



Multi-National Force - Iraq Strategy, Plans and Assessment (Strategy)

SPA STRATEGY INFORMATION PAPER

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(U) Purpose: To examine potential strategic options and recommend a course of action should the ongoing insurgency and ethno-sectarian conflict in Iraq evolve into civil war.

(S//REL) Key Judgment on the Current Situation: Civil war in Iraq is defined as a conflict whose fundamental character has shifted from a primarily anti-Coalition and anti-government insurgency to a sustained armed conflict among competing groups whose ethno-sectarian identities and loyalties grow to outweigh political, economic, tribal, regional or other interests. Violence in Iraq associated with the complex inter-relationship between the insurgency, terrorism and ethno-sectarian strife, heightened in the wake of the Golden Mosque attack, does not currently constitute a civil war. As long as prominent Shia leadership leverage their influence to maintain stability there is little likelihood that localized violence in Baghdad, Diyala and surrounding areas will spread throughout the general populace. Notwithstanding, the conditions for civil war do exist, principally: hardening of ethno-sectarian identities, high levels of violence with potential for ethnic and sectarian clashes and existence of centers of authority outside the government. A subsequent catastrophic event, similar to the Golden Mosque attack, could trigger another cycle of widespread violence could potentially push Iraq into civil war.

(S//REL) The Most Likely Scenario in the Event of Civil War: Specific political, cultural, military and geographic aspects of the current situation in Iraq will make civil war in Iraq an altogether unique event. Foremost, civil war in Iraq would be predominantly communal versus a nation-wide conflict characterized at the macro level by a significant and continuous increase in sectarian violence, civilian murders and attacks on religious sites, and at the micro level, by society fracturing along familial, tribal and neighborhood lines. In the coming months, the government may fail to form as prominent ethnic and sectarian leaders refuse to cooperate or make critical concessions. The government could also form and then subsequently dissolve as an increase in widespread violence and lawlessness would make its authority largely irrelevant. In this environment, a likely catalyst for the onset of civil war would be an attack by AQI or another terrorist group on a major emotive or iconic target that generates a sudden explosive surge in communal tensions, leading to violence and triggering large-scale operations by opposing militias. While the regional or provincial government may remain in place and functional to an extent, MOI forces would dissolve and cease to respond to central authority. Local commands would defer to local militia objectives, with individual commanders using their forces to actively pursue communal or militia agendas. The loyalty of the Iraqi Army (IA) will be more robust; however as acts of ethno-sectarian violence increase, units will see substantial AWOLs as members seek to secure their families and communities. We also see a likely increase in population movement as ethno-sectarian cleansing occurs in mixed urban areas and hardened sub-national boundaries emerge between Kurd, Shi'a and Sunni regions.

(S//REL) Indicators: Currently, MNF-I is tracking five main indicators for civil war. The first is a hardening of ethno-sectarian identities, especially among the more militant members of each group who might seek to spark a civil war. The second is a change in the character of violence from primarily anti-occupation insurgent violence to primarily targeting competing ethno-sectarian groups. The third is ethno-sectarian mobilization in response to a perceived threat from growing militias. The fourth is population movements in response to violence or to the threat of violence in specific areas, including forced relocations and voluntary population transfers affected to take control of territory. A fifth indicator is necessary to monitor the ISF: significant elements of the ISF are defecting to militias, are actively cooperating with militias, are refusing to act against them or officers are removed from their positions for obvious sectarian motivations.

(S//REL) Assumptions.

GOI will fail to form if not formed before civil war breaks out.

If the government has already formed, it will fragment into sectarian elements but a recognizable core would remain in Baghdad.

In wake of sustained sectarian violence ISF will suffer significant setbacks in cohesiveness and capability; without continued Coalition support will be unable to suppress a civil war. IP will likely largely melt away – many joining militias; while the IA, with less ethno-sectarian fissures, will come to suffer increasing rates of desertion, leading to a steep decline in capability.

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Coalition policy and national strategic guidance (revised mission, endstate, objectives in Iraq) in the event of a civil war support all potential strategic military courses of action.

The major combatants will be Shia militias (JAM, Badr, rogue elements) versus Sunni insurgent groups (1920 Revolutionary Brigade, Jaysh Muhammad, New Bath Party) with AQI and Ansar al Sunnah increasingly attempting to use their organizational and ideological strengths to take the lead.

The number of combatants not readily identified or under the control of organized militias or insurgent groups will significantly increase.

The KRG is insulated from the fighting secured by the Peshmerga in the Kurdish areas.

AQI will: surge signature operations (suicide attacks, spectacular terrorist acts against GOI and Shia religious icons) to increase momentum in escalating violence; facilitate increased flow of foreign fighters into Iraq; seek opportunity to re-establish safe haven; attempt to establish itself as the natural leader of the Sunni community.

Regional neighbors will covertly interfere in an Iraqi civil war; will not overtly intervene as long as MNF-I maintains presence.

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Infrastructure attacks will increase; substantial, long-term interruption of Iraqi oil exports.

Geographic locality of attacks will expand as combatants attempt to target opposition safe areas.

As a second order effect, a humanitarian crisis will ensue creating a significant refugee/displaced persons problem.

~~(S//REL)~~ **Risk (Specifically associated with the outbreak civil war).**

Loss of coalition public support for the war.

Government of Iraq fails to form a functioning government or dissolves altogether.

ISF fractures along sectarian lines.

AQI and Sunni Rejectionist insurgent groups establish a compact and unite efforts towards common purpose.

AQI re-establishes safe haven; emboldens Al Qaeda's supporters throughout the region causing a significant defeat for the GWOT effort.

Civil war in Iraq ignites wider regional conflict ostensibly drawn along sectarian lines; Iranian and Syrian influence in Iraq increased.

Long-term interruption of Iraqi oil exports.

Coalition casualties increase significantly.

Elements within the security forces could attempt a coup.

Limited chemical or biological weapon used against civilians.

Significant, widespread humanitarian or environmental disaster ensues.

~~(S//REL)~~ **Potential Strategic Courses of Action:** MNF-I has a broad spectrum of potential military strategic courses of action should civil war break out in Iraq. The strategic options vary from a complete withdraw of Coalition Forces from Iraq to aggressively prosecuting an offensive war against one or more of the belligerents. Ideally, the most desired course of action is one in the middle of the strategic spectrum: stop the outbreak of widespread violence using kinetic operations if necessary, then using all instruments of Coalition power, reverse the conditions that lead to civil war and resume our current lines of operations directed at the endstate specified in the Joint Campaign Plan. In practical terms, MNF-I has four broad strategic options:

~~(S//REL)~~ **Coalition Forces withdraw from Iraq:** In this course of action, Coalition Forces withdraw from Iraq entirely: either to strategic forward operating bases in the region, home nation or a combination of both. In this course of action, we would acknowledge that our strategic endstate in Iraq is unachievable in the current situation.

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We would simply cut our losses in an effort to preserve political capital and the military and economic resources to re-engage Iraq at an opportunity in the future more conducive to achieving our strategic interests. The potential advantages in withdrawing from Iraq are: (1) avoiding a war with no clearly defined, decisive and attainable military objective and lack of public support, (2) allowing Iraqis to exhaust longstanding ethno-sectarian pressure and resolve through violent conflict apparently irreconcilable differences, (3) the Coalition could preserve political capital and military and economic resources for the future when ethno-sectarian tensions have culminated in Iraq. The potential disadvantages in withdrawing from Iraq are: (1) drawing the region into a wider conflict and increase Syrian and Iranian influence in Iraq, (2) creating the global perception among allies and potential enemies that the US failed and does not have the will follow through, (3) allowing AQI to re-establish safe haven in Iraq and emboldening the global efforts of al Qaeda (much like the Soviet withdraw from Afghanistan), (4) causing a long-term loss of oil exports from Iraq, (5) creating an ensuing humanitarian disaster, (6) executing a dangerous strategic withdraw under fire and (7) permanently weakening the potential to foster democracy in the Middle East. Overall, the disadvantages, or risk, in this course of action outweigh the advantages. This is however a feasible option. Great nations throughout history have coolly calculated "return on investment" and have made sound though unpleasant decisions for long-term national well-being.

(S//REL) Coalition Forces assume a defensive, force protection posture and allow civil war to culminate: In this course of action, Coalition Forces assume a defensive, force protection- oriented posture around existing or a reduced number of key forward operating bases in Iraq. In this course of action, we would acknowledge that our strategic endstate in Iraq is temporarily unachievable. We would sustain this reduced presence and limit our exposure to hostile actions until ethno-sectarian violence subsides. We would then re-engage in security operations amongst the Iraqi populace to restore stability. Offensive operations during this course of action would be limited to maintaining the security of our reduced footprint, strike operations against terrorist sanctuary and shaping operations that could prevent imminent loss of life or physical destruction of infrastructure as long as these operations do not place us in the middle of inter-sectarian fighting. In this course of action there is the possibility of providing enabling support to any elements of the ISF that might be engaged in maintaining the central government and trying to re-establish the status quo. Actions by CF during this period would require new ROE to avoid the perception of taking sides with any faction in the civil war except that of the remaining core of the government. The potential advantages of this course of action are: (1) we could sustain this posture over a long term at a reduced level of forces, (2) Coalition Force casualties would be reduced, (3) we would avoid the pitfalls associated with taking sides in the conflict, (4) we would be positioned to resume operations to achieve our desired endstate, (5) we could protect some of the key components of the infrastructure, (6) we would be positioned to deny T&FF outright safe haven, (7) we could prevent a wider regional escalation and reduce Iranian and Syrian influence in Iraq, and finally (8) this would not be perceived as an absolute failure of US policy and would reinforce the US determination to see the mission through in Iraq. The potential disadvantages of this course of action are: (1) we will be portrayed as standing by allowing large scale violence and human rights abuses, (2) we will surrender the initiative to AQI, (3) Coalition bases might take on the unwanted role as refugee centers, and (4) the "bunker

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perception” could rapidly dissipate Coalition public support for the war. Overall, the most difficult aspect of this course of action is “selling” our actions at home and abroad. We would be well positioned however to resume the initiative after the civil war has ran its course.

(S//REL) Coalition Forces intervene to stop the civil war: In this course of action, Coalition Forces would actively conduct military operations to separate the belligerents and reduce the violence. Imperative to the success of this approach is the maintenance of the core government in Baghdad with a commitment to a political solution to the civil war and support for continuing peace negotiations. We would continue to pursue our existing strategic endstate and take on the added dimension of peace enforcement operations to our strategy. The potential advantages of this course of action are: (1) we would use the military element of power in an effective strategic role (i.e. peace enforcement similar to operations to separate the combatants in the Balkans (1995 to present), (2) we could prevent a wider regional escalation and reduce Iranian and Syrian influence in Iraq, (3) we could continue aggressive operations against T&FF, (4) we could protect the critical infrastructure at about the current level of effort, (5) we would achieve a clear global IO victory in the midst of a setback by reaffirming our commitment and meeting our moral obligation in Iraq, and (6) we could prevent to a large degree an ensuing humanitarian disaster. The potential disadvantages of this course of action are: (1) this approach will require a greater boots on the ground strength, (2) we will likely have to fight the remainder of the war with decreasing Coalition public support, (3) this approach could potentially unite the combatants against MNF-I temporarily and (4) conducting the operations necessary to separate the combatants would undoubtedly increase Coalition casualties. Overall, this course of action would challenge the Coalition’s base of popular support and require a redoubled commitment in material resources and Coalition soldiers’ lives. However, over the recent decade U.S. and British forces in particular have proved especially capable in the types of peace enforcement operations that would be necessary to stop a civil war in Iraq.

(S//REL) Coalition Forces align with one or more groups and pursue aggressive offensive operations against the opposition: In this course of action, the strategic imperative is a policy decision to choose sides in Iraq. The obvious assumption particular to this course of action is that the Coalition would side with the Shia dominated government (and making concessions to the KRG to sustain their neutrality) and pursue an outright offensive war to destroy the Sunni insurgency. The potential advantages of this course of action are: (1) ironically, we would achieve far greater leverage over the Shia government to corral the militias, crackdown on extrajudicial misconduct in the MOI and diminish relations with Iran if we agree to aggressively prosecute a war against the Sunni insurgency, (2) we would use military in an effective strategic role, (3) we could unleash certain constraints in how aggressively we attack T&FF in Sunni areas, (4) we would, after some near-term setbacks, improve the security of the strategic infrastructure and finally (5) we would largely avert a humanitarian disaster in two-thirds of Iraq. The potential disadvantages of this course of action are: (1) we would be perceived as dividing Islam and reinforcing al Qaeda’s fundamentalist appeal in the larger Sunni dominated Muslim world, (2) Coalition Force casualties would increase in the near-term, (3) it is likely that the majority of Sunni dominated units in the ISF would desert rather than pursue this course of action, and (4)

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Coalition public support would likely decline as we are perceived as becoming embroiled in a civil war. This course of action would give us considerable leverage over the Shia government as to its policy in Iraq but assumes considerable risk from a global IO perspective: regardless of which side the Coalition supports, we will likely be denounced for dividing Islam. Additionally, this course of actions would have a profound effect on the ISF requiring as to rebuild it at some point in the future with exclusively with Shia and Kurd recruits.

~~(S//REL)~~ **Key considerations for Coalition Force operations during a civil war:** In the event MNF-I does undertake operations during a civil war, ten key strategic security tasks should be considered:

1. Compel the Government of Iraq to immediately enact the most restrictive national emergency laws possible (vehicle ban, weapons ban, curfew, travel restrictions, ban against unlawful demonstration).
2. Seek unity of command: place all ISF, including MOI units under OPCON of MNF-I (get control of MOI early).
3. Use both Coalition Forces and CENTCOM assets to isolate Iraq/ block Iranian and Syrian borders.
4. Establish and enforce an inter-entity boundary (or ZOS- zone of separation) between the belligerents along ethno-sectarian fault-lines.
5. Secure Baghdad: establish a Baghdad specific ZOS, expand the green zone and secure government facilities.
6. Enforce restrictive measures on militias; be prepared to execute aggressive kinetic option to enforce weapons ban, deny freedom of action, etc.
7. Deploy theater reserve (2/1AD) and request additional forces to increase Coalition boots on the ground presence (this will not be done on the cheap –the Coalition drawdown plan will be significantly delayed).
8. Issue strong demarche (backed by the implicit threat of force) to Iran and Syria not to interfere in Iraq and immediately halt the flow of terrorists entering Iraq.
9. Secure Iraq's strategic infrastructure.
10. Continue to pursue AQI in order to prevent them from establishing a safe haven in Iraq.