Iraq’s Evolving Insurgency

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Please note that this is part of a rough working draft of a CSIS book that will be published by Praeger in the fall of 2005. It is being circulated to solicit comments and additional data, and will be steadily revised and updated over time.

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I. Introduction

The fall of Saddam Hussein would have exposed deep fracture lines in an impoverished Iraq, almost regardless of how it occurred. One key legacy of the British “divide and rule” tactics that formed the state was minority Arab Sunni rule over a state that had come to have an Arab Shi’ite majority of some 60% of the population, and Kurdish, Turcoman, and other minorities that made up another 20%. Iraq’s violent politics had further compounded these problems by bring a leader to power who never tolerated political dissent, and began the bloody purging and suppression of all organized political resistance when he took full power in 1979.

Saddam Hussein’s “Powder keg”

Iraq came to be ruled by a small, largely rural Sunni Arab elite that used the Ba’ath Party and the state to maintain itself in power. Its economy remained relatively undeveloped, agriculture was never modernized or made productive, inefficient state-industries undercut development as did a rigid state-controlled financial sector and mix of barriers to trade and outside investment. Worse, the economy effectively became a command kleptocracy where Saddam Hussein used the nation’s wealth to secure power and support his ambitions, and his ruling elite exploited their positions for their own personal benefit.

The nation was impoverished and driven into massive debt in the early 1980s by Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Iran and effort to seize its oil-rich territory in the southwest of Iran. Eight years of war crippled the development of the nation’s infrastructure, education, and efforts to properly develop its oil wealth. In 1990, Saddam Hussein’s efforts to solve his economic problems by invading Kuwait led to a massive military defeat, a new massive burden of reparations for the war, and then to more than a decade of UN and international sanctions further crippling every aspect of the nations development.

The politics of the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted from 1980-1988, were essentially the politics of ruthless repression. Political dissent of any kind became even more dangerous. Kurdish efforts to exploit the war and achieve some degree of autonomy or independence were met with murder, the use of poison gas, and “ethnic cleansing.” Hundreds of thousands of Arab Shi’ites were driven out of the country, and many formed an armed opposition with Iranian support. While most of the remaining Arab Shi’ites remained loyal, their secular and religious leaders were kept under constant surveillance and sometimes imprisoned and killed. The marsh areas along the Iranian border were a key center of the fighting between Iran and Iraq, but still became a sanctuary for deserters and Shi’ite opposition elements.

Iraq’s defeat in the Gulf War in 1991, following its invasion of Kuwait, in 1990 did more than further impoverish the country. Uprisings in the Shi’ite areas in the south were suppressed with all of the regime’s customary violence and then followed by a mix of repression and low-level civil war that lasted until Saddam was driven from power. While this conflict received only limited attention from the outside world, it often involved significant local clashes between Iraqi government forces and those of Shi’ite opposition movements based in, and back by, Iran. The post-Iraq War discovery of mass graves of Shi’ite fighters and civilians are a grim testimony to how serious this “quiet” fighting could be. This further divided Shi’ite and Sunni, but also left a lasting legacy of anger

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against the US and Britain for not supporting the uprisings against Saddam and protecting the Shi'ites.

A similar set of uprisings in the Kurdish north created a flood of refugees into Turkey following the defeat of the Kurds, and force the US to use airpower to protect the Kurds, and create an international aid effort to support them. This gave the Kurds a level of protection the Arab Shi’ites lacked, but left them in a kind of limbo where they had de facto autonomy, but lived with nearly one-third of Iraq’s military forces deployed on the edge of their “security zone.” Divisions between the two main Kurdish factions led to low-level fighting and even to one faction supporting an attack by Saddam on the other, The end result, however, was to further increase the Kurdish desire for independence, while keeping many dispossessed Kurds out of their original homes in areas like Kirkuk and Mosul.¹

From 1991 until the Coalition invasion in 2003, Saddam Hussein created further political problems by encouraging tribal divisions and favoring those tribes and clans that supported his rule and regime. He exploited religion by increasing publicly embracing Islam, and privately favoring Sunni factions and religious leaders that supported him while penalizing Shi’ite religious leaders and centers he saw as a threat. At the same time, funds were poured into Sunni areas in the West, government and security jobs were given to Sunnis, and scarce resources went into military industries that heavily favored Sunni employment. The result was to distort the economy and urban structure of Iraq in ways that favored Sunni towns and cities in areas like Tikrit, Samarra, Fallujah, Ramadi and other largely loyalist Sunni towns.

Saddam Hussein’s regime manipulated rationing, control of imports, state funds, and the UN oil for food program for his own benefit, further undercutting economic development. The funding of education, medical services, and infrastructure was used as a political weapon in an effort to exploit the suffering of the Iraqi people to break out of UN sanctions. It also was used selectively to favor key power centers like Baghdad, and major potential centers of urban unrest, while leaving other areas with limited or no essential services like water, power, and sewers. Rather than seek to restore and develop the nation’s oil and gas wealth, existing fields were overproduced, funds were redirected for the use of the regime, and exports were manipulated to obtain kickbacks and get political support from nations like Syria. These efforts were cloaked by a propaganda campaign blaming the US, UN, outside powers, and UN sanctions for all of the mistakes of the regime.

By comparison, Tito’s regime in the former Yugoslavia was both progressive and benign. At the time the US-led coalition invaded Iraq was divided by far greater pressures, and had far less capability for political leadership. It was a time bomb waiting to explode, and fueled by both its original heritage of ethnic and sectarian division and over twenty years of direct misrule by Saddam Hussein.

**America’s Strategic Mistakes**

The United States made major strategic mistakes in preparing to deal with this situation. It did demonstrate that it could fight the war it planned to fight: a conventional regional
war with remarkable efficiency, at low cost, and very quickly. The problem was that the US chose a strategy whose post-conflict goals were unrealistic and impossible to achieve, and only planned for the war it wanted to fight and not for the “peace” that was certain to follow.

Its most obvious mistake was its basic rationale for going to war: A threat from based on intelligence estimates of Iraqi efforts to create weapons of mass destruction that the US later found did not exist. At a grand strategic level, however, the Bush Administration and the senior leadership of the US military made the far more serious mistake of wishing away virtually all of the real world problems in stability operations and nation building, and making massive policy and military errors that created much of the climate of insurgency in Iraq.

The full chronology of what happened is still far from clear, and its far easier to accuse given US leaders that it is to understand what really happened or assign responsibility with any credibility. It is clear, however, that many of the key decisions involved were made in ways that bypassed the interagency process within the US government, ignored the warnings of US area and intelligence experts, ignored prior military war and stability planning by the US Central Command (USCENTCOM), and ignored the warnings of policy makers and experts in other key coalition states like the United Kingdom.

At the same time, it is also clear that too much credence was given to ideologues and true believers in the ease with which such a war could be fought and in effective nation building. These included leading neoconservatives in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Office of the Vice President, and some officials in the National Security Council, as well as in several highly politicized “think tanks.” The same was true of various Iraqi exile groups that grossly exaggerated the level of Iraqi popular support for a “liberating” invasion and the ease with which Saddam Hussein’s regime could be replaced, and underestimated both the scale of Iraqi’s ethnic and sectarian divisions and economic problems.

These problems were compounded by leadership within the Office of the Secretary of Defense that put intense pressure on the US military to plan for the lowest possible level of US military deployment, and then for delays in that deployment because of the political need to avoid appearing precipitous to the UN. At the same time, the leadership of the US military actively resisted planning for, and involvement in, large-scale and enduring stability and nation building activity, and failed to plan and deploy for the risk of a significant insurgency.

The fact the US failed to plan for meaningful stability operations and nation building was the most serious strategic mistake that led to the insurgency and crime that are the focus of this analysis, but these mistakes were compounded by other problems:

- A failure to accurately assess the nature of Iraqi nationalism, the true level of culture differences, and the scale of Iraqi problems. This failure of strategic assessment included the failure to see the scale of Iraq’s ethnic and sectarian differences, its economic weaknesses and problems, the difficulty of modernizing an infrastructure sized more to 16-17 million than the current population of 25-26 million, unrealistic estimates of “oil wealth,” the probable hardcore support for the former regime in Sunni areas, secular versus theocratic tensions, the impact of tribalism, the impact of demographics in a society so young and with so many employment problems, and a
host of other real-world problems that became US and Coalition problems the moment Coalition forces crossed the border.

- The failure to plan and execute effective broader information operations before, during and after the invasion to win the “hearts and minds of Iraqis,” persuade them that the Coalition came a liberators that would leave rather than occupiers who would stay and exploit Iraq, and that the Coalition would provide aid and support to an truly independent government and state. A secondary failure to anticipate and defuse the flood of conspiracy theories certain to follow Coalition military action.

- The failure to create and provide anything approaching the kind and number of civilian elements in the US government, necessary for nation building and stability operations. These problems were particular serious in the State Department and other civilian agencies, and much of the civilian capability the US did have was not recruited or willing to take risks in the field.

- The failure to plan and execute efforts to maintain the process of governance at the local, provincial, and central level; to anticipate the risk the structure of government would collapse and the risk of looting, and to create a plan for restructuring the military, police, and security forces -- all of which needed to be proclaimed and publicized before, during, and immediately after the initial invasion to win the support of Iraqi officials and officers who were not linked to active support of Saddam Hussein and past abuses, and to preserving the core of governance that could lead to the rapid creation of both a legitimate government and security.

- Broad failures by what a leading officer involved in planning operations in Iraq by “quiescent US military and Intelligence community leaders who observed the distortion/cherry picking of data that lead to erroneous conclusions and poor planning,” but failed to press their case or force the issue.

- Over-reliance on exile groups with limited credibility and influence in Iraq.

- Failure to anticipate and prepare for Iraqi expectations after the collapse of Saddam’s regime, and for the fact that many Iraqis would oppose the invasion and see any sustained US and coalition presence as a hostile occupation.

- Miscalculations about UN support, NATO & coalitions, and transit through Turkey.

- Failing to the provided the personnel and skills necessary to secure Iraqi rear areas and urban areas as the Coalition advanced, and to prevent the massive looting of government offices and facilities, military bases, and arms depots as the during and after the fighting: A process that effectively destroyed the existing structure of governance and security without making any initial effort to replace it. It was not until May 2003, roughly two months after the fall of Baghdad, that a 4,000 man US military police effort was authorized for deployment to Baghdad, and it then took time to arrive. No serious effort to rebuild Iraqi police forces took place until June 2004, in spite of mass desertions right after the fighting and the turmoil caused by disbanding the Ba’ath Party and military and security forces.¹

- The creation of a small cadre of civilians and military in the Office of Reconstruction and Assistance (ORHA), many initially recruited for only three-month tours. ORHA planned to operate in an Iraq where all ministries and functions of government remained intact. It was charged with a largely perfuractory nation building task, given negligible human and financial resources, not allowed meaningful liaison with regional powers, and not integrated with the military command. Effective civil military coordination never took place between ORHA and the US command during or after the war, and its mission was given so little initial priority that it was did not even come to Baghdad until April 21, 2003 -- twelve days after US forces – on the grounds it did not have suitable security.

- Failing not only to anticipate the threat of insurgency and outside extremist infiltration, in spite of significant intelligence warning, but to deploy elements of US forces capable of dealing with
counterinsurgency, civil-military operations, and nation building as US forces advanced and in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the regime. Creating regional commands based on administrative convenience, rather than need, and leaving most of the initial tasks of stability operations and nation building up to improvisation by individual local commanders who had minimal or no expert civilian support.

- Replacing ORHA after the fall of Saddam Hussein with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), and suddenly improvising a vast nation building and stability effort, recruiting and funding such an operation with little time for planning, and then attempting to carry out the resulting mission along heavily ideological lines that attempt to impose American methods and values on Iraq.

- Placing the CPA and US commands in separate areas, creating large, secure zones that isolated the US effort from Iraqis, and carrying out only limited coordination with other Coalition allies.

- Staffing the CPA largely with people recruited for short tours, and often chosen on the basis of political and ideological vetting, rather than experience and competence.

- This failure was compounded by a lack of language and area skills and training on the part of most US military forces, and intelligence capabilities designed to provide the human intelligence (HUMINT), technical collection, analytic capabilities, and “fusion” centers necessary for stability, counterterrorist and counterinsurgency operations.

- A failure to honestly assess the nature and size of the Iraqi insurgency as it grew and became steadily more dangerous.

- Planning for premature US military withdrawals from Iraq before the situation was clear or secure, with major reductions initially planned to begin some three months after the fall of Saddam’s regime, rather than planning, training, and equipping for a sustained period of stability operations.

- A failure to react to the wartime collapse of Iraqi military, security, and police forces and focus immediately on creating effective Iraqi forces – a failure that placed a major and avoidable burden on US and other coalition forces and compounded the Iraqi feeling that Iraqi had been occupied by hostile forces.

- Planning for several years of occupation, once the CPA was created, and for a situation where a US-led coalition could improves it own values and judgments about the Iraqi people, politics, economy, and social structure for a period of some three years – rather than expedite the transfer of sovereignty back to Iraq as quickly as possible. The record is mixed, but the CPA only seems to have decided to expedite the transfer of sovereignty in October 2003, after the insurgency had already become serious, and its choice of June 2004 for doing so was largely arbitrary. Even then, it failed to make its plans sufficiently convincing to much of the Iraqi people.

It is perfectly true that foresight is far more difficult than “20-20 hindsight.” Many, if not most, of these problems were, however, brought to the attention of the President, National Security Council, State Department, Department of Defense, and intelligence community in the summer and fall of 2002, and in interagency forums. No one accurately prophesized all of the future, but many inside and outside government warned what it might be. The problem was not that the system did not work in providing many key elements of an accurate assessment, it was that the most senior political and military decision makers ignored what they felt was negative advice out of a combination of sincere belief, ideological conviction, and political and bureaucratic convenience.

Over time, these failures also pushed the US to the limit of the ground forces it could easily deploy. They help cause the death of well over 1,500 Americans and other coalition forces after Saddam had fallen and the war had ended, and wounded well over
10,000. The also helped to kill and wound tens of thousands of Iraqis. It is also important to note that they laid the ground work for many of the problems in creating effective Iraqi forces, and that responsibility cannot be allocated to the US military and civilians in the field. No one can claim “20-20 hindsight” or that all of these failures were avoidable. The fact remains, however, that every failure listed was ultimately a failure at the highest levels of US policy and the direct responsibility of the President, Vice President, Secretary of Defense, National Security Advisor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and service chiefs.

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- The failure to plan and execute effective broader information operations before, during and after the invasion to win the “hearts and minds of Iraqis,” persuade them that the Coalition came a liberators that would leave rather than occupiers who would stay and exploit Iraq, and that the Coalition would provide aid and support to an truly independent government and state. A secondary failure to anticipate and defuse the flood of conspiracy theories certain to follow Coalition military action.

- The failure to plan and execute efforts to maintain the process of governance at the local, provincial, and central level; to anticipate the risk the structure of government would collapse and the risk of looting, and to create a plan for restructuring the military, police, and security forces -- all of which needed to be proclaimed and publicized before, during, and immediately after the initial invasion to win the support of Iraqi officials and officers who were not linked to active support of Saddam Hussein and past abuses, and to preserving the core of governance that could lead to the rapid creation of both a legitimate government and security.

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- The creation of a small cadre of civilians and military in the Office of Reconstruction and Assistance, many initially recruited for only three month tours, that was charged with a largely perfunctory nation building task, given negligible human and financial resources, not allowed meaningful liaison with regional powers, and not integrated with the military command.

- Replacing ORHA after the fall of Saddam Hussein with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), and then suddenly improvising a vast nation building and stability effort, recruiting and funding such an operation with little time for planning, and then attempting to carry out the
resulting mission along heavily ideological lines that attempt to impose American methods and values on Iraq.

- Placing the CPA and US commands in separate areas, creating large, secure zones that isolated the US effort from Iraqis, and carrying out only limited coordination with other Coalition allies.
- Staffing the CPA largely with people recruited for short tours, and often chosen on the basis of political and ideological vetting, rather than experience and competence.
- A failure not only to anticipate the threat of insurgency and outside extremist infiltration, in spite of significant intelligence warning, but to deploy elements of US forces capable of dealing with counterinsurgency, civil-military operations, and nation building as US forces advanced and in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the regime. Creating regional commands based on administrative convenience, rather than need, and leaving most of the initial tasks of stability operations and nation building up to improvisation by individual local commanders who had minimal or no expert civilian support.
- This failure was compounded by a lack of language and area skills and training on the part of most US military forces, and intelligence capabilities designed to provide the human intelligence (HUMINT), technical collection, analytic capabilities, and “fusion” centers necessary for stability, counterterrorist and counterinsurgency operations.
- Planning for premature US military withdrawals from Iraq before the situation was clear or secure, with major reductions initially planned to begin some three months after the fall of Saddam’s regime, rather than planning, training, and equipping for a sustained period of stability operations.
- Failure to anticipate and prepare for Iraqi expectations after the collapse of Saddam’s regime, and for the fact that many Iraqis would oppose the invasion and see any sustained US and coalition presence as a hostile occupation.
- A failure to react to the wartime collapse of Iraqi military, security, and police forces and focus immediately on creating effective Iraqi forces – a failure that placed a major and avoidable burden on US and other coalition forces and compounded the Iraqi feeling that Iraqis had been occupied by hostile forces.
- A failure to honestly assess the nature and size of the Iraqi insurgency as it grew and became steadily more dangerous.
- The failure to provide, or even have available, anything like the civilian elements in the US government, necessary for nation building and stability operations. These problems were particular serious in the State Department and other civilian agencies, and much of the civilian capability the US did have was not recruited or willing to take risks in the field.
- Then creating an occupation authority that planned for several years of occupation, as if a US-led coalition could improves it own values and judgments about the Iraqi people, politics, economy, and social structure for a period of some three years – rather than expedite the transfer of sovereignty back to Iraq as quickly as possible. The record is mixed, but the CPA only seems to have decided to expedite the transfer of sovereignty in October 2003, after the insurgency had already become serious, and its choice of June 2004 for doing so was largely arbitrary. Even then, it failed to make its plans sufficiently convincing to much of the Iraqi people.

It is perfectly true that foresight is far harder than “20-20 hindsight.” Many, if not most, of these problems were, however, brought to the attention of the President, National Security Council, State Department, Department of Defense, and intelligence community in the summer and fall of 2002, and in Interagency forums. No one accurately prophesized all of the future, but many inside and outside government warned what it might be. The problem was not that the system did not work in providing many key
elements of an accurate assessment, it was that the most senior political and military
decision makers ignored what they felt was negative advice out of a combination of
sincere belief, ideological conviction, and political and bureaucratic convenience.
II. The Growth and Character of the Insurgent Threat

The end result of these complex forces is that the US-led Coalition initially tried to restrict the development of Iraqi armed forces to a token force geared to defend Iraq’s borders against external aggression. It did not try to create police forces with the capability to deal with serious insurgency and security challenges. As time went on, it ignored or did not give proper priority to the warnings from US military advisory teams about the problems in organizing and training Iraqi forces, and in giving them the necessary equipment and facilities.

The US failed to treat the Iraqis as partners in the counterinsurgency effort for nearly a year after the fall of Saddam Hussein, and did not attempt to seriously train and equip Iraqi forces for proactive security and counterinsurgency missions until April 2004 – nearly a year after the fall of Saddam Hussein and two-thirds of a year after a major insurgency problem began to emerge.3

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

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

The US failed to establish the proper political conditions to reduce Iraqi popular resentment of the Coalition forces and create the political climate that would ease the task of replacing them with effective Iraqi forces. It did not make it clear that the US and Britain had no economic ambitions in Iraq and would not establish permanent bases, or keep Iraqi forces weak to ensure their control. In fact, Lt. Gen. Jay Garner, the first American Administrator in Iraq, suggested in early 2004 that US forces might remain in Iraq for “the next few decades,” adding that securing basing rights for the US should be a top priority.4

Moreover, the US did not react to the immediate threat that crime and looting presented throughout Iraq almost immediately after the war, and which made personal security the number one concern of the Iraqi people. It acted as if it had years to rebuild Iraq using its own plans, rather than months to shape the climate in which Iraqis could do it.

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

As a result, the US failed to come to grips with the Iraqi insurgency during the first year of US occupation in virtually every important dimension. It was slow to react to the
growth of the insurgency in Iraq, to admit it was largely domestic in character, and to admit it had significant popular support. The US military and intelligence effort in the field did begin to understand that terrorist and insurgent threat was serious and growing by the fall of 2003.

The US-led Multinational Command announced a four-phase plan in October 2003 to transfer security missions to Iraqi forces. The four phases of this plan were to:\(^5\)

- Create mutual support, where the multinational force establishes the conditions for transferring security responsibilities to Iraqi forces;
- Transition to local control, where Iraqi forces in a local area assume responsibility for security;
- Transition to regional control, where Iraqi forces are responsible for larger regions; and,
- Transition to strategic overwatch, where Iraqi forces on a national level become capable of maintaining a secure environment against internal and external threats.

For all of 2003, and most of the first half of 2004, however, senior US officials and officers kept referring to the attackers as terrorists, kept issuing estimates that they could not number more than 5,000, and claimed they were a mixture of outside elements and diehard former regime loyalists (FRLs) that had little popular support. The US largely ignored the previous warnings provided by Iraqi opinion polls, and claimed that its political, economic, and security efforts were either successful or would soon become so. In short, the US failed to honestly assess the facts on the ground in a manner reminiscent of Vietnam.

These problems were compounded in the case of the Iraqi police, which initially were seen as a minor aspect of the security mission, and largely in terms of training a police force with a respect for the rule of law and human rights. The Iraqi police largely deserted in April 2003, during the fighting. Many voluntarily returned to duty during May 2003, but the CPA made no real effort to vet them or review their performance, and the CPA’s Director of Police was tasked with providing rush training to get as many on the streets as quickly as possible with no real vetting.\(^6\) According to the GAO, it was not until May 2004, that a national security presidential security directive was issued gave CENTCOM the responsibility of directing all US government efforts to organize, train, and equip Iraqi security force, which led to the Multi-National Security Training Command-Iraq, operating under MNF-I, being given a clear lead on all Coalition efforts.\(^7\)

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

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

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

**Evolving Threat Tactics and Pressure on Government Forces**

During the period from roughly August 2003 to the present, Iraqi insurgents emerged as
effective forces with significant popular support in Arab Sunni areas, and developed a
steadily more sophisticated mix of tactics. In the process, as Chapter XII and Appendix A
describe in detail, a native and foreign Islamist extremist threat also developed which
deliberately tried to divided Iraq’s Sunni Arabs from its Arab Shi’ites, Kurds, and other
Iraqi minorities. By the fall of the 2004, this had some elements of a low-level civil war,
and by June 2005, it threaten to escalate into a far more serious civil conflict.

There are no reliable unclassified counts of insurgent attacks and incidents, or of the
casualties on both sides – an issue also discussed in depth in Chapter XII. The US only
publicly reported on its own casualties, and the Iraqi government stopped making its own
estimates public. Estimates of insurgent casualties are also tenuous at best.

The NGO Coordinating Committee on Iraq did, however, make useful estimates of the
patterns of attack between September 2003 and October 2004. These patterns seem
broadly correct and both illustrate key patterns in the fighting, and the need for competent
and combat-capable Iraqi government military, security, and police forces:

- From September 2003 through October 2004, there was a rough balance between the three
  primary methods of attack, namely improvised explosive device (IED), direct fire, and indirect
  fire, with a consistent but much smaller number of vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices
  (VBIED). Numbers of attacks varied significantly by month. There was a slow decline from well
  over 400 attacks each by improvised explosive device (IED), direct fire weapons, and indirect fire
  weapons to around 300. There was also, however, a slow increase in attacks using VBIEDs.

- Attack distribution also varies, with a steadily rising number of attacks in the area of Mosul in the
  north. Baghdad, however, has been the scene of roughly twice as many attacks and incidents as the
  other governorates, with 300-400 a month on average. Al Anbar, Salah-al-din, and Ninewa have
  had roughly one-third to one half as many. Babil and Diyala average around 100 per month,
  Lower levels of attack have taken place in Tamin and Basra.

- Since the Shi’ite fighting with Sadr has ceased, the peak of insurgent activity in the south has
  declined. There have been relatively low levels of attack in the Karbala, Thi-Qar, Wassit, Missan,
  Muthanna, Najaf, and Qaddisyaa governorates.

- Erbil, Dahok, and Sulaymanniyah are northern governorates administrated by the two Kurdish
  Regional Governments (KRGs) and have long been relatively peaceful.

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• Attacks fit a broad pattern during the day, although 60% of the attacks reported are unspecified. Of those that do have a specific time reported, 10% are in the morning, 11% are in the afternoon, and 19% are at night.

A rough NGO Coordinating Committee on Iraq estimate of targets and casualties for the from September 2004 to October 2004 is shown in Figure 2 below, and helps illustrate the continuing diversity of the attacks and that far more than American casualties were involved from the start of the conflict:

**Figure 2**

**Illustrative Patterns in Targeting and Casualties (September 2003–October 2004)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Number of Attacks/Incidents</th>
<th>Killed</th>
<th>Wounded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coalition Forces</td>
<td>3227</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>1002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition Air Convoy</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA/US Officials/Green Zone</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diplomatic Mission</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractor</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilian</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>3467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal &amp; Suspect</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICDC</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurds Army</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>1012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IO</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreter</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Property</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

The insurgent and terrorist threat evolved rapidly after June 2003, and has continued to evolve ever since. Almost from the beginning, Iraqi insurgents, terrorists, and extremists exploited the fact that the media tends to focus on dramatic incidents with high casualties, gives these high publicity, and spends little time analyzing the patterns in insurgency. The fact there were different groups of insurgents and terrorists also led the patterns of insurgent activity to evolve in ways that included a steadily wider range of tactics that each group of actors exploited whenever it found them to be convenient, and which all groups of attackers could refine with time.

Insurgents came to exploit the following methods and tactics relating to political, psychological, and information warfare:

• **Attack the structures of governance and security by ideological, political, and violent means:**
  Use ideological and political means to attack the legitimacy of the government and nation building process. Intimidate and subvert the military and security forces. Intimidate and attack government officials and institutions at the national, regional, and local levels. Strike at
infrastructure, utilities, and services in ways that appear to show the government cannot provide essential economic services or personal security.

- **Create alliances of convenience and informal networks with other groups to attack the US, various elements of the Iraqi Interim Government and elected government, and efforts at nation building:** The informal common fronts operate on the principal that the “enemy of my enemy” is my temporary friend. At the same time, movements “franchise” to create individual cells and independent units, creating diverse mixes of enemies that are difficult to attack.

- **Attack Iraqi elites and ethnic and sectarian fault lines; use them to prevent nation building and governance by provoking civil war:** As the US and Coalition phased down its role, and a sovereign Iraqi government increased its influence and power, insurgents increasingly shifted their focus of their attacks to Iraqi government targets, as well as Iraqi military, police, and security forces. At the same time, they stepped up attacks designed to prevent Sunnis from participating in the new government, and to cause growing tension and conflict between Sunni and Shi’ite, and Arab and Kurd.

There are no clear lines of division between insurgents, but the Iraqi Sunni insurgents focused heavily on attacking the emerging Iraqi process of governance, while Islamist extremist movements used suicide bombing attacks and other bombings to cause large casualties among the Shi’ite and Kurdish populations – sometimes linking them to religious festivals or holidays and sometimes to attacks on Iraqi forces or their recruiting efforts. They also focused their attacks to strike at leading Shi’ite and Kurdish political officials, commanders, and clergy.

Targeting other groups like Shi’ites and Kurds, using car bombings for mass killings, hitting shrines and festivals forces the dispersal of security forces, makes the areas involved seem insecure, undermines efforts at governance, and offers the possibility of using civil war as a way to defeat the Coalition and Iraqi Interim Government’s efforts at nation building.

For example, a step up in Sunni attacks on Shi’ite targets after the January 30, 2005 election, led some Shi’ites to talk about “Sunni ethnic cleansing. This effect was compounded by bloody suicide bombings, many of which had some form of government target, but killed large numbers of Shi’ite civilians. 8 These attacks included cases where 58 corpses were dumped in the Tigris, and 19 largely Shi’ite National Guardsmen were found dead in a soccer stadium in Haditha. They also included a bombing in Hilla on March 1, 2005 that killed 136 – mostly Shi’ite police and army recruits. 9

Similar attacks were carried on the Kurds. While the Kurds maintained notably better security over their areas in the north than existed in the rest of the country, two suicide bombers still penetrated into a political gathering in Erbil on February 1, 2004, and killed at least 105. On March 10, 2005, a suicide bomber killed 53 Kurds in Kirkuk. On May 3, 2005, another suicide bomber – this time openly identified with the Sunni extremist group Ansar al-Sunna blew himself up outside a recruiting station in Erbil, killing 60 and wounding at least 150 others. 10 At the same time, other attacks systematically targeted Kurdish leaders and Kurdish elements in Iraqi forces.

By May 2005, this began to provoke Shi’ite reprisals, in spite of efforts to avoid this by Shi’ite leaders, contributing further to the problems in establishing a legitimate government and national forces. Sunni bodies began to be discovered in unmarked graves, as well as Shi’ite ones, and killings stuck at both Sunni and Shi’ite clergy. 11

- **Link asymmetric warfare to crime and looting; exploit poverty and economic desperation:** Use criminals to support attacks on infrastructure and nation building activity, raise funds, and undermine security. Exploit unemployment to strengthen dedicated insurgent and terrorist cells. Blur the lines between threat forces, criminal elements, and part-time forces.

- **Attack petroleum and oil facilities, electric power, water, and other critical infrastructure:** Attacks on power and water facilities both offset the impact of US aid and cause Iraqi anger against the government. Al Qa'ida and Ba'athist groups found oil facilities and pipelines to be
particularly attractive targets because they deny the government revenue, affect both power and
Iraqi ability to obtain fuel, get extensive media and foreign business attention, and prevent
investment in one of Iraq's most attractive assets.\textsuperscript{12}

The impact of this activity is regularly reflected in the histograms in the Department of Defense,
\textit{Iraq Weekly Status Report}. For example, the April 27, 2005 edition shows that electric power
generation remained far below the US goal, and usually below the prewar level, from January 1,
2004 to April 21, 2005. Crude oil production averaged around 2.1 MMBD from February through
April 2005, versus a goal of 2.5 MMBD, and a prewar peak of 2.5 MMBD in March 2003.
Exports averaged only about 1.3-1.4 MMBD from January to April 2005, largely because of
pipeline and facility sabotage --- although record oil prices raise Iraqi export revenues from $5.1
billion in 2003 to $17.0 billion in 2004, and $6.2 billion in the first four months of 2005.

The continuing threat to electric facilities forced many Iraqis to rely on home or neighborhood
generators even in the areas with power, rolling power cuts in most areas, and major shortages in
others. It was also a reason that the US was only able to spend $1.0 billion of $4.4 billion in
programmed aid money on the electricity sector by the end of April 2005, and $261 million out of
$1.7 billion on the petroleum sector.\textsuperscript{13}

Sabotage and theft helped cripple many of the country's 229 operating water plants by the spring
of 2005, and some 90% of the municipalities in the country lacked working sewage processing
plants, contaminating the main sources of water as they drained into the Tigris and Euphrates. The
Iraqi Municipalities and Public Works Ministry calculated in April 2005 that it provide water to
some 17 million Iraqis (70% of the population), and supplies were so bad that some 30% of the 17
million did not have access to drinkable water. Many projects had to be cancelled and $1 billion of
the $3.65 billion allocated in US aid had to be diverted to security needs. There were a total of 15
water project starts in 2004, but none were planned for 2005.\textsuperscript{14}

- \textbf{Strike at US and other aid projects to undermine Iraqi acceptance of the MNC-I and the
  perceived legitimacy of the Iraqi government.} It is unclear just how systematic such attacks
  have been, but a report by the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction indicates that at
  least 276 civilians working on US aid projects had been killed by March 31, 2005, and at least
  2,582 had been wounded. The number of contractors killed also rose by 19\% (to 44) in the first
  quarter of 2005. The cost impact is also high. The report indicates that the security costs of
  USAID funded aid projects were only 4.2\% of the total cost from March 2003 to February 2004,
  but rose to 22\% during the final nine months of 2004.\textsuperscript{15} Other reports indicated that contractors
  had filed 2,919 death and injury claims for US and foreign workers between the beginning of the
  war on March 19, 2003, and May 10, 2003, with 303 killed.\textsuperscript{16}

- \textbf{Exploit Arab satellite television as well as traditional media:} Islamist movements and other
  insurgents learned how to capture maximum exposure in regional media, use the Internet, and
  above all, exploit the new Arab satellite news channels. Insurgents and terrorist also play close
  attention to media reactions, and tailor their attacks to high profile targets that make such attacks
  “weapons of mass media.”

- \textbf{Maintain a strategy of constant attrition, but strike hard according to a calendar of turning
  points and/or at targets with high political, social, and economic impact:} Insurgents and
  Muslims learned the importance of a constant low-level body count and the creation of a steady
  climate of violence. This forces the US into a constant, large-scale security effort; makes it
difficult for Iraqi forces to take hold; puts constant pressure on US and Iraqi forces to disperse;
and ensures constant media coverage.

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

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So was an attack on Abu Ghraib prison, the site of many media reports on the abuse of Iraqi prisoners on April 2, 2005. The prison still held some 3,446 detainees and the insurgent attack was conducted by 40-60 insurgents, lasted nearly 40 minutes, and was large and well organized enough to wound 20 US troops.\textsuperscript{17}

- **Focus on Large US Installations**: As the insurgents became better organized, they moved from hit and run firings as US installations to much larger and better organized raids that could capture major media attention even when these largely failed. The major Zarqawi organization raid on Abu Ghraib prison in early April 2005 was an example of such a raid.\textsuperscript{18} As the chronology in the Appendix shows, they also involve suicide bombing and infiltration attacks on the “Green Zone” in Baghdad and other major US military facilities in areas like Mosul. The use of Iraqi uniforms, security and army vehicles, false IDs, and intelligence gained from infiltrators also became more sophisticated.

- **Push “hot buttons”:** Try to find forms of attack that provoke disproportionate fear and “terror” to force the US Iraqi forces into costly, drastic, and sometimes provocative responses: Terrorists and insurgents have found that attacks planned for maximum political and psychological effects often have the additional benefit of provoking over-reaction. Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad exploited such tactics throughout the peace process.

  One example of such attacks that put constant pressure on Americans, demonstrated insurgent “strength,” and got high profile media attention was the long series of attacks on the secure areas in the “Green Zone” in Baghdad and along the road from that zone to Baghdad airport.

  Attacking the airport road was an almost perfect way of keeping up constant psychological and political pressure. It passed through a hostile Sunni area, was almost impossible to secure from IEDs, VBIEDs, rocket and mortar attacks, and sniping without pinning down large numbers of troops. This helps explain why there were well over 100 attacks on targets moving along the road during January 30 through May 4, 2005.\textsuperscript{19}

- **Game Regional, Western, and other outside media**: Use interview access, tapes, journalist hostage takings and killings, politically-led and motivated crowds, drivers and assistants to journalists, and timed and targeted attacks to attempt to manipulate Western and outside media. Manipulate US official briefings with planted questions.

- **Use Americans and other foreigners as proxies**: There is nothing new about using Americans and other foreigners as proxies for local regimes, or attacking them to win support for ideological positions and causes. There has, however, been steadily growing sophistication in the timing and nature of such attacks, and in exploiting softer targets such as American businessmen in the country of operations, in striking at US and allied targets in other countries, or in striking at targets in the US. It is also clear that such attacks receive maximum political and media attention in the US.

- **Attack UN, NGO, Embassies, aid personnel, and foreign contractor business operations**: Attacking such targets greatly reduces the ability to carry out nation building and stability operations to win hearts and minds. Attacking the “innocent,” and curtailing their operations or driving organizations out of the country has become an important focus of insurgents and Islamist extremist attacks.

- **Kidnap, kill, and/or intimidate women and cadres of foreign workers**: Killing and kidnapping women, particularly those working in NGOs and aid projects gets great media attention and leads some organizations to leave the country. Kidnapping or killing groups of foreign workers puts political pressure on their governments, gets high local and regional media attention, and sometimes leads governments to stop their workers from going to Iraq.

  Counts of kidnappings in Iraq, and analyses of responsibility, are necessarily uncertain and sharply undercount the number of kidnappings of Iraqis – many of which are never reported. An analysis of kidnappings from April 1, 2004 to January 31, 2005 showed, however, that there were 264
foreign civilian kidnappings. Some 47 were killed, 56 remained missing, 150 were released, five escaped, and a total of six were rescued. Given the fact there were some 100,000 expatriates in Iraq at the time, this meant a roughly 1 in 380 chance of being kidnapped, and roughly 20% of the foreigners kidnapped were killed or beheaded.20

- **Kidnap, kill, and/or intimidate professionals, Iraqi media and intelligentsia, “mystery killings.”** Steady killing and intimidation of individual professionals, media figures, and intelligentsia in threatened areas offers a series of soft targets that cannot be defended, but where a cumulative pattern of killing and intimidation makes governance difficult, creates major problems for security and police forces, weakens the economy, and exacerbates the general feeling of insecurity to the point where people lose faith in the Iraqi government, Coalition, and political process. According to the head of Iraqi Journalists Syndicate, Shihab al-Tamimi, kidnappings and assassinations targeting Iraqi journalists surged in the weeks leading up to the January 30 election.21

The US State Department report on Human Rights for 2004 states that, the Ministry of Human Rights claimed that at least 80 professors and 50 physicians were assassinated during 2004. Reporters Without Borders noted that 31 journalists and media assistants were killed during the year. Universities also suffered from a wave of kidnappings. Researchers, professors, administrators, and students were all victims, including some who disappeared without a trace.22

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

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

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

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

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

At the same time, any attack or incident that garners massive media coverage and political reactions appears to be a “victory” to those who support Islamist extremism or those who are truly angry at the US – even though the actual body count is often low, and victory does not mean creating stronger forces or winning political control. Each such incident can be used to damage the US and Western view of the Arab and Islamic worlds.
"Body dumps" became a variation on this theme: The bodies of Iraqi forces and other Iraqis would be dumped in areas like rivers, soccer stadiums, and other public places where they were found without any clear picture of who had killed them and why, and sometimes who the bodies were. In mid March 2005, for example, some 80 bodies were found in four dumps in Iraq, many police officers and soldiers. Somewhat ironically, a small dump of seven bodies of Zarqawi loyalists, seeming killed by other Sunnis, were found the same week.

Deprive the central, regional, and local governments' efforts to expand legitimacy. Attack nation-building and stability targets: There is nothing new about attacking key economic targets, infrastructure, and aspects of governance critical to the functioning of the state in an effort to disrupt its economy, undermine law enforcement and security, and encourage instability. Iraqi insurgent and Islamist attacks on aid workers and projects, and their role in encouraging looting, sabotage and theft did, however, demonstrate a growing sophistication in targeting stability efforts and tangible progress in aid and governance. These tactics also interact synergistically with the above tactics.

Confuse the identity of the attacker; exploit conspiracy theories: Insurgents and Islamists learned that a mix of silence, multiple claims to be the attacker, new names for attacking organizations, and uncertain levels of affiliation both make it harder for the US to respond. They also produced more media coverage and speculation.

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

Seek to create sanctuaries like Fallujah, take shelter in mosques, shrines, and high value targets, and targets with high cultural impact: Again, exploiting facilities of religious, cultural, and political sensitivity is not a new tactic. However, as operations against Sadr and in Fallujah have shown, the tactics raise the media profile, create a defensive deterrent, and can be exploited to make the US seem anti-Islamic or to be attacking a culture and not a movement.

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

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

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

**Lessons About Methods of Attack and Combat**

There is no clear division between the mix of insurgent and terrorist tactics focused on the political and psychological nature of war and those that focus on directly attacking military targets like MNC-I and Iraqi government forces, Iraqi and Coalition officials, and the Iraqi economy and nation building process. However, some of the major adaptations that insurgents and terrorists in Iraq made in terms of tactics and methods of attack include:

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• **Mix crude and sophisticated IEDs:** Hezbollah should be given credit for having first perfected the use of explosives in well structured ambushes, although there is nothing new about such tactics – the Afghans used them extensively against the Soviets. Iraq has, however, provided a unique opportunity for insurgents and Islamist extremists to make extensive use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs) by exploiting its massive stocks of arms. The insurgents were able to draw on large stocks of explosives, as well as large bombs and artillery shells. Nearly 400 tons of HMX and RDX plastic explosive disappeared from the Qaqaa weapons facility alone after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime.

The Iraqi attackers also learned to combine the extensive use of low grade IEDs, more carefully targeted sophisticated IEDs, very large car bombs and other devices to create a mix of threats and methods that is much more difficult to counter than reliance on more consistent types of bombs and target sets. The insurgents based many of their initial efforts on relatively simple weapons designs, some of which seem to have been adapted from the Arabic translations of US field manuals on booby traps and similar improved devices. The insurgents soon learned, however, to use more sophisticated detonators and triggering systems to counter US electronic countermeasures, and increase their distance away from the bomb. According to one report, only 10% of the IEDs used in Iraq as of May 2005 were modeled on the pressure-detonation devices shown in US Army Field Manual 5-31 and in a direct Iraqi translation published in 1987. Insurgents had also learned how to make crude shaped-charges to attack US armored and other vehicles.

The insurgents also paid close attention to US intelligence collection methods, and counter-IED operations and change their behavior accordingly. They also use improved methods of concealment, like digging holes in a road and then “paving over” the hole. Other methods have included stealing police, military, and government vehicles, and uniforms and IDs, to penetrate in to secure areas, and linking bombings to ambushes with rifles and RPGs – or additional IEDs – to attack the response force. While Coalition forces claimed to find some 30-40% of IEDs, and render them safe, by May 2005, they also reported that the number of IED incidents had steadily climbed to some 30 per day.

In September 2004, General Richard Cody, the US Army Vice Chief of Staff, stated that some 500-600 IEDs were then going off each month, and roughly half either harmed US personnel or damaged US vehicles. Lt. General James T. Conway, Director of Operations in the US Joint Staff, stated in May 2005, that a total of 70% of all Coalition casualties to date since the fall of Saddam Hussein were caused by IEDs, an effort that had been so successful that the US announced that even uparmored Humvees were unsafe in high threat areas, and were being replaced with heavily armored 5-ton “gun trucks.” An analysis by the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count showed that IEDs, and an additional 89 had killed 336 Americans by various suicide or car bombs, as of April 29, 2005.

Similar data are not available on Iraqi casualties, a larger percent of whom seem to have been hit by suicide bombers and in ambushes, but the chronology in the Appendix to this analysis shows there have been many effective attacks. For example, three Iraqi soldiers were killed and 44 were wounded in a single VBIED bomb attack on their bus on April 6, 2005. Iraqi military, security, and police are particularly vulnerable because they have little or no armor, and often must move into insecure facilities or go on leave in unprotected vehicles simply to perform routine tasks like bringing money to their families in a cash-in-hand economy.

• **Use mixed attacks, and seek to ambush military and emergency forces in follow-on attacks:** Iraqi insurgents steadily improved their ability to carry out complex attacks where an IED might be set off and then either more IEDs or other methods of attack would be used against rescuers and follow-on forces. Alternatively, an ambush might be used to lead US and Iraqi forces into an area with IEDs.
By the spring of 2005, insurgents increasingly used such mixed attacks to strike at US facilities. For example, they used a mix of gunmen, suicide car bombs, and a large fire truck filled with explosives to attack a US marine base at Camp Gannon at Husaybah near the Syrian border on April 11, 2005. On May 9, 2005, they used a hospital at Haditha as an ambush point, and then attacked the US forces that responded with suicide bombs once they are entered. This mix of unpredictable attacks, many slowly built up in ways difficult for US intelligence methods to detect, has greatly complicated the operations of US and Iraq forces, although scarcely defeated them.

- **Carry out sequential ambushes**: Increasingly carry out complex mixes of sequential ambushes to draw in and attack Iraqi and US responders to the initial or previous follow-on attacks.

- **Develop complex mixes and ambushes using small arms and light weapons**: At least through the spring of 2005, insurgents did not make effective use of looted guided anti-tank weapons, and had only been able to down one aircraft with manportable surface to air missiles (MANPADS). They did, however, steadily improve their tactics from single fire ambushes to multiple firings of RPGs against the same target, mixes of firing positions, and sequential fire points, ambushes, and defenses -- mixing small arms, RPGs, and light automatic weapons.

- **“Swarming” techniques, and attacks on vehicles**: The quality of urban and road ambushes improved strikingly in Iraq, as did the ability to set up rapid attacks, and exploit the vulnerability of soft skinned vehicles. Insurgents also learned to “swarm” coalition forces by rushing in from different points or firing simultaneously from multiple locations. In some cases, a single vehicle could take eight RPG rounds in a short encounter. Particularly in built-up areas, these tactics could kill or disable even heavy armor like the Abrams tank, and posed a major threat to lighter armored vehicles, as well as exposed infantry.

- **Suicide bombs, car bombs, and mass bombings**: The use of such tactics has increased steadily since 1999, in part due to the high success rate relative to alternative methods of attack. Exploding vehicles account for approximately 60% of Iraqi police and recruit fatalities. It is not always clear that suicide-bombing techniques are tactically necessary. In many cases, timed devices might produce the same damage. Events in Iraq have shown, however, that suicide bombers still have a major psychological impact and gain exceptional media attention. They also serve as symbols of dedication and commitment, can be portrayed as a form of Islamic martyrdom, and attract more political support and attention among those sympathetic to the cause involved.

   The cost of suicide bombers has also been low. It seems that most are not Iraqis and are recruited from outside Iraq by various Islamist organizations. The limited evidence available indicates that many are chosen because they can be persuaded to seek Islamic martyrdom, and do so collectively and without trying to call great public attention to themselves. They act as “force multipliers” for relatively small Islamic extremist groups because a single volunteer can use a strap on bomb, or single vehicle filled with explosives, penetrated into a crowded area or high profile target area, and then set off an explosion producing high casualties. Even when such attacks fail to reach their target the explosion often gets intense public and media attention.

- **Stay behinds, diehards, and suicide squads**: During and after Fallujah, insurgents increasingly had teams stay behind who seem to have been prepared to die or to seek martyrdom. Many were Iraqis. The willing to defend a building or small area with suicidal determination and no regard for retreat often inflicted higher casualties on MNC-I and Iraqi forces.

- **Make better use of light weapons like automatic weapons, RPGs, and mortars; attack from remote locations or use timed devices**: While much will depend on the level of insurgent and Islamist extremist access to arms, Iraq and Afghanistan have seen a steady improvement in the use of systems like mortars and anti-tank weapons, mortars, rockets, and timed explosives. It has also seen improvements in light weapons and the increasing use of armor piercing ammunition as a cheap way of attacking body armor, vehicles, and penetrating walls.

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• **Make effective use of snipers:** Iraqi insurgents initially had very poor marksmanship and tended to fire off their weapons in sustained and poorly armed bursts. With time, however, they not only developed effective snipers, but trained spotters, learned how to position and mix their snipers with other elements of Iraqi forces, and developed signals and other communications systems to like them into tactical operations. Overall fire discipline and marksmanship remained poor through the late spring of 2005, but sniper elements became steadily more effective, and the overall quality of insurgent fire discipline and marksmanship was generally no worse than that of Iraqi soldiers, security personnel, and police. Snipers acquired new types of rifles, ant-armor ammunition, and body armor from outside Iraq, indicating they might have both support and training from Islamist extremists. Islamist web sites also began to include interactive sniper “training” data as recruiting tool and crude training aid.

• **Attack lines of communication (LOCs), rear area, and support activity:** Iraqi insurgents soon found that dispersed attacks on logistics and support forces often offer a higher chance of success than attacks on combat forces and defended sites, and makes the Coalition fight wars based on “deep support” rather than “deep strikes” beyond the Forward Edge of Battle Areas (FEBA).

In some cases, like the road from the Green Zone and central Baghdad to the airport, insurgents also chose routes that the Coalition and government forces could not avoid, where constant attacks both harassed operations and became a political statement and symbol of Iraq’s lack of security. These “ambush alleys” allowed the insurgents to force a major Iraqi or MNC defensive effort at relatively little cost.

• **Strike at highly visible targets with critical economic and infrastructure visibility:** Water and power facilities have a broad political, media, economic, and social impact. Striking at critical export-earning facilities like Iraq’s northern export pipeline from the Kirkuk oil fields to the IT-1A storage tanks near Baiji, where oil accumulates before it is pumped further north to Ceyhan, has sharply affected the government’s revenues, forced it to create special protection forces, and gained world attention.

• **Kill Iraqi elites and “soft targets”:** The insurgents soon found it was far easier to kill Iraqi officials and security personnel, and their family members, than Americans. They also found it was easier to kill mid-level officials than better-protected senior officials. In some areas, simply killing educated elites and/or their family members – doctors, professionals, etc. – could paralyze much of the nation building process, create a broad climate of insecurity, and force the US and Iraqi forces to disperse resources in defensive missions or simply have to stand aside and tolerate continued attacks.

• **Target elections, the political process and governance:** Elections and the local presence of government are soft, dispersed targets whose operation is critical to political legitimacy. Hitting these targets helps derail the political process, gets media visibility, offers vulnerable “low hanging fruit,” and intimidates the government and population in much wider areas than those subjected to direct attack.

• **Strike at major aid and government projects after completion; break up project efforts when they acquire visibility or have high levels of employment:** Insurgents and terrorists often simply struck at the most vulnerable projects, but they seem to have learned that timing their attacks, looting, sabotage, and intimidation to strike when projects are completed means the Coalition and government aid efforts have maximum cost with minimum effect. They strike at projects when the security forces protecting workers and aid teams were no longer there. This often led the local population to blame the Coalition or government for not keeping promises or providing the proper protection. Alternatively, breaking up project efforts when they began to have maximum local visibility and employment impact had many of the same effects.

• **Hit the softest element of Iraqi military, security, and police forces:** The insurgents found they could strike at men on leave, their families, recruits or those seeking to enlist, green troops and trainees, and low quality units with limited fear of effective retaliation. High profile mass killings
got major media attention. Moreover, isolated forward elements in hostile or threatened areas not only were vulnerable, but successful attacks broke up governance, aid efforts, and intimidated local populations. This strategy has been most damaging to Iraqi police, which remain the weakest element in the security apparatus.

- **Create informal distributed networks for C^4IBM—deliberately or accidentally:** Like drug dealers before them, Iraqi insurgent and Islamist extremists have learned enough about COMINT and SIGINT to stop using most vulnerable communications assets, and to bypass many—if not most—of the efforts to control cash flow and money transfers.

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

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

The existence of parallel, non-competing groups of hostile non-state actors provides similar advantages and has the same impact. The fact that insurgent and Islamist extremist groups operate largely independently, and use different tactics and target sets, greatly complicates US operations and probably actually increases overall effectiveness.

- **Street scouts and spotters:** Like many previous insurgent groups, Iraqi hostiles learned to have children, young men, and others use cell phones, signals, and runners to provide tactical scouting, intelligence, and warning in ways that proved very difficult to detect and halt.

- **Make cities and towns urban sanctuaries and defensive morasses:** Iraqi insurgents found that cities with supportive and/or accepting populations can be made into partial sanctuaries and centers for defensive fighting and ambushes, and that tactical defeat can normally be dealt with by dispersal and hiding among the civilian population. Such tactics combine well with attacks on local authorities and security forces friendly to the US, efforts to block nation building at the local level, and efforts to exploit religion, ethnicity, tribalism, etc.

- **Use neighboring states and border areas as partial sanctuaries:** While scarcely a new tactic, Iraqi insurgents have made increased use of cross border operations and taken advantage of the difficulties in securing the Syrian, Iranian, and Saudi borders. By March 2005, for example, these tactics had created a near sanctuary in the area along the Euphrates from Hit and Haditha toward Syria and through Ubaydi, Qaim, Karabilah, and Qusaybah to the Syrian border along the road to Abu Kamel. The Vietnamese used the same tactic in Cambodia and Laos, and so have many other insurgent forces. The idea of securing a nation based on securing the territory within its tactical boundaries is often a tactical myth.

- **Create dispersed and rapidly mobile operations and centers, mixed with fixed “diehard” and “sleeper” installations.** The insurgents rapidly learned not to concentrate operates and to keep them rapidly mobile. They mixed these with “die hard” facilities designed to fight and defend themselves and inflict casualties if attacked, and with sleeper cells and stay behind operations to recover after an area was attacked, captured, and “secured” by Coalition and Iraqi forces.

- **Exploit weaknesses in US human intelligence (HUMINT), battle damage assessment (BDA), and damage characterization capabilities:** Iraqi insurgents and other Islamist extremists learned that US intelligence is optimized around characterizing, counting, and targeting things, rather than people, and that the US has poor capability to measure and characterize infantry and insurgent numbers, wounded, and casualties. They exploit these weaknesses in dispersal, in conducting
attacks, in concealing the extent of losses, and in manipulating the media by claiming civilian
casualties and collateral damage.

- **Counter US advantages in intercepting satellite and cellular communications:** Insurgents
  utilize the text messaging function of cell phones to communicate in an effort to avoid electronic
eavesdropping by the US. Insurgents will often use more than one phone to communicate a
message, so that those listening in only hear part of the message.

- **Exploit slow Iraqi and US reaction times at the local tactical level, particularly in built up
  areas:** Learn to exploit the delays in US response efforts, and rigidities in US tactical C’I
  behavior, to attack quickly and disperse.

- **Exploit fixed Iraqi and US patterns of behavior:** Take advantage of any tendency to repeat
tactics, security, movement patterns, and other behavior; find vulnerabilities and attack.

- **Hit at US HUMINT links and translators:** US dependence on Iraqi translators and intelligence
  sources is a key area of US vulnerability and one the insurgents have learned to focus on.

- **Use “resurgence” and re-infiltration – dig in, hide, and reemerge:** Disperse under pressure or
  when defeat seems likely. Let the US take an “empty” city or objective. “Resurge” when the US
  tactical presence declines.

- **Use incident frequencies, distribution of attacks, and tactics that strain or defeat US
  intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (IS&R) assets and ability to support Iraqi
  forces:** There is no question that assets like RPVs, aircraft, SIGINT systems, etc. can provide
  significant capability *when they are available.* It is unclear whether it is deliberate or not, but the
  geographic spread and daily incident count in Iraq indicates that insurgent movements and actions
  often reach numbers too large to cover. In fact, the US averaged some 1,700-2,000 patrols per day
during May 2004. While it is nice to talk about netcentric warfare, it is a lot harder to get a big
  enough net.

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

- **Increase the size and power of IEDs to nullify the advantages of US and Coalition armor:** In
  two separate instances in early January 2005, IEDs destroyed a Bradley Fighting Vehicle and an
  Abrams tank. The two vehicles are among the more heavily armored vehicles in the US arsenal.
  Prior to the two bombings, both the Abrams and the Bradley Fighting Vehicle had proven
  relatively effective in protecting troops inside.

- **Choose a vulnerable Iraqi and US force:** Deny the US and Iraqi forces a large, cohesive enemy
  while attacking small or dispersed elements of US and Iraqi forces, facilities, or targets.

- **Counter US IS&R capabilities by adapting new techniques of communication and
  interaction:** The steady leakage of details on US and allied intelligence collection methods has led
  Islamist extremist and terrorist movements to make more use of couriers and direct financial
  transfer; use electronic communications more safely; screen recruits more carefully, find ways to
  communicate through the Internet that the US cannot target, disperse better, and improve their
  hierarchy and cell structure.

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

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

- **Use the media, infiltrators/sympathizers, and ex-detainees for counterintelligence**: Constantly monitor the media and Internet for data on US and Iraqi intelligence, targeting, and operational data. Use infiltrators and sympathizers. Debrief released prisoners and detainees to learn what their capture and interrogation reveals about US and Iraqi intelligence efforts.
III. The Evolving Nature of the Insurgency

The insurgent and terrorist threat in Iraq remains all too real and is evolving in response to the changes in Iraqi and Coalition forces. Iraq faces a wide mix of active and potential threats, and the task that Iraqi military, security, and police forces is anything but easy. It is still far from clear whether the US and Iraqi government will be able to decisively defeat the various insurgent groups.

The Sunni elements of the insurgency involve a wide range of disparate Iraqi and foreign groups, and of mixes of secular and Islamic extremist factions. There are elements tied to former Ba’athist officials, and to Iraqi and Sunni nationalists. The are elements composed of native Iraqi Sunni Islamists, groups with outside leadership and links to Al Qaeda, and foreign volunteers with little real structure -- some of which seem to be seeking Islamic martyrdom rather than clearly defined political goals.

Tribal and clan elements play a strong role at the local level, creating additional patterns of loyalty that cut across ideology or political goals. The stated objectives of various groups range from a return of some form of Ba’athist like regime to the creation of an extremist Sunni Islamic state, with many Iraqi Sunnis acting as much out of anger and fear as any clearly articulated goals.

These groups often cooperate, although there are indications of divisions between the more-Ba’ath oriented Iraqi Sunni groups and some of the Sunni Islamic extremist groups with outside ties or direction. At least some such Sunni groups are willing to consider negotiating with the new government, while Islamist extremist groups are not. This had led to threats and some violence between various Sunni factions. While not common, there have been growing reports of Iraqi Sunni executions of foreign Sunni Islamic extremists since November 2004.

At the same time, there is the constant threat that Sunni Arab extremists will provoke something approaching civil war. There is the risk of factional fighting within the Shi’ites, and between Iraq’s Arabs and Kurds. Serious divisions exist between the more secular and more religious Shi’ites over how religious a new Iraqi state should be, and within Shi’ite religious factions. Figures like the Muqtada Sadr raise the risk of renewed Shi’ite insurgent movements, and tensions between Arab and Kurd have long been near the flashpoint in Kirkuk and present serious problems in Mosul.

Iraq’s neighbors have conflicting interests and play a role in the insurgency. Syria has supported and tolerated Sunni Islamist infiltrations well as allowed ex-Ba’athists to operate from Syria. Turkey is primarily interested in ensuring the Iraq’s Kurds do not become an example to Turkey’s Kurdish dissidents. Iran has its own interests in supporting Iraq’s Islamic Shi’ites, creating an ally, and ending American “encirclement.” The Arab states of the Gulf and Middle East do not want a Shi’ite dominated Iraq, and fear a Shi’ite “crescent” of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

The Uncertain Cycles and Patterns in the Insurgency

Complex insurgencies involve patterns that can play out over years and sometimes decades. It is easy to claim trends towards security, but generally far more difficult to
make them valid or real. For example, the Iraqi Interim Government claimed in early 2005 that some 16 of Iraq’s 18 provinces were secure were clearly untrue. There was a significant level of security in 12 provinces, and the US and IIG had won significant victories in Najaf and Fallujah in 2004, but the insurgency was clearly not defeated or incapable of attacks in supposedly safe Shi’ite and Kurdish areas.

Similarly, coalition and Iraqi success in preventing insurgent attacks on polling places during the January 30 election did not mean that there were not several hundred attempt attacks and attacks elsewhere, or prevent a new round of attacks and acts of terrorism after the election.

**Uncertain Claims the Insurgency is Losing Ground**

Several senior US officers did claim that the insurgency was losing ground after the election. Lt. General John F. Sattler, the head of the USMC Expeditionary Force claimed in March that insurgent attacks were averaging only 10 per day, with two producing significant casualties, versus 25 per day, with five producing significant casualties, before the battle of Fallujah in November 2000.

On February 17, 2005, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld told the Senate Armed Service Committee that classified estimates on the size of the insurgency are not static, but that they are “a moving target.” In the same session, General Richard Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, also avoided hard numbers but described the insurgency as having limited capabilities; meaning that the insurgency can mount only around 50 to 60 attacks on any given day.

General George W. Casey, commander of MNF-I, stated on March 9, 2005 that “the level of attacks, the level of violence has dropped off significantly since the [Iraqi] elections.” The US Chief of Staff, General Richard B. Myers claimed that same week that the number of attacks have fallen to 40-50 per day, far fewer than before the elections, but roughly the same as in March 2004. The Iraqi interim Minister of the Interior, Falah al-Naqib, also made such claims. So did Lt, General Sir John Kiszely, then the British Commander in Iraq.

As is the case with so many other types of official US reporting on Iraq, however, such claims were not supported with anything like the detail and transparency necessary to establish their credibility. The US ceased to provide detailed unclassified data on the types of insurgent attacks or their locations in the summer of 2004. The private organizations that try to do this produce interesting results, but results that are often suspect. What US official sources did say after the elections is that that prior to the Iraqi election:

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

- Attacks against US soldiers per day have fallen to between 40 and 50. US officials state that this is approximately ½ the level one year ago.
- Approximately ½ of the attacks that due occur cause no casualties or property damage.

Such estimates reflected problems that typical of the US and British official reporting on the insurgency that make it even more difficult to analyze its intensity and predict trends. The counts quoted by senior US officials focused on attacks directed at US and Iraqi government targets rather than all attacks, and did not include all attempts and minor incidents, and. They also did not include Iraqi criminal activity, or sabotage; and the Iraqi Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior had stopped all meaningful reporting in these areas in the summer of 2004.

**Uncertain Trends in the Numbers**

The unclassified work by DIA and MNC-I-I -- showing the approximate number of total attacks per month from May 2003 to March 2004 and summarized in Figure 2 -- showed patterns typical of the cyclical variations in modern insurgencies. \(^41\) The same is true of the trend data on US casualties shown in Figure 3, and it is clear from any detailed comparison of these figures that there is no clear correlation between incident counts and casualty counts, and even accurate incident counts would be only the crudest possible indication of the patterns in insurgency without a much wider range of comparative metrics.

Other reporting gave strong indications that insurgent activity had surged before the elections and then temporarily eased back, rather than diminished in any lasting way. An internal US Army analysis in April also calculated that the apparent shift was more a shift in focus to more vulnerable non-US targets than an actual drop in incidents. \(^42\) Similarly, a study by the National Intelligence Council in the CIA, that was leaked to *Newsweek*, concluded that US government reporting had so many conflicting sources and methods of analysis that the resulting metrics could not be trusted, and that there was inadequate evidence to support any conclusions about whether the insurgents were being defeated. \(^43\)

The DIA and MNC-I-I figures, and Coalition casualty data, were also skewed in favor of counts of attacks on coalition forces and grossly undercounted attacks on Iraqi civilians, and some aspects of Iraqi officials, military, and police. One of the tragedies of Iraq is that as part of its effort to spin reporting on the war in favorable directions, the Department of Defense has never publicly attempted to count Iraqi casualties of any kind, or treat Iraqi military and police casualties as partners whose sacrifice deserves recognitions.

They also undercounted major acts of sabotage. Like most such partial counts they this disguised important shifts in the patterns in insurgency. As the chronology in the appendix to this analysis shows, insurgents also shifted from US and Coalition to Iraqi government, Kurdish, and Shi'ite targets, and the major incidents came to include a far more bloody series of suicide bombings.

As a result, it is not surprising that there was a major resurge in such activity in the months that followed, and as a new Iraqi government finally completed its selection...
process in late April and early May 2005. An independent count of Iraqi military and police casualties showed that some 1,300 had been killed between the fall of Saddam Hussein in April 2003 and the end of 2004, but that an increase insurgent activity and new focus on Iraq forces killed 109 in January 2005, 103 in March, 200 in March, 200 in April and 110 in the first week of May. This was a total of roughly 722 in the first four months of 2005, raised the total to 2,022 killed – scarcely a decline in insurgent activity.\textsuperscript{44}

The number of car bombings rose from 65 in February 2005 to 135 in April, and the total number of major attacks per day rose from 30-40 in February and March to 70 in April and May. The intensity of the attacks also increased as more suicide bombings took place by Islamist extremists – many conducted by young men from countries like Libya, Saudi Arabia, and the Sudan who infiltrated in from across the Syria border. The number of major attacks involving suicide bombers rose from 25% in February to a little over 50% in April.

While the insurgents focused more on Iraqi casualties, the attacks on MNC-I forces climbed back from 40 a day in March to 55 in April, far below the peak of 130 a day before the January 30, 2005 elections – but scarcely reassuring.\textsuperscript{45} The good news for the US was that only 146 Americans died during the three-month period from February 1 to April 30, 2005, versus 315 in the pervious three-month period.\textsuperscript{46}

The difficulty in analyzing the patterns in a constantly changing uncertainty is also illustrated by the major surge in activity that took place at the new government was appointed. The Iraqi government announced most of its appointments on April 28, 2005 - - some three months after the election and months after the supposed deadline for doing so.

In the week that followed (April 28-May 6), there were 10 major suicide bombings, and 35 major attacks. Insurgents killed more than 270 Iraqi civilians, and at least 14 bodies were found in a Baghdad garbage dump that may have been from previous attacks. Many of the attacks were against Iraqi forces and recruits, and the intensity of the attacks is indicated by the fact that a suicide bomber from the "Army of Ansar al-Sunna" killed more that 60 people in the Kurdish city of Erbil in Northern Iraq in a single attack.\textsuperscript{47} For the first time, in April, more than 50% of the car bombings were suicide attacks.\textsuperscript{48}

That same month, 80 more bodies had been found floating in the Tigris, and 19 more in a soccer stadium.\textsuperscript{49} The total number of US killed now totaled 1,593 (1,216 killed in hostile action), and 12,243 wounded. Some 180 allied military had been killed, and 86 US civilians, and unofficial estimates put the number of Iraqi dead at least 21,450-24,325.\textsuperscript{50}

These developments led some US officers and officials to claim during the first months after the election that the insurgents were lashing out because they had taken so many casualties they were desperate, and/or to say that the successful car bombings by Islamic extremists had little strategic meaning since they alienated the Iraqi people and could easily be carried out by a small number of largely foreign volunteers that were not representative of Iraqi Sunnis.

Such arguments could not be disproved or proved, but they were made at the same time the US Marines found it necessary to conduct a major offensive along the Euphrates from
Haditha to the Syrian border, and the largest offensive since the attack on Fallujah. As of the late spring of 2005, insurgents and terrorists continued to try to strip the new government of its perceived legitimacy. Attacks on Iraqi security forces and government officials remained a central part of their strategy, and the number of suicide bombings continued to mount. There were 21 car bombings in Baghdad alone during the first two weeks of May, and 126 in the 80 days before May 18th, this compared with 25 during all of 2005.

Additionally, insurgents continued attacks designed to disrupt supplies of water, electricity, crude oil, gasoline and heating oil, particularly to Baghdad. This shift in attack patterns indicated that insurgents were carrying out a sophisticated plan to sabotage government services, hoping to convince residents that the government cannot provide for its people. Because of the technological expertise involved in these attacks, some experts believed that former, Hussein-era officials were still aiding the sabotage efforts – although others felt that by this time, there was a large pool of such expertise in the various insurgent forces.

Senior US officers like General Abizaid gave far more cautious briefings in May than some officers had given in February, and talked about “years” of combat. The only real good news was that there was no significant Shi’ite anti-Coalition or government insurgent activity since Sadr's militia ceased to actively try to occupy cities and shrines and in the south in the summer and fall of 2004 -- although Sadr had rebuilt at least part of his organization and did support anti-Coalition demonstrations after the January 2005 election.
Figure 2
Approximate Number of Major Attacks Per Month: June 2003-February 2005

Note: Includes approximate number of attacks on Coalition, Iraqi security forces, Iraqi government officials, civilians, and infrastructure.

Figure 3
Approximate Number of US Killed and Wounded: June 2003-April 2005

Note: Other Killed includes all other Coalition military forces but no civilians and no Iraqis.

The Limits to the Insurgency

It is important to note that the present insurgency in Iraq is not a national insurgency. It is driven by a relatively small part of Iraq’s population concentrated in part of the country. Although there are no accurate census data, the Arab Sunni population only seems to be around 15-20% of Iraq’s total population, and only 6-8% of Iraq’s total population is located in the areas most hostile to the Coalition and the Iraqi government. Moreover, if one looks at the total population of all the scattered cities and areas where insurgents and terrorists largely dominate, it does not exceed 6-9% of Iraq’s total population.

General John Abizaid, commander of the US Central Command, said that the four provinces with particularly difficult security situations are western Baghdad, Al Anbar, Nineveh and Saahuddin. Yet, even these areas -- where insurgents operate and have significant local influence -- much of the population is divided and limited areas are normally under active insurgent control.

Many Iraqis do passively support the insurgency – and provide political support for attacks on Coalition forces. One Coalition private poll, conducted in February 2005, showed that as many as 45% of those polled supported attacks on Coalition forces while only 15% strongly supported the Coalition. Out of those native Sunni Iraqis who supported the insurgency, however, most only provided sympathy or passive support. And – has been touched upon earlier -- there are clear signs that even Iraqi Sunnis who do support the insurrection sometimes actively oppose the actions of outside Islamist extremists and terrorists.

There have been indicators that some formerly hostile Sunnis are moving towards participation in the government and evolving Iraqi political process. The negotiations between anti-government Sunnis and Iraqi officials stepped up after the January 30, 2005 elections. While most Sunnis boycotted the elections, the elections were successful enough in legitimizing majority Shi’ite rule, and in including the Kurds, to show some Sunni continued opposition could simply end in isolation and a loss of wealth and power. At total of 64 Sunni clerics signed a fatwa legitimizing Sunni participation in the Iraqi military, security forces, and police forces on April 8, 2005. Sunni sermons included similar themes, and effectively stated that violence against the Iraqi forces was wrong.

The Continuing Threat

At the same time, the Iraqi Government and US can scarcely claim that they are clearly moving towards victory. The problems in measuring the trends in the insurgency cited earlier are not new ones. The number of incidents declined somewhat immediately after the battle of Fallujah in 2004, but major insurgent attacks have occurred in Baghdad, Mosul, Karbala, and Najaf. The US lost 24 men and 60 were wounded in one attack on a mess tent in Mosul on December 21, 2004. Some 68 Iraqis were killed in attacks in Karbala and Najaf a few days earlier, and some 175 wounded. The Sunni triangle, the area along the Tigris, and the “triangle of death” south of Baghdad are all areas of intense Sunni insurgent activity, and the stability of Shi’ite and Kurdish areas remains uncertain.
Estimates on the number of insurgents have varied widely ever since it became a serious struggle in August 2003. Much depends on the definition of insurgent and the level of activity and dedication involved, and virtually everyone who issues such estimates admits they are little more than sophisticated "guessimates.

A few outlying estimates have been as low as 3,500 full-time actives that make up the "core" forces. Most US military estimates range between 8,000 and 18,000, perhaps reaching over 20,000 when the ranks swell for major operations. Iraqi intelligence officials, on the other hand, believe the figure for Iraqi sympathizers and insurgents could be as high as 200,000, with a core of anywhere between 15,000 and 40,000 fighters and another 160,000 supporters. The true figure may well fall somewhere in this range, but the exact number is also largely irrelevant as long as the insurgency enjoys popular sympathy.

Political developments also affect the cycles and nature of the insurgency. Some experts believe the January 30, 2005 elections led some of the native Iraqi insurgents to be more willing to consider negotiating with the government and playing a role in the political process, while events inside and outside Iraq led Al Qa’ida and other Islamist extremist groups to see Iraq more and more as a center of their operations both because of the possibility of “defeating” the US and because it was one of the few theaters of operations that had significant public support in the Arab world.59

Iraq faces two more elections during 2005: the constitutional referendum, and full national election at the end of the year. Insurgents will have every incentive to create as much political turmoil as possible, as well as continue their attacks on the Iraqi government, economy, intelligentsia, security forces, and the Coalition.

There is no way to quantify how the development of Iraqi military, security, and police forces has kept pace with the development of effective Iraqi government forces. There are also no meaningful comparative casualty estimates, although MNSCT-I has issued reports of over 1,000 dead in the various elements of Iraqi forces, and one US commander has talked about 15,000 insurgent and terrorist casualties.50

In any case, numerical comparisons are largely pointless. The ratio of security forces to insurgents sometimes has to reach levels of 12:1 through 30:1 in order to provide security in a given area, while in other cases, a small number of security forces can decapitate a movement or cell and end it. Intangibles like the battle for political perceptions and “hearts and minds” are often far more critical than the numbers of insurgents and defenders.

Threat forces have evolved, as well as Iraqi military, security, and police forces. The insurgents and terrorists have grown in capability and size, although serious fighting in Fallujah, Mosul, and Samarra may have reduced their capabilities towards the end of the year. The insurgents have also learned a great deal about how to use their weapons, build more sophisticated IEDs, plan attacks and ambushes, improve their security, and locate and attack targets that are both soft and that produce political and media impact. Insurgents deployed 6 suicide bombers with explosive belts in February 2005 alone,
indicating that insurgents are learning ways to get around security restrictions that make car bombings more difficult.61

The Meaning of Coalition Victories and Insurgent Defeats

Insurgents have suffered a serious of significant and almost continuous tactical defeats since early 2004, notably in cities like Najaf, Baghdad, Samarra, Fallujah, and Mosul, but also increasingly in the “triangle of death,” Sunni triangle, and Iraqi-Syrian border areas. The US Marine Corps also launched its largest offensive in the Syrian border area and hostile areas along the main route from Syria to Iraq in April 2005. While this “Operation Matador” was only a limited success, it did show that the insurgents could not survive if they stood and fought, and operations in areas like Baghdad were more successful. 62 Iraqi forces only played a limited support role in these battles, but did deploy in greater strength since early 2005.

Nevertheless, US and Iraqi government attempts to root out the insurgency have so far only had limited impact. While some US officers have talked about the battle of Fallujah in November 2004 as a tipping point, many US experts were cautious even at the time. They felt the insurgents did lose a key sanctuary, suffered more than 1,000 killed, and lost significant numbers of prisoners and detainees. They also lost some significant leaders and cadres. Many insurgents and insurgent leaders seem to have left Fallujah before the fighting, however, and many others escaped.

The battles that have followed have been less concentrated and less intensive, but almost continuous – mixed with raids, captures, and the sudden “swarming” of known and suspected insurgent headquarters and operational areas. While neither MNC-I or the Iraqi government have provided counts of Insurgent killed and wounded, the figures almost certainly exceed 10,000 between May 2003 and May 2005, and could be substantially higher.

In spite of major new offensives like Operation Matador, however, Sunni insurgent groups remain active in Sunni-populated areas like the “Sunni Triangle,” the Al Anbar Province to the west of Baghdad, and the so-called “Triangle of Death” to the southeast of Baghdad. As a result, four of Iraq’s provinces continue to have both a major insurgency threat and a major insurgent presence. Sunni insurgents have also repeatedly shown since the battle of Fallujah that they can strike in ethnically mixed and Shi’ite-dominated cities like Baghdad, Mosul and Basra. They have also operated in Kurdish areas.

US and Iraqi efforts to thwart insurgent attacks – while tireless – are also sometimes hollow victories. As one US Marine specializing in counterinsurgency in Iraq recently noted, “Seizing the components of suicide bombs (or IED making material) is like making drug seizures, comforting, but ultimately pointless. There will always be more. Both sides are still escalating to nowhere.”

No province is safe from occasional attack, and the frequency and intensity of attacks are only part of the story. Various insurgent groups are still able to attack in other areas like Mosul, Ramadi, Samarra, Baquba, Balad, Bajii, Tall Afar, and Hawija during the fighting in Fallujah, and seem to have planned to disperse and to shift their operations before the
fighting in Fallujah began. The fighting in Mosul was particularly severe, and the US military reported a total of 130-140 attacks and incidents a day. While the Coalition and Iraqi forces did capture large numbers of weapons and supplies, few experts – if any – feel that the insurgents face any near term supply problems given the numbers of weapons looted from Iraq’s vast arms depots during and after the fighting that brought down Saddam.

Since the battle of Fallujah and the January 30th elections, there has been continuing sabotage of key targets like Iraq’s oil facilities, and a constant campaign of intimidation, disappearances, and “mystery killings.” Even cities that were supposedly liberated before the battle of Fallujah, like Samarra, have been the source of enough continuing attacks to force the redeployment of large numbers of Iraqi security and police forces and elements of key US counterinsurgency units like Task Force 1-26.

General Casey stated in March 2005 that insurgents operating from the Sunni areas had enough manpower, weaponry, ammunition, and money to launch between 50 and 60 attacks a day. Casey did, however, point to the arrest of several suspected terrorist leaders. Though the terrorists retained enough ammunition and arms to continue fighting for years, the general maintained that the capture of certain leaders had degraded the insurgents’ abilities to fashion IEDs, the deadliest weapon confronting US troops.

The Dominant Role of Iraqi Sunni Arab Insurgents

A violent split between the Arab Shi’ites and Kurds remains possible, as do splits within the major Shi’ite factions in the government. Barring such divisions, however, the insurgency will remain largely Iraqi and Sunni dominated. Some 35 Sunni Arab “groups” have made some kind of public announcement of their existence, or claimed responsibility for terrorist or insurgent attacks – although many may be little more than cells and some may be efforts to shift the blame for attacks or make the insurgent movement seem larger than it is. Some may be little more than tribal or clan groupings, since many elements of the Sunni insurgency have strong tribal affiliations or cells. An overwhelming majority of those captured or killed have been Iraqi Sunnis, as well as something like 90-95% of those detained.

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

The Sunni insurgents are divided into a complex mix of Sunni nationalists, pro-Ba’ath/ex-regime, Sunni Iraqi Islamists, outside Islamic extremists, foreign volunteers with no clear alignment, and paid or politically motivated criminals. Some are organized so that their cadres are in relatively small cells, some as small as 2 or 3 men. These cells
can recruit or call in larger teams, but the loss of even a significant number of such cells may not cripple a given group, and several Sunni groups operate in most areas. Others seem to operate as much larger, but normally dispersed groups, capable of coming together for operations of as many as 30-50 men.

**Ba’athists,” Ex-Regime Loyalists and/or “Sunni Nationalists”**

The CIA has acknowledged in classified studies that Ba’athist and ex-regime loyalists represent only a part of the insurgency – although they have played a key role in leadership, organization, and financing. The largest elements of the insurgency appear to be newly radicalized Iraqi Sunnis. According to the CIA reports, the Sunni loss of power, prestige, and economic influence is a key factor, as is unemployment and a loss of personal status -- direct and disguised unemployment among young Sunni men has been 40-60% in many areas ever since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Many insurgents are motivated by tribal or family grievances, nationalism and religious duty. Others are motivated by the U.S. occupation – particularly those who have lost a loved one fighting U.S. forces – and the political and economic turmoil that accompanied the occupation.  

This does not mean that ex-Ba’athists do not play a critical role. Many full-time and part-time Iraqi members of the Sunni groups do not have ties to or family linkage to Ba’ath groups or former members of Saddam and the Ba'ath regime. However, it is generally misleading to call them “former regime loyalists (FRLs)” or "former regime" elements (FREs). They are rather Sunni nationalists involved in a struggle for current power. This has allowed the insurgency to broaden its base and establish ties to Islamic groups as well.

The various Sunni insurgent groups do seem to have a significant degree of independence, but it is clear that many cooperate in at least some operations, and that many of the elements with at least some ties to ex-supporters of Saddam’s regime have some degree of central leadership and coordination. US experts talk of informal networks, using tools like the Internet, to coordinate operations and exchange data on tactics, targets, and operations. There is evidence of such exchanges between cells in Iraq and outside groups including those in Syria and Afghanistan. Insurgent groups also use the media to get near-real-time information on what other groups and cells are doing and to find out what tactics produce the maximum political and media impact.

It is unclear how much influence various “Ba’athist” groups have. However, both US and Iraqi Interim Government officials – such as the MNF commander General Casey and Iraqi Defense Minister Hazan Shaalan – believe that Ba’ath leaders in Syria coordinate with at least some of the Ba’ath sympathizers. The office of the Iraqi Prime Minister also called for the arrest of six senior members of the former regime in March 2005:

- Izzat Ibrahim al-Dur: Believed to be the leader of the New Regional Command and New Ba'ath Party.
- Muhammed Younis al-Ahmad: financial facilitator and operational leader of the New Regional Command and New Ba'ath Party.
- Rashid Ta'an Kazim: Central Ba'ath Party Regional Chairman in Al Anbar Province.

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- Abd Al-Baqi Abd Al-Karim Al-Abdallah Al-Sa'adun: Recruiter and financier of terrorist activity in eastern and central Iraq.
- Aham Hasan Kaka al-Ubaydi: A former intelligence officer, and now associated with Ansar Al Islam.
- Fadhi Ibrahim Mahmud Mashadani (aka Abu Huda): Top member of the New Ba'ath Party and a key financier of insurgent and terrorist activity.

Ba'athist elements benefit from the fact that they still have access to some of the former regime's money and they began to organize – at least a crude level – before the invasion began, and have since steadily tightened their organization and purged suspect members. According to one report, they held a major meeting at Al Hasaka in April or May of 2004 to tighten their structure.

Field leaders reportedly include Mohammed Younis al-Ahmad, a former aide to Saddam Hussein, and Ibrahim Sabawi, Hussein’s half brother and a former security director. They also benefit from the fact that some elements of the leadership of the Iraqi 5th Corps are still in Mosul, and Syria has provided a covert sanctuary for at least some Iraq Ba'athist leaders.70

In some cases, US military officials also see evidence of secular Sunni groups, and even Hussein loyalists, cooperating with extreme Islamists. In Mosul, Ba'athists worked with Salafists to attack American troops and derail the election process.71 While the two groups have conflicting visions and aspirations for Iraq’s future – and sometimes feud or even kill each other -- their short-term goals are largely the same: instability and insecurity, breaking up the new Iraqi government and depriving it of popular legitimacy, keeping Iraqi forces from becoming effective, and driving the US and MNC-I forces out of Iraq.

_Guesstimates and the "Numbers Game"

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

US officials kept repeating estimates of total insurgent strengths of 5,000 from roughly the fall of 2003 through the summer of 2004. In October, they issued a range of 12,000 to 16,000 but have never defined how many are hard-core and full time, and how many are part time. According to one outside expert, estimates as divergent as 3,500 to 200,000 were being cited in March. 2000.72

US and Iraqi official experts would be the first to indicate that any such numbers had to be guesstimates. They have also been consistently careful to note that they are uncertain as to whether the numbers are increasing or decreasing with time as a result of US and Iraqi operations versus increases in the political and other tensions that lead Iraqi Arab Sunnis to join the insurgents. There is no evidence that the number of insurgents is

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declining as a result of Coalition and Iraqi attacks to date. US experts stated in the spring of 2005 that they had no evidence of a decline in insurgent numbers in spite of large numbers of kills and captures since the summer of 2004.

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

**The Crime Problem**

At least some elements in the Sunni insurgency also work with criminal elements looting and sabotage campaigns. These clearly involve some native and foreign Sunni Islamist extremists – particularly in areas like kidnappings – but they the alliances “Ba’athists” and “Sunni nationalists” have with criminal groups seem to be much stronger. They also seem to dominate the cases where tribal groups mix insurgents and criminals.

The insurgents and their criminal allies understand the limits of Coalition ability to cover the given areas and the Coalition’s vulnerabilities. Many patterns of Coalition, Iraqi government, and Iraqi forces activity are easily observed and have become predictable. Bases can often be observed and are vulnerable at their entrances to rocket and mortar attacks, and along their supply lines. There are many soft and relatively small isolated facilities.

The crime problem also affects Iraqi popular confidence in the government and its popular legitimacy. Far more Iraqis face day-to-day threats from criminals than from terrorists and insurgents, although there is not area totally free from the risk of attack. If Iraqis are to trust their new government, if insurgents are to be deprived of recruits and proxies, and if Iraqi is to more towards economic development and recovery, the crime problem must be solved at the same time the insurgents and terrorists are being defeated.

This is a key priority in terms of Iraqi force development because it means effective regular policy is critical, and must have the same emphasis as developing military and security forces.

**The Intelligence and Security Problem**

“Ba’athists” and “Sunni nationalists”, and Sunni Islamist extremists, all pose acute security problems for MNC-I and Iraqi forces. As has been touched upon previous chapters, the insurgents have good sources within the Iraqi Interim Government and forces, Iraqi society and sometimes in local US and Coalition commands. This is inevitable, and little can be done to stop it. Iraq simply lacks the resources and data to properly vet all of the people it recruits.

Many Iraqis only work for the government or in the Iraqi forces because they cannot find other employment. They may, in fact, quietly sympathize with the insurgents. Workers in US and government facilities, and in various aid and construction projects, are even harder to vet. Men who do support the government are vulnerable to threats against the families, kidnappings, and actual murders of friends and relatives.

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

Vulnerability is to some extent unavoidable. Aid projects are easy to infiltrate and to target when nearing completion. NGO or contractor headquarters are easily observable targets. Infrastructure and energy facilities are typical targets that have long lines of pipes or wires and many vulnerable links. The media has to be careful and defensive, as do emergency workers and medical teams. Any nation is inevitably filled with soft or vulnerable targets that insurgents can choose at will, and experienced insurgents and terrorists will always target these vulnerabilities.

Inclusion versus Exclusion

In theory, the various Sunni insurgent groups are more capable of paralyzing progress, and fighting a long war of attrition, than of actually defeating an Iraqi government which is dominated by a cohesive Shi’ite majority, and which maintains good relations with the Kurds. Regardless of who is doing the counting, the total for active and passive native Iraqi Sunni insurgents still leaves them a small minority of Iraq's population. Unless the Iraqi government divides of collapses, they cannot bring back Arab Sunni minority rule or the Ba’ath; they cannot regain the level of power, wealth, and influence they once had. They cannot reestablish the form of largely secular rule that existed under Saddam, or reestablish Iraq as a country that most Arabs see as “Sunni.”

Richard Armitage, the former US Deputy Secretary of State, commented on the insurgency and its lack of realistic political goals as follows: “In Algeria, the so-called insurgents, or in Vietnam, the so-called insurgents, they had … a program and a positive view…In Iraq that’s lacking … they only have fear to offer. They only have terror to offer. This is why they’re so brutal in their intimidation.”

At the same time, Sunni insurgent elements are capable and well organized, and may be able to establish themselves as the dominant political and military force within the Sunni community. They can try to present themselves as the only legitimate alternative to the occupation, even if they fail to provide a popular agenda. This means they can survive and endure as long as the government is too weak to occupy the insurgency dominated areas, and as long as the large majority of Sunnis in given areas does not see a clear incentive to joint the government and Iraq's political process.

An understanding of these political and military realities may eventually drive many Sunni insurgents to join into the non-violent political process in Iraq if the Shi'ite and Kurds elements that now dominate the government and political process act to include them and provide suitable incentives.

Such shifts, however, are likely to be slow and limited in scope. Historically, most insurgent groups have a much better vision of what they oppose than what they are for, and they have limited interest in pragmatic realpolitik. Most Sunni groups are still committed to doing everything -- and sometimes anything -- they can to drive the
Coalition out and break up the peaceful political process almost regardless of the damage done to Iraq and to Sunni areas.

Much also depends on just how willing Iraqi Shi’ites and Kurds are to forget the past, not overreact to Sunni Islamist and other attacks designed to divide and splinter the country, and continue to offer Iraqi Sunnis a fair share of wealth and power. Iraq’s president and prime minister have both done this. The search for a Sunni Minister of Defense examined some 10 candidates before choosing Sadoon al-Dulaimi in early May 2003, and was a key factor delaying the creation of a new government. At the same time, other Shi’ites and Kurds have called for the systematic purging of all Sunnis with ties to the Ba’ath, including many in the Iraqi forces, and unexplained raids have taken place on Sunni political groups involved in trying to negotiate with the government.75

At the same time, there are no clear limits to the willingness of at least some Sunni Arab insurgent elements to escalate, even if this means trying to drive the nation into a civil war they cannot win. Some are likely to escalate even further as their situation becomes more threatened. It seems almost certain that many cadres and leaders of such groups and cells cannot be persuaded, only defeated. Some non-Islamist extremist groups will remain alienated almost regardless of what the government and other Sunnis do, and will move on to join the most extreme Islamist movements.

**Islamist Groups and Outside Volunteers**

Other key insurgent elements include Arab and Islamist groups with significant numbers of foreign volunteers, as well as and Iraqi Islamist extremists, like the one led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. It is unlikely that such groups make up more 10% of the insurgent force, and may make up around 5%, but in some ways they are the most dangerous element in the insurgency since they seem to be deliberately trying to provoke a civil war between Iraq's Arab Sunnis and its Arab Shi’ites, Kurds, and other minorities.

*The US State Department Assessment of Zarqawi*

The US State Department Country Reports on Terrorism, described the overall level of terrorist activity in Iraq at the end of 2004, and the role of Islamist groups, as follows:76

Iraq remains the central battleground in the global war on terrorism. Former regime elements as well as foreign fighters and Islamic extremists continued to conduct terrorist attacks against civilians and non-combatants. These elements also conducted numerous insurgent attacks against Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces, which often had devastating effects on Iraqi civilians and significantly damaged the country’s economic infrastructure.

…Jordanian-born Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi and his organization emerged in 2004 to play a leading role in terrorist activities in Iraq. In October, the US Government designated Zarqawi’s group, Jama’at al Tawhid wa’al-Jihad, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). In December, the designation was amended to include the group’s new name Tanzim Qa’idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (or “The al-Qa’ida Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers”) and other aliases following the “merger” between Zarqawi and Usama bin Ladin’s al-Qa’ida organization. Zarqawi announced the merger in October, and in December, bin Ladin endorsed Zarqawi as his official emissary in Iraq. Zarqawi’s group claimed credit for a number of attacks targeting Coalition and Iraqi forces, as well as civilians, including the October massacre of 49 unarmed, out-of-uniform Iraqi National
Guard recruits. Attacks that killed civilians include the March 2004 bombing of the Mount Lebanon Hotel, killing seven and injuring over 30, and a December 24 suicide bombing using a fuel tanker that killed nine and wounded 19 in the al-Mansur district of Baghdad.

In February 2004, Zarqawi called for a “sectarian war” in Iraq. He and his organization sought to create a rift between Shi’a and Sunnis through several large terror attacks against Iraqi Shi’a. In March 2004, Zarqawi claimed credit for simultaneous bomb attacks in Baghdad and Karbala that killed over 180 pilgrims as they celebrated the Shi’a festival of Ashura. In December, Zarqawi also claimed credit for a suicide attack at the offices of Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), one of Iraq’s largest Shi’a parties, which killed 15 and wounded over 50.

Zarqawi has denied responsibility for another significant attack that same month in Karbala and Najaf, two of Shi’a Islam’s most holy cities, which killed Iraqi civilians and wounded more than 120. Terrorists operating in Iraq used kidnapping and targeted assassinations to intimidate Iraqis and third-country nationals working in Iraq as civilian contractors. Nearly 60 noncombatant Americans died in terrorist incidents in Iraq in 2004. Other American noncombatants were killed in attacks on coalition military facilities or convoys. In June, Zarqawi claimed credit for the car bomb that killed the chairman of the Coalition-appointed Iraqi Governing Council. In April, an American civilian was kidnapped and later beheaded. One month later, a video of his beheading was posted on an al-Qa’ida-associated website. Analysts believe that Zarqawi himself killed the American as well as a Korean hostage, kidnapped in June. Zarqawi took direct credit for the September kidnapping and murder of two American civilians and later their British engineer co-worker, and the October murder of a Japanese citizen.

In August, the Kurdish terrorist group Ansar al-Sunna claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and killing of 12 Nepalese construction workers, followed by the murder of two Turkish citizens in September. Many other foreign civilians have been kidnapped. Some have been killed, others released, some remain in their kidnappers’ hands, and the fate of others, such as the director of CARE, is unknown.

Other terrorist groups were active in Iraq. Ansar al-Sunna, believed to be an offshoot of the Ansar al-Islam group founded in Iraq in September 2001, first came to be known in April 2003 after issuing a statement on the Internet. In February 2004, Ansar al-Sunna claimed responsibility for bomb attacks on the offices of two Kurdish political parties in Irbil, which killed 109 Iraqi civilians. The Islamic Army in Iraq has also claimed responsibility for terrorist actions. Approximately 3,800 disarmed persons remained resident at the former Mujahedin-e Khalq (MeK) military base at Camp Ashraf; the MeK is a designated US Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). More than 400 members renounced membership in the organization in 2004. Forty-one additional defectors elected to return to Iran, and another two hundred were awaiting ICRC assistance for voluntary repatriation to Iran at the end of the year. PKK/KADEK/Kongra Gel, a designated foreign terrorist group, maintains an estimated 3,000 to 3,500 armed militants in northern Iraq, according to Turkish Government sources and NGOs. In the summer of 2004, PKK/KADEK/Kongra Gel renounced its self-proclaimed cease-fire and threatened to renew its separatist struggle in both Turkey’s Southeast and urban centers. Turkish press subsequently reported multiple incidents in the Southeast of PKK/KADEK/Kongra Gel terrorist actions or clashes between Turkish security forces and PKK/KADEK/Kongra Gel militants.
The State Department report also provided a more detailed description of the role of Ansar al-Islam (AI) (a.k.a. Ansar al-Sunnah Partisans of Islam, Helpers of Islam, Kurdish Taliban).\textsuperscript{77}

Ansar al-Islam (AI) is a radical Islamist group of Iraqi Kurds and Arabs who have vowed to establish an independent Islamic state in Iraq. The group was formed in December 2001. In the fall of 2003, a statement was issued calling all jihadists in Iraq to unite under the name Ansar al-Sunnah (AS). Since that time, it is likely that AI has posted all claims of attack under the name AS. AI is closely allied with al-Qa’ida and Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi’s group, Tanzim Qa’idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (QJBR) in Iraq. Some members of AI trained in al-Qa’ida camps in Afghanistan, and the group provided safe haven to al-Qa’ida fighters before Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Since OIF, AI has become one of the leading groups engaged in anti-Coalition attacks in Iraq and has developed a robust propaganda campaign.

AI continues to conduct attacks against Coalition forces, Iraqi Government officials and security forces, and ethnic Iraqi groups and political parties. AI members have been implicated in assassinations and assassination attempts against Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) officials and Coalition forces, and also work closely with both al-Qa’ida operatives and associates in QJBR. AI has also claimed responsibility for many high profile attacks, including the simultaneous suicide bombings of the PUK and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) party offices in Ibril on February 1, 2004, and the bombing of the US military dining facility in Mosul on December 21, 2004.

Its strength is approximately 500 to 1,000 members, its location and area of operation is primarily central and northern Iraq. The group receives funding, training, equipment, and combat support from al-Qa’ida, QJBR, and other international jihadist backers throughout the world. AI also has operational and logistic support cells in Europe.

\textbf{Zarqawi Operations in 2005}

In the spring of 2005, US officials estimated that there might be fewer than 1,000 foreign fighters in Iraq or as many as 2,000. Many felt the number flowing in across the Syrian border and other borders was so high the total was rapidly increasing.\textsuperscript{78} A few press estimates went as high as 10,000 before the fighting in Fallujah.

It seems more likely that Zarqawi’s movement now consists of a series of cells, with a limited central organization. They probably total less than 2,000 full and part time men -- including both Iraqis and foreigners -- and probably with a core strength of no more than several hundred.

Zarqawi does seem to have been able to recruit more and more outside volunteers after the fighting in Fallujah, and substantially more volunteers for suicide bombing after the January 30, 2005 elections brought a Shi’ite and Kurdish dominated government to power. It is not clear whether this is sharply strengthening his movement, or simply helped to cope with the constant attrition caused by MNC-I and Iraqi attacks. The problem of infiltration, however, was serious enough to make improving border security a top Coalition and Iraqi government priority in January and February 2005, and a factor in a major Marine offensive in the Syrian border area in May.\textsuperscript{79}

While US claims about the importance of the killings and captures of Zarqawi’s senior lieutenants often seem exaggerated – as do claims to have nearly killed or captured Zarqawi – there have been many real successes. On January 10, 2005, then Prime Minister Allawi announced that Izz al-Din Al- Majid, a chief Zarqawi financier, was arrested in Fallujah in early December 2004. Al Majid had more than $35 million in his
In any case, the importance of such Islamist extremist elements is scarcely determined by their numbers. They tend to conduct the bloodiest attacks, do most to try to divide Iraq along ethnic and sectarian lines, and create a series of high profile bombings and atrocities that captures media and public attention both inside and outside Iraq. For example, some 400 people were killed in suicide bombings in Iraq during the first two weeks of May 2005, many in bombing by Sunni extremist groups clearly targeting Shi'ites and Kurds, and doing so during a key period of transition to the new government elected on January 30th.

Most of the suicide bombers in Iraq seem to have been foreign jihadists recruited by Islamic extremist movements and Islamists in other countries, and sent to Iraq with the goal of seeking "Islamic" martyrdom. Islamist extremist web sites have become filled with the claimed biographies of such martyrs. 80 Experts differ over just how many such suicide bombers exist and where they come from. Reuven Paz calculated in March 2005 that some 200 suicide bombers could be documented and that 154 had been killed in the previous six months/ He estimated that 61% were Saudi, and 25% were Iraqi, Kuwaiti, and Syrian. Nawaf Obaid found records of 47 Saudi suicide bombers in Saudi media and records in May 2005, and estimated the total number of Saudi insurgents as in the hundred. Evan F. Kohlmann found 235 suicide bombers named on web sites since the summer of 2005, and estimated that more than 50% were Saudi.81 Whatever the numbers of such recruits may be, Saudi officials and counterterrorist experts are deeply concerned about the fact that some clerics and Islamic organizations recruit young Saudis for Islamist extremist organizations, and infiltrate them through countries like Syria into Iraq. Such efforts are scattered and individual, rather than tied to movements like Al Qa’ida in visible ways, and can bypass the Saudi counterterrorist
structure, which is focused on internal security. They do, however, end up using young Saudis as tools in suicide bombings, have involved infiltrations across the Saudi border, and present the problem of a whole new generation of young Saudis being trained as Islamic extremists and Jihadists outside the country. The problem is also scarcely unique to Saudi Arabia, and presents the same problem to other Sunni Islamic countries.

Many of the lower level volunteers are not trained or skilled fighters. They come from a wide range of countries, often with little or no training, and the overwhelming majority has only a limited history of affiliation with any organized Islamist or extremist group. The actual movements, however, do have a large percentage of Iraqi and foreign fighters that considerably better organized, well armed, and capable of effective ambushes and attacks. They have shown they can fight hard, and are sometimes willing to stand and die in ways that force MNC-I and Iraqi troops into intense firefights and clashes.

**Zarqawi and “Weapons of Mass Media”**

Zarqawi’s movement has been extremely effective at striking at targets with high media and political impact, particularly in the form of suicide bombings and beheadings. Although a few of Zarqawi’s deputies were apprehended and the Syrians delivered Saddam Hussein’s brother-in-law, much of the group's leadership has survived US and Iraqi assaults. US officials believe the insurgent leadership is so well informed of its intelligence network that it can stay ahead of US and Iraqi forces, fleeing towns before Coalition forces arrive and slipping in and out of the country.

Ironically, jihadist websites often list complaints detailing a lack of press coverage for some of their attacks. The militant groups have largely been viewed as very successful manipulators of Arab and Western media outlets, able to tailor their attacks for maximum media coverage and psychological effect. The proliferation of groups could be an indication that there has developed competition for press coverage, media exhaustion, or of a reduced capacity of the insurgents to launch attacks that grab headlines.

Zarqawi’s Al Qa’ida in Mesopotamia group started an online Internet magazine entitled Zurwat al Sanam, in an effort to wage a more effective propaganda and recruiting campaign. This effort has been mirrored by other insurgent groups on the Web, and some analysts believe that it is a defensive tactic to counter the perceived inroads made by the January 30th elections and the capture of important terrorist lieutenants in the months that followed.

**Zarqawi Ties to Bin Laden and Outside Sunni Islamist Groups**

The Zarqawi group has strengthened its ties to outside terrorist groups. In October 2004, Zarqawi publicly pledged allegiance to Bin Laden and changed the name of his organization from Al Tawhid wal Jihad (Unity and Holy War) to Al Qa’ida in the Land of the Two Rivers. While there is no evidence that the two men have ever met or even directly communicated, Bin Laden issued a statement in December 2004 confirming Zarqawi as the “Emir” of Al Qa’ida in Iraq.

Movements like the Army of Ansar al-Sunna, which claimed responsibility for the attack on the US mess tent in Mosul in December 2004 and for many other suicide attacks, seem to have a mix of links to Zarqawi and possibly Al Qa’ida. They seem to be largely
Iraqi, but their mix of Sunnis and Kurds is uncertain, as is the extent to which the group and its cells are at least partly a legacy of Ansar al-Islam – an active Islamist group that reportedly provided sanctuary for Zarqawi before the war. In November 2004, Ansar al-Sunna claimed that it had twice collaborated with Zarqawi’s group and another group known as the Islamic Army in Iraq.

In February 2005, a leaked US intelligence memo indicated that an intercepted communication, reportedly from bin Laden to Zarqawi, encouraged Iraqi insurgents to attack the American homeland. Even so, US intelligence analysts view bin Laden and Zarqawi as separate operators, and it remains unclear as to what – if any – organizational or financial support Bin Laden provides Zarqawi’s organization.

Another “Zarqawi letter,” written on April 27, 2005 by one of his associates (Abu Asim al Qusayami al Yemeni), seemed to reflect Zarqawi’s complaints about the failure of some of his volunteers to martyr themselves, and by typical of the kind of complaints and calls for more support that he has used both to try to lever more support from Bin Laden and gain more support from Arabs outside Iraq.

Some analysts believe that Bin Laden made a strategic error by declaring Zarqawi “emir.” Iraqis are deeply distrustful of outsiders and, in particular, neighbors in the region. Bin Laden’s declaration could be seen by Iraqis in highly nationalistic terms as a Saudi ordering a Jordanian to kill Iraqis. These analysts believe that this will motivate those Iraqis that were previously unsure of whether to offer their support to the elected government.

Zarqawi also appears to have tried to remake his organization’s reputation to reduce tensions with Iraqi Sunnis, and possibly Iraqi Shi’ites as well. The Website pronouncements claimed that the group had tried to avoid Muslim casualties with the notable exception being the Iraq military and security forces. They quickly denounced attacks on civilians like the massive suicide car bombing in Hilla in March 2005. Previously, Zarqawi had advocated attacks on Shi’ites whom he viewed as apostates. It is unclear such efforts had much impact. It was clear that many bloody suicide bombins and other attacks had support from elements loyal to Zarqawi, and that many were sectarian attacks on Shi’ites or ethnic attacks on Kurds. It is now unclear that any Shi’ite element, including many of Sadr’s supporters, are willing to cooperate with such Sunni extremist groups.

At the same time, a tape attributed to Zarqawi in May 2005, was considerably less reticent. In the one hour and 14 minute tape, explained why Muslim civilians were being killed in his attacks and justified on the basis of research by “Abu Abdullah al Muhajer”. He claimed that many operations were cancelled because they were going to kill large numbers of Muslims, but mistakes were made and “we have no choice…It’s impossible to fight the infidels without killing some Muslims.” He stated that Muslims were killed in 9/11, Riyadh, Nairobi, Tanzania, and if these were considered illegitimate then it would mean stopping jihad in every place.

He also said that Iraq’s geography made a direct combat with the enemy difficult, and the only way was to intensify combat was suicide operations. He compared Iraq to...
Afghanistan with its mountains, and to Chechnya where there were woods, and said it was easier for the ‘mujaheddin” to have a safe place to hide and plan after fighting with the enemy. He stated that it was difficult for the “mujaheddin” to move in Iraq because of the checkpoints and the US bases, therefore suicide operations are easy to carry out and to force the enemy to leave the cities to places where it would be easier to shoot them. “These operations are our weapon...If we stop them jihad will be weaker…If the enemy gets full control of Baghdad it will implement its plan and control the whole nation. The whole world saw what they did in Abu Ghraib, Camp Bucca and prisons in Qut, Najaf and Karbalaa…that’s when they did not have full control, so what would happen if they do?"

He heavily attacked Iraq’s Shi’ites and Shiites in general. He said his group never attacked other sects in Iraq who are not considered Muslims, but fought the Shiites because they assist the enemy and are traitors. The Shiites pretend they care about civilian casualties...he mentioned operations carried out by Failaq Badr (with dates, locations, numbers of people killed) during the 1980s and 90s. He also claimed there was a plan to eliminate the Sunnis in Iraq, and that Sunni mosques were being handed over to Shiites and that Sunni clerics, teachers, doctors and experts are being killed. He claimed that Sunni women were being kidnapped and that Shiite police participated in raping women at Abu Ghraib.

He claimed there were problems at Iraqi government-run prisons in Iraq, including one in Qut which he said being run by Iranian intelligence and a prison in Hilla run by a Shiite major general called Qays, who “cuts Muslims’ bodies and rapes women”. He mentions a specific story where Qays threatened to rape the wife of one of the fighters. (evidently Major General Qays Hamza, chief of al Hillah police) He says his fighters tried to kill Qays but he survived. (there was a web statement dated March 30th about a suicide bombing in Hilla that targeted major general Qays).93

Zarqawi and Syria

Experts views differ as to how much of Zarqawi’s operations have taken place in Syria and with Syrian tolerance. There are reports that Zarqawi and top lieutenants met in Syria in the spring of 2005, but these have not been confirmed by US officials. US experts do believe, however, that a substantial number of recruits pass through Syria, and with Syrian tolerance or deliberate indifference – if not active support.94

Sunni Iraqi Nationalist versus Sunni Islamic Extremist, or De Facto Cooperation?

Opinions differ sharply as to whether the Sunni elements of insurgency are dividing or coalescing. Many analysts suggest that the insurgent coalition spans beyond Iraq’s Sunni tribal structure – that Ba’athists and their former adversaries, such as the Salafists and the Kurds, are finding a common cause with foreign fighters.95 Yet, the are also reports of fighting between the more secular native Sunni insurgents and Sunni Islamic extremists and some executions of such extremists by the more secular groups. The level of communication and cooperation between the various movements remains unclear.
This inability to characterize many Islamist movements, and the fact that successful suicide bombings and other attacks can have a major political and media impact even if they serve little clear military purpose, illustrates the fact that outside threats must be measured in terms of effectiveness and not numbers. In practice, the insurgents can choose the place and time of the attack, focus on targets with key political and media impact, and have an effect even if they fail to achieve the purpose of their attack but create visible explosions or kill innocent civilians.

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

Like the Iraqi Sunni Arab Insurgents, outside groups have also improved their ability to take advantage of the fact that media coverage of the fighting, particularly by Arab satellite television, provides a real time picture of what tactics and weapons work, what strikes have most media and political impact, and often what targets are vulnerable. This “Al Jazeera Effect” substitutes for many elements of a C4I system. At the same time, confronting this confusing array of threats is made more difficult without general Iraqi loyalty and stand-alone Iraqi forces.

These groups also pose a special threat because they have no clear boundaries that limit them to Iraq, and so few restraints and limits on the kinds of violence they use. In their eyes, Iraq is a theater of operation for far broader causes. Their core beliefs are based on a vision of Sunni Islam that rejects Shi’ites and even rejects Sunnis that dissent from the extremists.

So far, such groups have generally been careful to avoid any open claims to a split with Iraqis Shi’ites, and some cooperated with Sadr and his militia. They have, however, carried out mass attacks and bombings on Shi’ites, and they have repeatedly shown that they place few -- if any -- limits on the means of violence against those they regard as enemies of Islam. If anything, they ultimately gain the most if the Sunni and Shi’ite worlds divide, if Iraq becomes the continuing scene of violence between the US and Arabs, if US forces remain tied down, and if their actions create as much regional instability as possible.

This helps explain why Sunni insurgent movements, and particularly Islamist extremists, made Iraq’s political process a primary target before and after the January 30, 2005 elections. Insurgents feared that a relatively secure and successful election would cement Shi’ite dominance in Iraq and would signal the demise of both the Islamist and Ba’athist visions for the future of Iraq.

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On December 29, 2004, Ansar al-Sunna declared, “All polling stations and those in them will be targets for our brave soldiers.” Similarly, the Islamic Army in Iraq warned in mid-January 2005, “Do not allow polling stations in your neighborhood because they put your lives in danger. Do not also interfere with the employees who work in these voting centers, as they will be killed. Keep away from these places as they will be attacked.” On January 23, 2005, Zarqawi released an audiotape saying, “We have declared an all-out war on this evil principle of democracy and those who follow this wrong ideology.”

Another disturbing aspect of this extremism is the fact that it increasingly accuses the US of "dehumanizing" Muslims, Arabs, and Iraqis by its invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and actions in the war on terrorism. It cites episodes like the very real American abuses of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib, and US strategic writing on the use of precision weapons and the use of specialized nuclear weapons like "bunker busters." The corollary of this argument is that Islamic extremists are justified, in turn, in "dehumanizing" Americans and all of their allies, and using tactics like high casualty attacks like suicide bombings and the use of chemical and biological weapons. This again ignores all of the core teaching of Islam to justify virtually any act of violence, no matter how extreme.

**The Uncertain Status of the Shi’ites**

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

Moqtada al-Sadr now seems to be committed to participating in Iraq’s political process. His Mehdi (Mahdi) Army did, however, present a serious threat to Coalition and government forces in Najaf, in Sadr City in Baghdad, and in other Shi’ite areas in the south during much of the summer and early fall of 2004. US officials indicated that US forces faced up to 160 attacks per week in Sadr City between August and September 2004 of varying severity.

The various battles and political compromises that led Sadr to turn away from armed struggle in the late fall and early winter of 2004 have changed this situation significantly. US officials indicated that the number of attacks had dropped significantly to between zero and five a week in early 2005, and they remained at this level through May 2005.

General John Abizaid remarked in March 2005, however, “we have not seen the end of Muqtada Sadr’s challenge.” Although Iraqi government forces have been able to move in to the area, Sadr’s movement still controls Sadr City in Baghdad as much as the government does, and remains active in poorer Shi’ite areas throughout the country.

Sadr's supporters sponsored demonstrations calling for US forces to leave Iraq in April 2005, and top Sadr aides in his Independent National Bloc issued warnings to Ibrahim Jafari, then the prime minister designate, that he must pay more attention to these demands or that the Sadr faction might leave the United Iraqi Alliance and become an active part of the opposition. The group also demanded the release of some 200 Sadr activities arrested in earlier fight and that all criminal charges against Sadr be dropped.
Sadr was able to exploit the political weakness and divisions of other Shi’ite movements in the south and their lack of ability to govern, plus the fact other hard-line Islamist movements won significant numbers of seats in local governments in key areas like Basra. Sadr's Council for Vic and Virtue launched at least one attack on secular students in Basra for having a mixed picnic.

It was also clear in that Sadr was reviving the Mehdi (Mahdi) Army, which was again beginning to be openly active in parts of Southern Iraq such as Basra, Amarah, and Nasiriyah, and still had cells in Najaf and Kut as well. While some US official sources stated the was relatively weak, it began to hold parades again, and while only limited numbers of arms were displayed, it was clear that such weapons were still available in the places where they had been hidden during the fighting the previous year.

By the late spring of 2005, the Mehdi (Mahdi) Army seemed to be the largest independent force in Basra, played a major role in policing Amarah, and had effectively struck a bargain with the government police in Nasiriyah that allowed it to play a major role. Unlike most militias, it also had the active participation of Shi’ite clergy, most "activists" that strongly supported Sadr. One reason for their rebirth was the lack of effective action by the government. For example, the police in government police in Nasiriyah had 5,500 men, but was 2,500 men short of its goal.

The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and the faction of Abdul Aziz al-Hakim also still have large militia elements. Al Dawa, the Badr Corps, and the Iraqi Hezbollah also remain potential security problems.

Both Iraq’s Sunni interim president, Ghazi al-Yahwar, and King Abdullah of Jordan have both sounded warnings about the risks of Shi’ite dominance in the January 30, 2005 elections and possible Iranian influence. These warnings may well be exaggerated. Iraqi Shi’ites are Iraqi nationalists, not tools of Iran, and neither Iraqi Shi’ite clerics – aside from the Sadr faction – nor most of the Shi’ite population support a clerical role in politics. Yet, no one can predict how stable Iraq’s political structure will be in spite of the January 30, 2005 election.

While the election turnout initially dealt an apparent blow to the Sunni insurrection, much of the post-election insurgent activity has directly targeted Shi’ite clergy and political leaders, Shi’ite civilians, and Shi’ite institutions, and attacks have been targeted for key Shi'ite holidays like the February 19th Ashura holiday. While most Shi’ite leaders had strongly resisted any calls for reprisals against Sunnis, Shi’ites have called for such action, and there do seem to have been Shi’ite killings of Sunni clergy and civilians.

Shi’ite splits are possible, as are sectarian and ethnic splits. Moreover, few Shi’ites can forget that Sadr is believed to have been responsible for the assassination of Al Khoi right after the fall of Saddam Hussein and for the killing of Muhammad Bakr al-Hakim, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim’s brother, in August 2003.

Shi’ite divisions could put new burdens on Iraq’s forces, and/or potentially paralyze or divide key elements of the government. It is not clear that Sadr and other Shi’ite elements will hold together, or that other splits will not occur during 2005. Iraq must deal with forging and approving a constitution and with moving towards general elections at the

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end of the year without any clear picture of what political leaders, political parties, and power sharing arrangements will emerge in the process.

The risk also exists that the Kurds and Shi'ites might split in ways that could lead civil conflict or that Shi'ite politics may begin to react far more violently to Sunni insurgent bombings and attacks, and striking back at the Sunnis rather than seeking to include them. Shi'ite political leaders have generally been careful to avoid this so far, but the preaching in mosques has become more polarized, and popular tension is growing. Attacks like the bombings in Karbala and Najaf on December 20, 2004 have been followed up by many similar anti-Shi'ite attacks since the elections. At least some Sunni Arab and Islamist extremist insurgents are certain to continue to try to provoke sectarian Sunni versus Shi'ite rift using any means possible, no matter how bloody and violent.

**The Kurds and Other Minorities**

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

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

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

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

There are serious tensions between the Kurd, the Turcomans, and Assyrian Christians, as well as between Kurds and Arabs. At a local level, there are many small tribal elements as well as numerous “bodyguards,” and long histories of tensions and feuds. Even if Iraq never divides along national fracture lines, some form of regional or local violence is all too possible.

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Furthermore, the problems of native Kurds are compounded by the rebirth of Kurdish insurgency in Turkey, and acute Turkish pressure on the Iraqi government, Iraqi Kurds, and MNC-I to both deny Turkish Kurdish insurgents a sanctuary, and set any example that would encourage Kurdish separatism in Turkey. The Turkish Kurdish Worker Party (PKK) is a movement that has often used northern Iraq as a sanctuary, and which led to several major division-sized Turkish military movements into the area under Saddam Hussein. While estimates are uncertain, some 6,000 PKK forces seemed to be in Iraq in the spring of 2005, with another 2,000 across the border. These same factors help explain why Turkey has actively supported Iraq’s small Turcoman minority in its power struggles with Iraq’s Kurds.

**The Role of Crime and Criminals**

The vast majority of Iraqi criminals have limited or no ties to the insurgents, although some clearly are “for hire” in terms of what they target or in being willing to take pay for sabotage or acts of violence that help create a climate of violence in given areas. Many US and Iraqi intelligence officers do believe, however, that some criminal networks are heavily under the influence of various former regime elements or are dominated by them, and that some elements of organized crime do help the insurgency. Furthermore, at least some Shi’ite criminal groups and vendettas use the insurgency or Sunnis as a cover for their activities.

Like most aspects of the insurgency, it is difficult to know the strength of such elements and the extent to which they are and are not tied to insurgent groups. The collapse of Saddam’s regime, massive unemployment, the disbanding of a wide range of military and security elements, the destruction of Iraq’s military industries, de-Ba’athification, and sheer opportunism have all combined to make organized and violent crime an endemic part of Iraqi society even in many areas where the insurgents have little real strength. They also are a powerful force behind local vigilante and militia efforts that at least indirectly challenge the legitimacy of the central government.

Crime also has the impact of sabotage even when there is not intend deliberate to support the insurgency. It adds to the image of ineffective governance by acts like the impact of wire and equipment thefts on the ability to distribute electric power. It deprives the government of oil revenues through oil thefts, and adds to Iraq’s fuel problems by the endemic theft of gasoline.

While most kidnappings are almost certainly decoupled from any political motive, some may have been done for hire at the bidding of various insurgent groups. At best, the end result is a climate of cumulative violence, with some elements of Sunni versus Shi’ite tension. At worst, crime vastly compounds the government and Coalitions security problems, offers insurgent groups yet another kind of informal network, helps block investment and development, compounds the problem of hiring security forces, and undermines legitimacy.

Again, the fact that the Ministry of Interior stopped reporting meaningful crime statistics in mid-2004 makes trend analysis almost impossible. The same is true of the casualties involved. The Ministry of Health reported in the spring of 2005 that some 5,158 Iraqis
had died from all forms of criminal and insurgent activities during the last six months of 2004, but most experts felt such reporting might well be only about half the real total. The Baghdad Central Morgue counted 8,035 deaths from unnatural causes in Baghdad alone in 2004, a major increase from 6,012 in 2003 and a figure that compared with 1,800 in 2002 -- the last year of Saddam Hussein. The morgue reported that 60% of those killed were killed by gunshot wounds and were unrelated to the insurgency, and were largely a combination of crime, tribal vendettas, vengeance killings, and mercenary kidnappings.

The Problem of Syria

Foreign countries also play a role. Both senior US and Iraqi officials feel that Syria may overtly agree to try to halt any support of the insurgency through Syria, but allows Islamic extremist groups to recruit young men, have them come to Syria, and then cross the border into Iraq – where substantial numbers have become suicide bombers. They also feel Syria has allowed senior ex-Ba’athist cadres to operate from Syria, helping to direct the Sunni insurgency. These seem to include top level officials under Saddam Hussein such as Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, one of Saddam’s Vice Presidents.

General George Casey, the commander of the MNF, is a US officer who has been careful not to exaggerate the threat of foreign interference. Nevertheless, Casey has warned that Syria has allowed Iraqi supporters of Saddam Hussein to provide money, supplies, and direction to Sunni insurgents, and continues to be a serious source of infiltration by foreign volunteers. General Casey highlighted Syria’s complicity in this regard when testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 8, 2005. He stated:

There are former regime leaders who come and go from Syria, who operate out of Syria, and they do planning, and they provide resources to the insurgency in Iraq. I have no hard evidence that the Syrian government is actually complicit with those people, but we certainly have evidence that people at low levels with the Syrian government know that they’re there and what they’re up to.

The US State Department spokesman described Syria’s role as follows in the late spring of 2005:

I think that what we've seen, again, are some efforts, but it certainly isn't enough. We do believe the Syrians can do more. We do believe there's more they can do along the border to tighten controls.

We do believe that there's more that they can do to deal with the regime elements that are operating out of Syria itself and are supporting or encouraging the insurgents there.

And so, again, it's not simply a matter of them not being able to take the actions, at least from our perspective. Part of it is an unwillingness to take the actions that we know are necessary and they know are necessary.

In late February 2005, the Baghdad television station al-Iraqiya aired taped confessions of several alleged insurgents who were captured in Iraq. Many of the men, from Sudan, Egypt and Iraq, claimed that they were trained in Syria – at least three believed that they were trained, controlled and paid by Syrian intelligence officials. They were instructed to kidnap, behead and assassinate Iraqi security forces. The majority of the men expressed remorse for their actions and said they were driven almost exclusive by monetary rewards; there was almost no mention of religious or nationalistic motivation.
Syria has repeatedly emphatically denies that it supports or harbors any persons involved in the insurgency in Iraq. After months of American pressure and accusations, however, Syrian authorities delivered a group suspected of supporting the insurgency from Syria to Iraqi officials in February 2005. Among the captives handed over was Sabawi Ibrahim Hassan, Saddam Hussein’s half-brother and a leading financier for the insurgency.

There have also been reports that Zarqawi obtains most of his new young volunteers through Syria, and that they are recruited and transited in ways that have to be known to Syrian intelligence. There have also been media reports that Zarqawi’s top lieutenants, and perhaps Zarqawi himself, have met in Syria for planning sessions.112

US officials and commanders acknowledge that Syria has made some efforts to improve its border security and reduce infiltration. Syria faces problems because its border forces are relatively weak, they lack training and equipment, and much of the border is only demarcated by an earthen berm. Iraq also has comparatively few border posts and many isolated posts have been attacked and some have been destroyed or abandoned.113 A major effort is underway to rebuild them and strengthen the Iraqi border forces, but it so far has made limited progress, and the morale and effectiveness of these border forces is often still low.

The border area around Huasaybah (Qusaybah) in Iraq has long been a center smuggling and criminal activity. Two Muslim tribes in the area – the Mahalowis and Salmanis – have long controlled to illegal trade across the border and seem to permit insurgent activity with at least Syrian tolerance. The Iraqi government also proved unable to secure the area. A 400 man Iraqi unit sent in to try to secure Huasaybah in March 2000 virtually collapsed and was forced to hide out in a local phosphate plant.114

The entire route along the Euphrates from Hit and Haditha to Ubaydi, Qaim, Karbilah, Qusaybah, and Abu Kamal in Syria has also been a center and partial sanctuary for insurgent forces and a conduit for volunteers and supplies coming in from Syria. By the spring of 2005 it became so serious a center for some of the insurgents who fled from the fighting in Ramadi and Fallujah that the US Marine Corps launched its largest offensive since Fallujah against insurgent forces in the area, sometimes meeting stiff resistance from both Iraqi Sunni insurgents and Sunni Islamic extremist groups.115

At the same time, the insurgents do not need major shipments of arms, virtually anyone can go in and out moving money and small critical supplies, and volunteers can simply enter as ordinary visitors without equipment. US Customs and Border Protection officers are working to train their Iraqi counterparts and have had moderate success in detaining potential insurgents and arms suppliers, and in breaking up smuggling rings. Another US CBP team of officers and border agents was deployed in Iraq on February 1, 2005, to assist further in the training of Iraqis.

This may help, but Iraq’s border security forces have so far been some of its most ineffective units. Many of its new forts are abandoned, and other units that have remained exhibit minimal activity. Yet, even if Iraq’s border forces were ready and its neighbors actively helped, border security would still be a problem.
This illustrates a general problem for both Iraq and its neighbors. Iraq’s borders total 3,650 kilometers in length. Its border with Iran is 1,458 kilometers, with Jordan 181 kilometers, with Kuwait 240 kilometers, with Saudi Arabia 814 kilometers, with Syria 605 kilometers, and with Turkey 352 kilometers. Most of these borders are desert, desolate territory, easily navigable water barriers, or mountains. Even Iraq’s small 58-kilometer coastline is in an area with considerable small craft and shipping traffic and presents security problems.

It is also important to note that Syria plays a role in dealing with some of Iraq’s Shi’ites as well as its Sunnis. While it may tolerate and encourage former Iraqi Ba’thist operations in Syria, and transit by Islamist extremists, Syria also maintains ties to elements of formerly Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi’ite groups like the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), Al-Da’wa and Al-Da’wa - Tanzim al-Iraq that it first developed during the Iran-Iraq War. Syria has an Alawite-led regime that is more Shi’ite than Sunni, and while it sees its support of Sunni insurgents as a way of weakening the potential threat from a US presence in Syria, it also maintains ties to Shi’ite factions as well.

**The Problem of Iran**

The role Iran plays in the Iraqi insurgency is highly controversial. Iran certainly has an active presence in Iraq and has ties to several key Shi’ite political parties. These include key elements the Shiite-based United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) that emerged as Iraq's most important political coalition in the January 2005 elections: the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), Al-Da'wa and Al-Da'wa - Tanzim al-Iraq. The Revolutionary Guard and Iranian intelligence have been active in southern Iraq since the early 1980s, as well as other areas. They almost certainly have a network of active agents in Iraq at present.

Prime Minister Allawi repeatedly expressed his concern over Iran’s actions during 2004 and early 2005, as did other senior officials in the Interim Iraqi Government. Some senior Iraqi Interim Government officials clearly see Iran as a direct and immediate threat.

Iraqi interim Defence Minister Hazem Sha'alan claimed in July 2004 that Iran remained his country's "first enemy", supporting "terrorism and bringing enemies into Iraq...I've seen clear interference in Iraqi issues by Iran...Iran interferes in order to kill democracy". A few months later Sha'alan -- a secular Shiite who is one of Iran's most outspoken critics in Iraq -- added that the Iranians "are fighting us because we want to build freedom and democracy, and they want to build an Islamic dictatorship and have turbaned clerics to rule in Iraq".116 Sha'alan made the following points in a briefing on September 22, 2004:

- Iranian intervention and support of Sadr pose major threats; and some infiltration has taken place across the Syria border.
- Iran is behind Sadr. It uses Iranian pilgrims and sends arms, money, and drugs across border
- Iraq must have strong border defence forces. “If doors and windows are empty, no amount of cleaning will ever get rid of the dust.”

In a recent study of Iran's role in Iraq, the International Crisis Group noted that an Iranian cleric and close associate of Ayatollah Sistani warned in November 2004 that: "Iran's policy in Iraq is 100 per cent wrong. In trying to keep the Americans busy they have furthered the
suffering of ordinary Iraqis….We are not asking them to help the Americans, but what they are doing is not in the interests of the Iraqi people; it is making things worse. We [Iranians] have lost the trust of the Iraqi people [Mardom-e Aragh az dast dadeem].

King Abdullah of Jordan has made a wide range of charges about Iranian interference in Iraq and went so far as to charge during the period before the Iraqi election that Iran was attempting to rig Iraq’s election with up to 1,000,000 false registrations. He has since talked about the risk of an Iraqi-Syrian-Lebanese "axis" or "crescent."

In an unusual interview aired on Iraqi TV on January 14, 2005, Muayed Al-Nasseri, commander of Saddam Hussein’s “Army of Muhammad,” claimed that his group regularly received arms and money from both Syria and Iran. “Many factions of the resistance are receiving aid from the neighboring countries,” he said. “We got aid primarily from Iran.”

It should be noted, however, that Iran has repeatedly denied these charges most US and Iraqi officials view claims that Iran is an active supporter of the Sunni insurgency, or playing a currently hostile role in Iraq with scepticism. American experts seem more concerned with the potential role Iran could play in any Iraqi civil conflict, or once a Shi’ite political majority takes office, than with direct Iranian support of a Shi’ite insurgency.

As General George Casey put it, “I don’t see substantial Iranian influence on this particular government that will be elected in January. I see Iran as more of a longer-term threat to Iraqi security…a long-term threat to stability in Iraq. If you look on the other side, I think Syria is a short-term threat, because of the support they provide to Ba’athist leaders operating inside and outside of Iraq.”

It is also important to note that many of the party officials and militia that lived in Iran before the fall of Saddam Hussein were never particularly grateful to Iran during the time they had to remain in exile and are not pro-Iranian now. The Ayatollah Sistani, Iraq's pre-eminent Shi’ite religious leader -- as well as virtually all of the influential Iraqi clergy except Sadr -- is a quietest who opposes the idea that religious figures should play a direct role in politics.

Moreover, Sistani has publicly rejected the religious legitimacy of a velayat-e faqih or supreme religious leader like Iran's Khameni. The major Iraqi Shi’ite parties that did operate in Iran before Saddam's fall did endorse the idea of a velayat-e faqih while they were dependent on Iran, but have since taken the position that Iraq should not be a theocratic state, much less under the control of a velayat-e faqih.

The analysis of the International Crisis Group, and of many US experts in and outside Iraq interviewed for this analysis do not support the existence of any major Iranian effort to destabilize or control Iraq through June 2005. However, present and future uncertainties surrounding Iran’s role, however, can scarcely be ignored. Iran does seem to have tolerated an Al Qa’ida presence in Iran, or at least transit through the country, as a means of putting pressure on the US, in spite of Al Qa’ida's distinctly uncertain tolerance of Shi’ism. Iran may have been active in supporting groups like Al Ansar in the past, or at
least turning a blind eye, and may allow cross border infiltration in Iraq's Kurdish region now.

Iran also sent a top-level official, Kamal Kharrazi, to Iraq on May 17, 2005 -- only 48 hours after Secretary of State Condolezza Rice had left the country. Kharrazi met with Prime Minister al-Jaafari and Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari. He also met with other top officials and key members of the Shi’ite parties, and his visit was at a minimum a demonstration of Iran’s influence in an Iraq governed by a Shi’ite majority, even though some key Iraqi Shi’a parties like Al Dawa have scarcely been strong supporters of Iran. Kharrazi also gave an important message at his press conference, “…the party that will leave Iraq is the United States because it will eventually withdraw…But the party that will live with the Iraqis is Iran because it is a neighbor to Iraq.”

Iran clearly fears the US presence in Iraq, and the risk of being "encircled" by the US presence in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Gulf. Iranian officials have has threatened to destabilize Iraq if the US bring military pressure against Iran because of its activities in nuclear proliferation. A split in Iraq's government could lead some Shi'ite factions to actively turn to Iran for support, and the divisions in Iran's government create the ongoing risk that hard-line elements might intervene in Iraq even if its government did not fully support such action. At this point in time, however, these seem to be risks and not realities.

**Iraqi Views of the Threat**

There is no single Iraqi view of any major issue that affects Iraq. Iraqis disagree in detail regarding almost all of the issues covered in this analysis, and sometimes presented very different views of how serious they took the threat from Syria and Iran, how and whether they quantified various threat forces, and how serious they saw given extremist, terrorist, and insurgent elements as being. There was also no agreement on whether the threat was getting better or worse, although most felt the election was a major step forward and that insurgent attacks were less successful than they feared.

Like the US and MNC-I, they see four major threats:

- **Zarqawi and Outside Islamist Extremist Organization Fighters:** Mostly foreign Arab and from other countries. Cannot quantify, but numbers are small and probably well under 1,000. The problem is their methods of attack have great impact.

- **Former Regime Elements (FRE)s:** Large numbers, and a mix of true supporters of the Ba’ath, alienated Sunnis, paid volunteers, temporary recruits, and other Iraqis. No way to quantify, but some feel is in the 15,000 to 30,000 level depending on how estimate full time and part time fighters.

- **Iraqi Native Islamist Extremist Organization Fighters:** Small and just emerging. Cannot quantify, but numbers are small and probably well under 500. The problem is their methods of attack can mirror image outside extremists and have great impact.

- **Organized Crime:** The major source of violence and insecurity in at least 12 of the 18 governorates. Often seem to cooperate with terrorists and insurgents. Many different levels of seriousness, but numbers are very high, as is impact.
Some Iraqis also felt elements of various militias were becoming a problem, but the
details are unclear. Iraqi officials also point out that they feel MNC-I estimates are
misleading because they seem to only include hardcore insurgents. They also feel that
the Minister of Defense was generally correct in including some 200,000 sympathizers
in one guess at the threat. “It does no one any good to deny the insurgents have major
public support, particularly in Sunni areas. Our political problem is much more
important than our military one.”

**Inclusion versus Conflict**

The insurgency already has long been a low-level civil war, and is being driven towards a
broader Sunni vs. Shi'ite conflict by Islamist extremists. Much of the future nature of the
insurgency in Iraq depends on the wisdom and pragmatism of Iraq’s present and
emerging political leaders over the course of 2005 through 2007. This will be especially
true especially before, during, and after the effort to create a new constitution, the
referendum to follow, and the full-scale election now scheduled for December 2005.

US policymakers clearly understand the issues and risks involved. US and other MNC
officials pressed hard for "inclusion" before the elections, and for Iraqi government
contacts and negotiations with the so-called "rejectionist" elements among Iraq Sunni
Arabs after the elections. In addition to the visits by Secretary Rumsfeld discussed
earlier, US Deputy Secretary of State, Robert Zoellick visited Iraq both after the election
and in May. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Iraq on May 16, 2005 -- again to
deliver the message that the government must be inclusive, avoid purges of the civil
service and Iraqi forces, and develop the existing Iraqi force structure as rapidly as
possible.

So far, Iraq's Arab Shi'ite leaders have resisted polarization along ethnic and sectarian
lines. Key religious leaders as diverse as the Grand Ayatollah Ali al Sistani and the
Moqtada al-Sadr have been strong voices calling for inclusion and opposing any general
reprisals against Iraq's Sunnis. Iraq’s new president and prime minister both stressed a
strategy of inclusion and amnesty on taking office. Iraqi officials have also continued
to negotiate with those who boycotted the elections - some of which have shown an
interest in joining the new political structure and being included in writing the
constitution.

The new Iraqi cabinet included seven Sunnis in spite of the fact most boycotted the
election. Iraq’s new Minister of Defense, Sadoon al-Dulaimi, was chosen after a long
political struggle to find a Sunni with real political credentials that was acceptable to
Iraq’s Shi’ites and Kurds. Dulaimi was a former officer with training as a sociologist. He
became an exile during the Iran-Iraq war and had been sentenced to death in absentia by
Saddam Hussein. He had returned to Iraq after Saddam’s fall, and had set up the
Baghdad-based Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies, which conducted a
number of Iraq's public opinion surveys. While some Sunnis charged he did not have the
political weight to be a serious leader, he was the member of the government who
announced on May 16, 2005 that Iraqi forces would stop raiding Sunni mosques and
"terrifying worshipers." Other key Sunnis included Abid Mutlak al-Jubouri, one of
three deputy prime ministers and Usama al-Najafi, as Minister of Industry.
There have been other positive signs from Iraq's native Arab Sunnis. As has been noted earlier, there are signs of tension and sometimes clashes between Iraqi Sunnis and foreign-led Sunni Islamist extremist groups. In early April 2005, some of the native Iraqi Sunni clerics in the Association of Muslim Scholars reversed their previous attack on Iraqis joining the security forces. Ahmed Abdul Ghafoor al-Samarrai, a leading cleric in the organization gave a Friday sermon encouraging Iraqi Sunnis to join the army and police, to prevent Iraq from falling into, "the hands of those who have caused chaos, destruction, and violated the sanctities." A total of 64 Sunni native Iraqi imams and religious scholars signed the fatwa that al-Samarrai read, including such leading previously hard-line imams as Ahmed Hassan al-Taha of Baghdad.

Insurgency can turn into a broader civil war, however, and the future inclusiveness of the Iraqi government is anything but clear in a climate where Iraq is just beginning to develop political leaders and parties. There are only 17 Sunni members of the 275-person National Assembly. No one knows how a Shi'ite majority will behave or govern. There have been unexplained Iraqi security raids on seemingly peaceful Sunni political groups like the Dialogue Council, a body composed of 31 Sunni groups. Some Sunnis have also charged that government forces have deliberately raided their mosques, mistreated prisoners, and may have executed Sunni civilians. At the same time, Sunnis have been unrealistically demanding and deeply divided over how to deal with any movement towards inclusion.

The Sunni clerics who urged their follower to join the Iraqi forces did so in an ambiguous fatwa, stating that the "new army and police are empty of goods people, and we need to supply them...Because the police and army are a safeguard for the whole nation, not a militia for any special part, we have issued this fatwa calling on our people to join the army and police." An investigation by the New York Times raised serious questions as to whether Dialogue Council's leaders were prepared to accept an Iraqi that was not Sunni ruled. The Times found that the Council's conservative Islamic secretary general, Fakhri al-Qaisi, felt that Shi'ites were only 30% of the population and not 60%, and argued that Sunni Arabs were closer to 40% than 20%. He also reacted to the raid on the Council's office by saying that the Council was interested in negotiation but that, "I think it's a scheme to wipe us out, destroy us," he said. "Their slogans about democracy are all but lies."

According to the Times, he said that vice president Sheik Ghazi al-Yawar, the highest-ranking Sunni in the government, "...hasn't protected his friends or cooperated sincerely with us in the council." He described the new Minister of Defense, Sadoun al-Dulaimi, as a "double agent." Saleh Mutlak, another Council member, charged that the leaders of the military wing of Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), one of the two leading Shi'ite religious parties, had been a major obstacle in the negotiations with the new government. He also said that Prime Minister Jafari was half-hearted: "We could not reach anything with him," he said. "He speaks in a vague way. He never comes to the point."

While this was only one report at a time of considerable tension, interviews with Iraqis in February 2005 had revealed the same Sunni claims about demographics and attitudes.
towards the elections. It is also clear that some senior figures in both SCIRI and Prime Minister Jaafari's Al Dawa party believe in purging the new government of Ba'athists and setting very demanding requirements for any inclusion. These do seem to include Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, the leader of SCIRI who is not in the government but is a key voice in Shi‘ite politics.

The initial group chosen to draft the new constitution on May 10, 2005 included 28 Shi‘ites from Prime Minister Jafari’s United Iraqi Alliance, 15 Kurds from the Kurdish Alliance, eight members from former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi’s Shi‘ite dominated alliance, and one each to a communist, a Turcoman, a Christian, and one Sunni Arabs. While the government sought more Sunnis, inclusion was clearly at risk. This could be a critical problem for efforts at inclusion since the new constitution can be vetoed if a two-thirds majority of voters in the of Iraq’s 18 provinces decide to vote "no." Sunnis dominate Al Anbar Province and have large majorities in Salahuddin and Nineveh Provinces.

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

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

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

**Insurgency and the Effectiveness and Visibility of Iraqi Military, Security, and Police Forces**

Finally, it should be noted that the level and success of the insurgency interacts with success in creating effective Iraqi forces that are also the visible element of security operations that Iraqis see on a day-to-day basis. The lack of highly visible Iraqi forces, and the fact that US occupiers have both won virtually every past victory and still
dominate most security activity, have also reinforced the image of a nation where fighting is done by foreigners, non-Muslims, and occupiers.

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

To return to points made earlier, US and Coalition-dominated actions are seen as actions by “occupier” forces; they are a source of constant propaganda and fuel conspiracy theories. Real and imagined civilian casualties, collateral damage, and the impact on civilians and shrines that these engagements cause remain a constant problem. All of these points reinforce the need to create larger and more effective Iraqi forces as soon as possible, and to give them full force protection and counterinsurgency capability.

At the same time, it is important to stress that Iraq not only needs to defeat the insurgent but its criminals, and to create a civil society in which Iraqis depend on the police and security forces and not the military. As has been discussed previously, Iraqis may vastly prefer their own military to Coalition occupiers, but they also do not want their own military constantly visible in the streets. Most ordinary Iraqis also seem crime as much more of a day-to-day threat than insurgents. As a result, the efforts of the Iraqi government and MNSTC-I to create effective police and security forces in parallel with creating effective military forces are absolutely critical to nation building, political legitimacy, effective government, and the effort to eventually create a true civil society.

This also raises serious issues about how the new Iraqi military, security, and police force treat their own population. One of Jalal Talibani’s first acts in becoming Iraq’s new president in April 2005 was to offer an amnesty to Iraqi Sunni insurgents. This followed up on a more limited offer of insurgent by then Prime Minister Ayad Allawi in 2004. Such acts of political inclusion are as critical to Iraqi success in defeating the insurgents as the effectiveness of Iraqi forces.\(^{128}\)

There are indications, however, that some Iraqi forces -- including commando units -- use far more brutal methods in searching for, interrogating, and dealing with other Iraqis than Coalition forces are permitted to use.\(^{129}\) Moreover, there are similar indications that some Coalition forces encourage Iraqi forces to do this, and use them as proxies for actions they are not allowed to take. At a minimum, US and other Coalition forces operating with Iraqi units sometimes stand by and allow such activities to take place.\(^{130}\)

US State Department human rights reporting notes that Iraqi forces must operate in a climate of extraordinary violence and extremism on the part of their opponents, and make protecting Iraqi civilians their primary mission. It also, however, sounds an important warning about the Iraqi police, security, and National Guard actions through December 31, 2005.\(^{131}\)

With the ongoing insurgency limiting access to information, a number of instances in the Report have been difficult to verify. However, there were reports of arbitrary deprivation of life, torture, impunity, and poor prison conditions--particularly in pretrial detention facilities--and arbitrary arrest and detention. There remained unresolved problems relating to the large number of

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Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Corruption at all levels of the Government remained a problem. Some aspects of the judicial system were dysfunctional, and there were reports that the judiciary was subject to external influence. The exercise of labor rights remained limited, largely due to violence, unemployment, and maladapted organizational structures and laws; however, with international assistance, some progress was underway at year's end.

…With the ongoing insurgency, there was a climate of extreme violence in which persons were killed for political and other reasons. There were occasional reports of killings particularly at the local level by the Government or its agents, which may have been politically motivated. In early December, Basrah police reported that officers in the Internal Affairs Unit were involved in the killings of 10 members of the Ba'ath Party. Basrah police also reported that the same Internal Affairs Unit officers were involved in the killings of a mother and daughter accused of engaging in prostitution. The Basrah Chief of Intelligence was removed from his position as a result of the accusations; however, he retained command of the Internal Affairs Unit. An MOI investigation into the Basrah allegations was ongoing at year's end. Other instances reflected arbitrary actions by government agents. For example, on October 16, Baghdad police arrested, interrogated, and killed 12 kidnappers of 3 police officers.

… The TAL expressly prohibits torture in all its forms under all circumstances, as well as cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), during this reporting period, torture and ill treatment of detainees by police was commonplace. In interviews with 90 prisoners conducted from August to October, 72 claimed that they had been tortured or mistreated. The reported abuses included some instances of beatings with cables and hosepipes, electric shocks to their earlobes and genitals, food and water deprivation, and overcrowding in standing room only cells.

Additionally, HRW reported that specialized agencies, including the Major Crimes Unit, Criminal Intelligence, Internal Affairs and possibly the Intelligence Service, were responsible for pretrial irregularities, such as arrest without warrant, lengthy periods of detention before referral to an investigative judge, and the denial of contact with family and legal counsel. Although detainees were primarily criminal suspects, they also included others, such as members of the Mahdi Militia and juveniles, who sometimes were caught in arrest sweeps.

There were instances of illegal treatment of detainees. For example, on November 1, Baghdad police arrested two Coalition Force citizen interpreters on charges involving the illegal use of small arms. After their arrest, police bound the detainees' arms behind them, pulling them upward with a rope and cutting off their circulation. This treatment was followed by beatings over a 48-hour period with a steel cable, in an effort to make the detainees confess. Both interpreters required medical treatment after their release to Coalition Forces. No further information on the incident was available at year's end. In another case, the Commission on Public Integrity (CPI) gathered enough evidence to prosecute police officers in Baghdad who were systematically raping and torturing female detainees. Two of the officers received prison sentences; four others were demoted and reassigned.

There were also allegations that local police sometimes used excessive force against both citizens and foreigners. On November 28, a foreign national reported that police beat him at a police station in Kufa. According to the victim, he witnessed police beating detainees at a police station while he was filing a claim on another matter. When he questioned the treatment of the detainees, he was beaten and detained for 4 hours.

A number of complaints about Iraqi National Guard (ING) abuses surfaced during the year. For example, in November, the ING raided a house in southern Baghdad and arrested four alleged insurgents. The family was evicted and the ING burnt the house. In another incident, a doctor at the al-Kindi hospital in Baghdad said that the ING had tried to force him to treat one of their colleagues before other more serious cases. When he refused, they beat him. There also were many reported instances of ING looting and burning houses in Fallujah in November.
According to an ING official, disciplinary procedures were in place to deal with the mistreatment of citizens and a number of members of the ING were fired during the year for violations.

There were numerous reports and direct evidence that insurgents employed multiple forms of torture and inhumane treatment against their victims...Although there was significant improvement in Iraqi Corrections Service (ICS) prison conditions following the fall of the former regime, in many instances the facilities did not meet international penal standards. According to the Government, it generally permitted visits by independent human rights observers. In August, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) visited ICS facilities. The Ministry of Human Rights established a permanent office at the Abu Ghraib prison. HRW visited some ICS facilities.

After the fall of the former regime, prison functions were consolidated into the Ministry of Justice, and the ICS was transferred from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to the Ministry of Justice. According to the Government, ICS confined civilians under the rule of law, and a valid confinement order from a judge was required. Confinement was not connected with military intelligence operations nor was there any contact with military confinement functions.

...Allegations of inmate abuse by ICS Officers continued, although fewer than in the previous year. The ICS Internal Affairs Division claimed it conducted investigations of all detected or reported cases and that appropriate corrective action was taken if an allegation was verified. Although fewer than 10 cases were investigated between July and December, an individual with access to human rights complaints alleged that hundreds of cases were pending accusing ICS officers of abuse and torture of detainees and prisoners, including women. No further information was available at year's end.

..At year's end, ICS was investigating eight cases in which inmates alleged police predetention abuse and torture. Overcrowding was a problem. Inmate disturbances and riots reduced available prison beds by approximately one-third, and pretrial detention facilities were often overcrowded. The insurrections in Sadr City and later in Najaf created additional overcrowding in detention facilities.

...Detainees were generally retained in custody pending the outcome of a criminal investigation. Individuals were generally arrested openly and warrants were issued only with sufficient evidence, although, there were numerous reports of arbitrary arrest and detention

There were no publicized cases of criminal proceedings brought against members of the security forces in connection with alleged violations of these rights, nor were there publicly known measures adopted to prevent recurrence.

Due to the insurgency, high-crime rates, and limited police training, innocent persons were sometimes arrested and detained erroneously

...The MOI's responsibilities extended only to internal security. MOI commands a number of uniformed forces, including the Iraqi Police Service (IPS) and Department of Border Enforcement. The MOI also has criminal and domestic intelligence capabilities and regulates all domestic and foreign private security companies operating in the country. The MOI also has authority over the Civil Defense Directorate, the firefighters and emergency response organization, and the Facilities Protection Service shielding strategic infrastructure, government buildings, and cultural and educational assets.

...In the aftermath of the fall of the former regime, a police presence temporarily vanished, except in the Kurdish North. Police equipment was stolen. After April 2003, a large recruitment and training program was established, including hiring former police officers.

During the year, various specialized units were created, including an Emergency Response Unit (with capabilities similar to a SWAT team) and Public Order Battalions that perform riot control functions, as well as specialized counterinsurgency units.
More than any other group, the police have been a target of terrorist attacks. Over 1,500 IPS personnel have been killed between April 2003 and year's end. Additionally, pervasive lawlessness has led to an increase in violent and organized crime, particularly related to kidnappings.

…There was a widespread perception that police made false arrests to extort money. Some police officers did not present defendants to magistrates and held them in detention cells until their families paid bribes for their release. In the Central Criminal Court in Baghdad, the time between arrest and arraignment was often in excess of 30 days, despite the 24-hour requirement.

There were organized police abuses. For example, on September 4, approximately 150 police, none of whom had uniforms or badges, surrounded the Iraqi Institute of Peace (IIP), which is associated with the International Center for Reconciliation of the Coventry Cathedral, in response to an alert that a prominent former regime figure might be inside the Cathedral. Four individuals identified themselves as MOI officials, but did not show badges. Armed men, some with heavy weapons, broke down the doors and ransacked the IIP building, stealing phones and money. The incident ended with no serious injuries but without judicial follow-up.

On August 16, a ministry, reportedly wishing to occupy the real property used by a political party, caused party members to be arrested and detained for almost 60 days without charges. During their detention, a habeas corpus writ from the Chief Investigative Judge of the Central Criminal Court was ignored. The minister involved also refused to appear before the judge to explain his ministry's actions. The political party members were eventually released; however, the property involved remained under the control of the ministry at year's end.

…Reportedly, coerced confessions and interrogation continued to be the favored method of investigation by police. According to one government official, hundreds of cases were pending at year's end alleging torture. There have been several arrests, and both criminal and administrative punishments were handed out to police in cases where allegations of torture were substantiated.

Additionally, corruption continued to be a problem with the police. The CPI was investigating cases of police abuse involving unlawful arrests, beatings, and the theft of valuables from the homes of persons who were detained; however, the police often continued to use the methods employed by the previous regime. In addition to the CPI, several other mechanisms were put into place to address this problem, including an internal affairs capability, mentoring, and training programs that focus on accountability.

…Efforts to increase the capacity and effectiveness of the police were ongoing; however, there was little indication that the IIG took sufficient steps to address this problem adequately or to reinforce publicly the message that there will be no climate of impunity.

Because of arbitrary arrest and detention practices, some prisoners were held in incommunicado detention.

…Lengthy pretrial detention continued to be a significant problem due to backlogs in the judiciary and slow processing of criminal investigations. Approximately 3,000 inmates were in pretrial detention, and 1,000 were held post-trial.

…Corruption remained a problem in the criminal justice system. In the fall, the MOI referred allegations of misconduct involving a judge to the COJ. The allegations concerned professional misconduct, including bribery. At year's end, this case was still pending…

The Coalition, US, and MNSTC-I training effort have all made major efforts to give the new Iraqi military, security, and police forces human rights training and the kind of respect for the rule of law and the need to win hearts and minds that are vital to success. The same is true of NATO training efforts and those of other countries. There is no question, however, that such training is not always successful, and that Islamist suicide bombings and atrocities sometimes provoke Iraqi forces to extremes. There are also
units like the 5,000 man Special Police Commando that are Iraqi recruited and training, and while often highly effective have scarcely been models of respect for human rights.  

Counterinsurgency and counterterrorist operations are necessarily brutal and violent; war is war. They also, however, are also battles for the hearts and minds of both the people where the war is fought and of the enemy. The effectiveness of Iraqi forces is heavily dependent on their winning such support and not mirroring the actions of Saddam Hussein’s forces and regime. As similar US errors at the Abu Ghraib prison compound demonstrated all too clearly, excessive force and interrogation methods quickly become counterproductive and self-defeating even if they produce short-term results. The political dimension and impact of military, security, and police operations is not one that either Coalition or Iraqi commanders and forces can afford to ignore, even in the heat of battle. The primary purpose of Iraqi operations is to reforge a nation; not defeat an enemy.
1 For a broader discussion of these issues, see W. Andrew Terrill, *Strategic Implications of Intercommunal Warfare in Iraq*, Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, February 2005.


12 For a broader discussion, see Gal Luft, "Pipeline Sabotage is Terrorist's Weapon of Choice," *IAGS Energy*, April 1, 2005. The impact of this activity is regularly reflected in the histograms in the Department of Defense, *Iraq Weekly Status Report*. For example, the April 27, 2005 edition shows that electric power generation remained far below the US goal, and usually below the prewar level, from January 1, 2004 to April 21, 2005. Crude oil production averaged around 2.1 MMBD from


Elliot Blair Smith, “Insurgents’ Smallest Weapons Pose Greatest Threat to Troops,” USA Today, April 12, 2005, p. 11.


Iraqi Coalition Casualty Count, http://www.icasualties.org/oif/IraqiDeaths.aspx, accessed May 9, 2005. To put these figures in perspective, the same source counted a total of 21,447-24,324 Iraqis killed during the war to date.
56 For the text of such Sunni statements, see http://www.memri.org-bin/opener_latest.cgi?ID=SD88805.

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Statement by Thair Al-Nakib, spokesman for the Office of Prime Minister, March 22, 2005.


US Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Country Reports on Terrorism 2004, Department of State Publication 11248, April 2005, pp. 94-95.


For detailed quotes of the Iraqi Al-Qa'ida ideology, see "The Iraqi Al-Qa'ida Organization: A Self Portrait," http://www.meri.org/bin/opener_latests.cgi?ID=SD88405/

92 http://www.tajdeed.org.uk/forums/showthread.php?s=7838f482e3c844b637da253a006e17bf&threadid=33974
93 This analysis was prepared by Hoda K. Osman of ABC News.
98 The author is indebted to Ahmed Hashim for his pioneering analysis of the speeches, sermons, and literature on this topic.

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118 Translation of the Al Fayhaa TV interview by The Middle East Media Research Institute, Special Dispatch Series, No. 849, January 19, 2005.


132 For descriptions of these efforts, consult the weekly archives of the weekly MNSTC-I publication, The Advisor. Also the press releases of US units. For example, see Spc. Erin Robicheaux, "1st Iraqi Army Brigade Receives Human Rights Training," HQ-MND Baghdad, Release 20050426-03, April 26, 2005.


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