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MNF-W Tribal Engagement: a Model

May 2007

(U) The purpose of this paper is to highlight MNF-W's success in enlisting tribal support against AQI in al-Anbar Province, to outline MNF-W's tribal engagement model, and to assess this model's utility in other areas of Iraq.

(U) Key Findings:

- ~~(S//REL)~~ In the predominantly Sunni Anbar province, tribes are providing increased support to MNF, ISF, and the government in the battle against AQI.
- ~~(S//REL)~~ This increase in support is attributable to AQI's murder and intimidation program (M&I), undermining of tribal revenue sources and authority, and to MNF-W's effective engagement techniques.
- ~~(S//REL)~~ MNF-W has effectively co-opted tribes into supporting CF, ISF and the government through clear and honest communication, improvement of security and infrastructure, and by allowing tribes to legally support and contribute to al-Anbar's security and political process.
- ~~(S//REL)~~ MNF-W's staggered handover procedure is effective at passing engagements information and relationships to incoming units.
- ~~(S//REL)~~ Divisions in other areas of Iraq could successfully apply the MNF-W tribal engagement model. However, they should initially apply the model in areas which are predominantly Sunni, with reasonably cohesive tribal structures.

(U) Background:

~~(S//REL)~~ The almost entirely Sunni al-Anbar Province was an AQI stronghold from 2003 to 2006. Since late 2006 however, a large part of the population and many tribes have begun working against AQI; and with ISF, MNF, and the government. This trend began with al-Qaim on the Syrian border, when the local Albu Mahal tribe decided to align itself with MNF-W to eliminate AQI. The result of that operation was a success: today al-Qaim has thriving markets, full schools, a functioning city government, and real estate development. A key reason for the project's success was the recruitment of tribal youth into the local police force and the involvement of tribal leaders in improving local politics. Throughout the rest of al-Anbar certain tribes have fought AQI directly. These tribes have contributed members towards the ISF; the IP in particular, and staffed the Provincial Security Forces (PSF)--formerly known as emergency response units (ERUs). Perhaps of most importance, some tribes in the Dulaymi confederation banded together under Sheikh Sattar to form an anti-AQI tribal grouping, the Sahawa al-Anbar (SAA), which translates to Anbar awakening. This grouping

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was heavily involved in assisting and supporting the creation of PSFs and supporting IP recruitment. Recently, in order to enter the political arena, the SAA has renamed itself the Sahawa al-Iraq (SAI), and is beginning to step back from its direct involvement in the PSFs. This will also allow it to represent a broader tribal base without those tribes needing to subjugate themselves to Sheik Sattar's SAA. SAI's professed aims are to "oppose insurgents such as AQI and reengage with Iraq's political process".

~~(S//REL)~~ **The backlash against AQIs attempts to control Anbar:**

~~(S//REL)~~ The improving situation in al-Anbar is due partially to the population's backlash against AQI. This backlash came about largely because of the excessive violence of the group's M&I campaign, and specifically its willingness to target civilians either directly or indirectly as "acceptable collateral damage". After several years of violence, the people of Anbar tired of AQI. Other factors leading to the reduction in support for AQI were:

- AQI's undermining of tribal revenue sources and authority, in many cases the group sought to totally destroy tribal leadership structure and replace it with their own
- AQIs attempts to impose an extreme Salafist lifestyle on Anbar's population of general moderate Sunnis

(U) MNF-W engagement model:

~~(S//REL)~~ **Effective communication with tribal leaders.** MNF-W's engagement policies are a key reason for the increasing support provided by the population, and certain tribes in particular, to CF, ISF and GOI efforts. Reporting indicates that forces in MNF-W have over the past three years maintained persistent contact between key leaders, including tribal leaders, at similar strata (minor leaders speak with company commanders, area leaders/Mayors talk with Bn commanders, etc). In engagements, MNF demonstrated respect for the sheikhs, and engendered their support. Following 2006 when AQI intensified its M&I violence against the people of al-Anbar, the populace realized the CF were a better alternative; and because they had consistently worked hard work to keep the communications channels available, the tribes used them.

~~(S//REL)~~ **Choosing and supporting strong tribal leadership.** Sheikh Sattar was not an immediately apparent choice for the leadership of SAI; many Sunni tribal leaders did not perceive that he had adequate status or charisma to effectively form and drive an anti-AQI tribal alliance in Anbar. However despite these doubts, MNF-W believed Sattar was a good choice, and having made this decision, put their full backing behind him. Sattar proved an effective figurehead for SAA, and many Sunni tribes in Dulaym confederation joined the movement during his stewardship.

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~~(S//REL)~~ **Government involvement.** CF in MNF-W influenced tribal leaders to resist AQI and support the government by utilizing tribal lines of communication and structures. Through these mechanisms they co-opted, influenced, or otherwise gained the cooperation of tribes toward the goals of governmental legitimacy and support for the provincial government and ISF. In particular:

- CF in MNF-W enabled tribes to legally support and contribute to security in Al Anbar. They openly invited and encouraged tribal sheikhs to contribute their young men to the Iraqi Police and PSFs.
- Forces in MNF-W went through tribal sheikhs to organize support for the political process on a city by city basis. BN COs discussed municipal politics and the CG discussed provincial politics, but always with a definite goal in mind such as an election or selection process to create a city council that would serve the cities' needs better. Two key points stand out about this process. First, coalition encouragement was focused towards the Iraqis achieving self-governance; second, MNF did not themselves select and install the political leaders. Instead, the coalition encouraged tribal leader involvement in and support for the political process, frequently through civil affairs initiatives. Because CF didn't directly appoint political leaders, they avoided creating the perception that the governments which were established were MNF puppets. By working this process through the sheikhs, the coalition empowered them and gave them ownership in the local government. While these new leadership figures and institutions were heavily influenced by tribal leaders, they were at least a start in representative government. After their establishment, CF continued to support the leadership to ensure their survival.

~~(S//REL)~~ **Improved security for Anbar's population.** MNF-W improved security for the citizens of al-Anbar city by city. Around cities, they established good relationships with as many tribes as possible in an attempt to limit AQI's freedom of movement into and out of the city. Within cities, they established a series of interlocking combat outposts (COPs) -- forward positions in urban areas intended to deny space to the insurgents. The COPs were set up sequentially; MNF established a new one as they pushed out into different neighborhoods, and as ISF forces became available to fill in the battle space. From these positions, MNF-W was able to over watch activities and actively patrol key areas. In some urban areas, the IP were staffed primarily by tribal members who were from the local area. When no positions were available in the IP, MNF-W facilitated the creation of PSFs, which were integrated with various arms of the ISF, and staffed primarily with tribe members belonging to Sheikh Sattar's anti-AQI tribal organization, the SAA. The creation of these PSFs was an effective temporary measure which allowed the anti-AQI tribes to be legally involved in the fight against extremists. The consistent integration of tribes into the ISF and PSFs increased the effectiveness of the security they provided to the people of Anbar.

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This was because the tribesmen's level of knowledge about their local areas allowed them to effectively target known AQI members. It was also beneficial for security because tribal sheikhs were able to vet the members they pushed forward into the ISF or PSFs; this made it difficult for many hard core AQI supporters to slip through the net. Overall, these attempts to improve security yielded dividends which themselves furthered security in Anbar. As tribal leaders gained confidence in the protection the coalition provided them, they became more willing to commit themselves to supporting MNF and offer more members to the ISF and PSFs.

~~(S//REL)~~ **Infrastructure improvement.** MNF-W provided infrastructure projects to Anbar Province, which was particularly well demonstrated through the Commander Emergency Response Program (CERP). The purpose of CERP is to enable commanders to "respond to *urgent* humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements within their AOR by carrying out programs which will *immediately assist* the indigenous population". As an example of the effective way in which MNF-W communicated this program, 1-3 BCT made short presentations with Arabic translations on CERP projects in Ramadi, during meetings with sheikhs from the SAA. The presentation were followed by breakout sessions where local contractors and conference participants discussed project specifics with civil affairs teams. Two key points that made this approach successful are that MNF-W negotiated and explained their projects to tribes and responded quickly to areas of need for their constituents. This compares with AQIs frequent destruction of key infrastructure vital to the inhabitants of Anbar.

~~(S//REL)~~ **Conditions attached to support.** At times CF provided infrastructure improvements in exchange for certain requirements they needed the tribes to satisfy. These requirements included measurable reductions in violence, the surrender of key persons involved in anti-CF activity, and the establishment of political processes by the Iraqis. If the requirements were satisfied, the tribes could benefit from construction contracts, establishment of medical clinics, renovation of school and roads, construction of a water reservoir or treatment plants, and reductions of CF patrols in their area. Thus, tribes were given incentives to work with CF and the ISF against AQI.

~~(S//REL)~~ **MNF-W handover procedure.** MNF-W's handover procedure ensures that important information and relationships are handed over. The MEF, regimental and Brigade Combat Team Headquarters remain in place for a period of twelve to fourteen months, providing continuity at a number of levels of command. When a new MEF rotates in, there is a crossover period of several weeks during which the HQ does a comprehensive handover with old HQ. Individual battalions and below rotate through on seven month intervals. These lower level units also have a several week handover period.

(U) Future impact of tribal engagement in al Anbar:

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~~(S//REL)~~ CF and GOI efforts toward continuous engagement of tribal leaders will increase the likelihood that AQI is unable to re-establish their facilitation networks. As tribes display their willingness to cooperate, the engagement team must discuss and coordinate incentives (reconstruction, etc). Sunni "unification" at the tribal level in al-Anbar Province is a positive sign for CF and the GOI. However, progress must coincide with a delicate balancing act to keep tribal rivalries and jealousies from destroying the effort. Capitalizing on tribal knowledge of AQI operations throughout the province is essential to breaking the vital AQI line of communication (LOC) from al-Qaim to Fallujah.

(U) Applicability of MNF-W's engagement model to other areas in Iraq:

~~(S//REL)~~ While the MNF's techniques appear to have been reasonably successful in Anbar, there are a couple of characteristics which set this province apart from others in Iraq. Anbar has an almost exclusively Sunni population and most of its tribes fall under a single confederation, the Dulaym. Most other provinces in Iraq have a mix of sects, and in some cases mixed ethnicities, and most have a number of competing tribal confederations. Divisions trying to replicate the MNF-W tribal engagement model, should initially apply the strategy where conditions are similar to Anbar. It should be applied in those provinces, or sub-areas, which are predominantly Sunni, in which a certain level of tribal opposition to AQI exists, and where tribal structure is relatively homogenous. However, there is no reason why the MNF-W model could not be applied beyond these areas, provided CF and the GOI take actions to adapt the model to differing conditions. To develop tribal alliances against the insurgency in areas with a mixed ethno-sectarian composition and fractured inter-tribal structure, CF and the GOI could adopt measures to include:

- Identifying and developing strong tribal leaders who are willing to stand against AQI, and who have appeal across tribal and sectarian lines
- Improving fractured inter-tribal relationships by alleviating economic disparity and attempting to resolve inter-tribal disputes
- Acting on key Sunni reconciliation initiatives and reducing JAM influence in the ISF

~~(S//REL)~~ Recent reporting indicates that since the formation of SAI, the Sunni "Awakening" (Sahawa) is spreading to groups and tribes beyond Anbar, possibly becoming a national movement. SAI is attempting to get support from the GOI. CF and GOI encouragement and support for this group might facilitate the growth of inter-tribal ties in some governates outside of Anbar.

(U) Conclusion:

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~~(S//REL)~~ The groundswell of public sentiment against AQI in al-Anbar has been effectively fostered by MNF-W's engagement model, particularly their strong involvement of tribes. Through consistent and honest communication, provisions for infrastructure improvements and security, and through enabling tribes to legally support and contribute to security and involvement of sheikhs in local communities, MNF-W units have co-opted tribes in support of CF, ISF and the government.

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