcomed the families of the CLCs with open arms.<sup>116</sup> This phenomenon was literally without precedent in Baghdad.

Unfortunately, it appears that development of an Awakening Movement in Saydiyah has not had a similar effect, perhaps because the populations have not fully separated and therefore the Awakening Battalion poses a potential threat to Shia civilians.<sup>117</sup> This may explain the extraordinary response to the Saydiyah Awakening by national Shia political figures, including some very close to the Prime Minister. Furthermore, it may be that the violence over Saydiyah is not driven exclusively by the sectarian mix of the area per se, but rather the operational significance of the area within the broader “Battle of Baghdad” between Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Sunni remnants, and Shia militias. Because Saydiyah sits astride several key lines of communication and movement, it is possible that both sides will continue to fight for control, even as underlying civilian population distribution changes.

In other “fault-line” neighborhoods in Baghdad, the successful cleansing of Sunni residents was accompanied by the intensification of competition between the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SCIRI/SIIC), the Sadrist Trend and its militia (Jaysh al-Mahdi) and criminal elements formerly associated with Jaysh al-Mahdi. This dynamic has been most notable in the west Baghdad neighborhood of Washash, where relations between the two groups have at times broken out into violence.<sup>118</sup> This dynamic has not yet manifested itself in Saydiyah; in fact, available evidence suggests that these groups are cooperating in the process of clearing Saydiyah of Sunnis. This suggests that as long as there is a Sunni pocket in Saydiyah, we will likely not witness the same sort of intra-sect Shia violence that we have witnessed elsewhere.

Critics of Operation Fardh al-Qanoon have repeatedly argued that US operations within the city have only displaced violence from one neighborhood to another, the so-called “Whack-a-Mole” problem. In a comprehensive retrospective in early September, “Assessing the Surge,” the New York Times reported that “residents say [Saydiyah] remained peaceful and tolerant until January or February when crackdowns in Sunni areas to the east and west led to an influx of hard-line Sunni insurgents.”<sup>119</sup> This assessment was clearly inaccurate. The violence in Saydiyah is not merely violence displaced from other neighborhoods; it reflects the underlying geographic significance of the area to militias on both sides of the sectarian conflict in Baghdad. The continued violence in Saydiyah, while perhaps the toughest challenge for US and Iraqi forces in

Baghdad, stands in contrast with the enormous improvements in security since the beginning of Operation Fardh al-Qanoon.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> For additional details on the conflict between SCIRI and JAM in Washash and Iskan, see Gaughen, Patrick. "Backgrounder #13; Baghdad Neighborhood Project; Washash and Iskan." Institute for the Study of War. October 2007.

<sup>95</sup> Garrels, Anne. "Dozens of Iraqi Army Men Arrested in Killings. National Public Radio. All Things Considered. September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>96</sup> Oppel Jr., Richard A. and Qais Mizher. "Soccer Victory Lifts Iraqis; Bombs Kill 50 in Baghdad." *The New York Times*. July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Pg. A8.

<sup>97</sup> Greenwell, Megan. "US, Iran to Continue Talks Despite Differences; American Envoy in Iraq Presses Insurgent Issue." *The Washington Post*. July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Pg. A8; Aswat al-Iraq News Service. "Police Kill Suicide Bomber in Car Bomb in Saydiyah." July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic.

<sup>98</sup> Aswat al-Iraq News Service. "21 Unidentified Bodies Found in Baghdad." July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic; "16 Unidentified Bodies Found in Baghdad." July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic; "17 Unidentified Bodies Found in Baghdad." July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic; "20 Unidentified Bodies Found in Baghdad." July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic.

<sup>99</sup> Aswat al-Iraq News Service. "13 Unidentified Bodies Found in Baghdad." August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic; "21 Unidentified Bodies Found in Baghdad." August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic; "15 Unidentified Bodies Found in Baghdad." August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic; "12 Unidentified Bodies Found in Baghdad." August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic; "10 Unidentified Bodies Found in Baghdad." August 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic; "11 Unidentified Bodies Found in Baghdad." August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic; "12 Unidentified Bodies Found in Baghdad." August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic.

<sup>100</sup> Aswat al-Iraq News Service. "Sniper Kills Police Officer in Saydiyah." August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic.

<sup>101</sup> Aswat al-Iraq News Service. "Four Dead and Wounded in IED Blast and Mortar Attacks in Baghdad." August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic.

<sup>102</sup> Aswat al-Iraq News Service. "Six Killed and Injured in Attack on Pilgrims in South Baghdad." August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic.

<sup>103</sup> Raghavan, Sudarsan. "No Relief From Fear; Despite US Buildup, Families Still Fleeing Baghdad Homes As Violence, Rivalries Loom Over Paralyzed Iraq Government." *The Washington Post*. September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Pg. A1.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Tyson, Ann Scott. "US Widens Push to Use Armed Iraqi Residents; Irregulars to Patrol Own Neighborhood." *The Washington Post*. July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Pg. A1.

<sup>107</sup> Garrels, Anne. "Dozens of Iraqi Army Men Arrested in Killings. National Public Radio. All Things Considered. September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Aswat al-Iraq News Service. "Protesters in Saydiyah in Baghdad Demand Dissolution of the Awakening Battalion." September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007.

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<sup>110</sup> Multi-National Division – Baghdad. “Rashid Citizens March in Support of Security Volunteers.” September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Release # 20070927-11.

<sup>111</sup> Jerges, Sabah. “Iraqi Leaders Turn Against US-Created Militias.” Agence France Presse. October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>112</sup> Agence France Presse. “Baghdad Governor Unharmed as Convoy Comes Under Fire.” October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>113</sup> Partlow, Joshua. “Local Foes Commit to Peace in Baghdad; US Helped Negotiate Agreement Between Shiite, Sunni Leaders.” *The Washington Post*. October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Pg. A15.

<sup>114</sup> Agence France Presse. “Baghdad Governor Unharmed as Convoy Comes Under Fire.” October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>115</sup> Civilian Defense Experts Conference Call with Col. Ricky Gibbs, Commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> IBCT, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division (Responsible for the Rashid Security District, Baghdad). November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007.

<sup>116</sup> Glanz, James and Alissa Rubin. “Future Look of Iraq Complicated by Internal Migration.” *The New York Times*. September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007; Ali, Husayn. “New Experiment for US Forces in Confronting Al-Qaeda; Peacekeeping Meetings Between Sunni and Shia Neighborhoods.” *Al-Hayat*. September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic; Radio Sawa. “Tawafuq Front Emphasizes its Thanks to the People of Abu Disheer for Taking in the Sunni Families that were Forced out of Hawr Rajab by Al-Qaeda.” September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Translation from Arabic.

<sup>117</sup> For early speculation on the potential for conflict between the Awakening Battalion and Shia security forces in Saydiyah, see the comments of 1-18<sup>th</sup> IN Commander Lt. Col. George A. Glaze in Tyson, Ann Scott. “US Widens Push to Use Armed Iraqi Residents; Irregulars to Patrol Own Neighborhood.” *The Washington Post*. July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007. Pg. A1.

<sup>118</sup> Gaughen, Patrick. “Backgrounder #13; Baghdad Neighborhood Project; Washash and Iskan.” Institute for the Study of War. October 2007.

<sup>119</sup> Farrell, Stephen. “Assessing the ‘Surge:’ A Survey of Baghdad Neighborhoods – Saydia.” *The New York Times*. September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>120</sup> For evidence of the dramatic shift in the security conditions in West Baghdad, see Remarks by Colonel J.B. Burton, Commander, 2<sup>nd</sup> BCT, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, Baghdad to the Pentagon Press Corps via Satellite Link. October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007.