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The Changing Nature of the Conflict in Iraq 01 September 2007



(U) *The purpose of this paper is to update the Perfect Storm paper, published by the MNC-I CACE on 22 October 2006 and available on*

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(U) Key Findings:

- ~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ The conflict in Iraq is undergoing a metamorphosis; a convergence of events has led to an easing of the communal warfare which was plaguing the country.
- ~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ Baghdad remains the center of gravity for both the Sunni and Shi'a Extremists; to control the capital is to control the country.
- ~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ There has been a strategic shift in the Sunni mindset towards reconciliation and an anti-AQI stance.
- ~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ While showing adaptability at the tactical level, AQI is having difficulty altering their overall methodology in response to the changing dynamic of the Iraqi population.
- ~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ Fueled by successful Coalition Forces targeting efforts of Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM), a continued vision of an Iraq free of foreign occupation, a loss of faith in the Maliki Cabinet, and a realization that some Sunni elements believe AQI is the flashpoint for sectarian violence the Sadrists have developed and adjusted their strategy.

(U) Mitigating the Tension:

~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ The conflict in Iraq is undergoing a metamorphosis; a convergence of events has led to an easing of the communal warfare which was plaguing the country. Successful Coalition Force operations such as Fardh al Qanoon, Phantom Thunder and reconciliation initiatives combined with the actions of the Gol have all served to temper the storm which was engulfing the country. Although the underlying issues remain a level of civility and restraint have come to fruition in most regions.

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~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) has been significantly degraded over the past six months. Numerous safe havens have been eliminated along the Euphrates River Valley, Baqubah, the Diyala River Valley, and in Baghdad, as well as in the Baghdad belts. Their freedom of movement has been degraded and AQI leadership has been forced away from Baghdad. While showing adaptability at the tactical level, AQI is having difficulty altering their overall methodology in response to the changing dynamic of the Iraqi population. The failure of the second Golden Mosque bombing to incite the desired retaliation, growing tribal resistance, and the turning of Sunni militant groups are all direct reflections of the failure of their heavy-handed tactics. This does not render their tactical efforts defeated – AQI is still able to conduct limited high profile attacks. But their overall goal of establishing themselves as the leaders of the Sunni resistance in Iraq is moving farther away with each murder.

~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ Recently, there has been a strategic shift in the Sunni mindset towards reconciliation and an anti-AQI stance. Sunnis recognize that CF will eventually leave, and they will be left to not only defend themselves against JAM incursions but against AQI intimidation. While initially the anti-AQI movement was isolated to a few localized instances, new initiatives are springing up across Anbar, Baghdad, Salah Ad-Din, Diyala, and Ninewa Provinces, subsequently making the choice to prioritize AQI ahead of other threats they face as their number one priority. The anti-AQI campaign continues to build across Iraq, with many Sunnis recognizing AQI as a greater threat than Coalition Forces.

(U) The Situation in Baghdad:

~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ Baghdad remains the center of gravity for both the Sunni and Shi'a Extremists; to control the capital is to control the country. Although there has been a decrease in the violence levels throughout the security districts there remains areas considered as strongholds for both Sunni and Shi'a extremists which represent impediments to the political process at the national and political levels. Kadhamiyah's location and Shi'a security forces complicit status position it as an emerging center of gravity; a place from which those elements set on expansion can use to base attacks into Mansour and West Rashid. Within

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Kadhmiyah, security, as well as religious figures, are complicit with JAM activity, in some instances pushing the JAM agenda; specifically those involved with the Kadhmiyah Shrine security. Sunni Hayys are the only viable haven for AQI. Within East Rashid AQI strongholds remain. Numerous routes from the Southern Belts and safe neighborhoods are having an impact on freedom of movement. Adhmiyah, despite gains in security, remains arguably one of the last true AQI operational areas while the Mansour area reflects intra-Sunni fighting.

(U) Enduring Problem Sets:

~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ The Special Groups of the Jaysh al Mahdi, the reigning Shi'a extremist group and primary Iranian surrogate, are becoming increasingly more aggressive. Although these groups fall under the purview of the Office of the Martyr Sadr, Sadr is unable to effectively exert control over a number of these elements. The much touted "cease fire" of JAM announced following the hostilities in Karbala reportedly does not apply to many of these elements so long as they do not conduct activities in the name of JAM, continuing the plausible deniability under which they were bred. A common theme amongst all declared Jaysh al Mahdi ceasefires is that the "secret army" or what is now known as Special Groups does not fall under the declarations. This is likely due to the purpose of the Special Groups, whose conception was to give OMS and JAM plausible deniability; in most communiqués Special Groups are referred to as a separate entity from JAM. While a temporary lull in attacks on ISF can be expected from this declaration, attacks on CF will likely continue at the current rates as a great preponderance of those attacks are committed by Special Groups. This delineation between JAM and Special Groups enables increased ability for targeting as only, in theory, criminal elements and Special Groups will be committing acts of aggression for a six month period.

~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ The improving security situation in the mixed sectarian areas of Baghdad, the enabling of the prospects for political progress and the decline of both AQI and the Sunni insurgency serves as a direct threat to the goals of the Shia extremists who cannot intimidate, coerce, and extort in a stable environment. This progress also threatens 1.4b who will likely increase support to Shia Extremist with arms, training, and funding, focusing on southern Iraq, exacerbating intra-Shia tensions thereby heightening the impression of instability in order to increase pressure for a Coalition Force withdrawal. Additionally, there remains Shi'a on Shi'a and Sunni on Sunni violence possibly because as within any large city, there will be intrinsic criminal activity which accounts for a number of incidents.

~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ AQI is a dynamic, adaptive foe who operates within a complex, interconnected operational environment. AQI will attempt to continue operations to destabilize, discredit, and disrupt Iraq, the Gol, and CF they persist in conducting high profile attacks in Baghdad, despite losses of personnel, as

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Baghdad remains the operational center of gravity. This will also demonstrate their ability to conduct operations, thus downplaying any success CF may have against them. AQI will carry on attempts to intimidate the populace in order to garner passive support and establish havens and LOCs, seeking out a strategic staging area within striking distance to Baghdad, and await opportunities to "protect the populace" in areas where anti-AQI movements have pushed AQI out and JAM influence has come in to fill the void. Despite an apparent redirection of effort, AQSL will continue attempts, albeit at on a smaller scale, to bring foreign leadership into Iraq in order to influence the battlefield and bring AQI into alignment with AQSL strategy. Regardless of the degradation to the AQI network, AQ will maintain a constant presence in Iraq and continue to carry out some degree of violence.

~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ On the political front, many Sunni groups have not fared well. Frustration amongst the leading Sunni party, the Tawafuq Front, has led to a partial withdrawal from Governmental participation. Sunnis throughout Iraq want to participate in the political process but feel stymied by predominantly Shi'a local and National Governments.

(U) Conclusion:

~~(S//REL to USA, ACGU)~~ ***A key component necessary for the continued forward momentum of the identified positive trends is the Gol. It is imperative that the Gol capitalize on the tactical successes enjoyed by the security forces. The Shi'a dominated Gol must make a concerted effort to expand its influence outside of the capital or risk lending credence to those groups wishing to undermine the process of government. Reconciliation with Sunni Resistance Groups will be in jeopardy, opening a window of opportunity for AQI to advance their agenda to regain their foothold in Iraq. Eventually, the Shi'a extremist's tactics will cause a groundswell of resentment and rejection among the populace, much in the same way that AQI's strong-arm tactics worked against them in many areas; ultimately, the Shi'a will reject [redacted] just as the Sunni rejected AQI. The onus is on Gol, with Coalition Force assistance, to facilitate this cleaving providing a viable alternative which benefits all sides of the equation. A large hurdle is convincing the Shi'a that they have the power and that the threat of a Sunni resurgence is minimal thereby easing Shi'a paranoia. It is important to note also that the Sunni insurgency is not defeated or gone, only transitioned. A delicate balance must be obtained between the "haves" and the "have nots", monitored with diligence to ensure that there is not a further widening of the gap resulting in a subjugation of one side or another.***

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