Strategic Assessment in the Wake of the Golden Mosque Attack

- The Impact of Militias
- Sectarian Violence
- Performance of the ISF
- Strategic Implications on Our Broader Mission
The Impact of Militias

- JAM members reacted very rapidly and were the most active group in the three days following the attack.
- Sunni perceived that they were threatened by Shia revenge attacks.
- Most JAM actions were defensively oriented to protect Shia mosques and neighborhoods.
- Although it was reported, no confirmation JAM took over and "protected" Sunni mosques.
- MNF-I could not confirm reports of similar actions by Badr groups.
- Very difficult to discriminate between JAM and "rogue militia" elements.
- Lawless behavior and lack of discipline destabilized the situation — there were murders and attacks on mosques.
- Sadr control appeared greater in south, south-central Iraq; less control in Baghdad.
- JAM filled security vacuum in some areas (manned IP checkpoints, armed patrolling, guarding Shi’a mosques/holy sites).
- JAM presented no overt challenge to ISF or CF once our forces increased security levels.
- 1920 Revolutionary Brigade members reportedly protected Sunni mosques in a militia-like role.
Sectarian Violence

The facts based on Iraqi NJOC reporting/ MNC-I confirmation (22FEB-1MAR):

- Mosques attacked: 56 / 33* (majority Sunni mosques)
- Civilians killed: 493 / 311
- Protests >1,000: 14 / 20

Post-Samarra period highest level of ethno-sectarian violence in past year; sharp increase in assassinations, executions, murders indicates heavy ethno-sectarian link

Initial spike in violence in first 48 hours following attack; subsided after emergency measures fully implemented across four key provinces (Baghdad, Babil, Diyala, Salah ad Din)

Additional spike in bombings on 28FEB following lifting of daytime curfew (five VBIEDs, one SVEST attacks in Baghdad- likely AQI)

Reports of sectarian-minority families fleeing some areas fearing retribution

Nahrwan attack surge:
- Surge in civilian murders (74 between 28 February-1 March); majority of victims assessed to be Shi’a
- Linkages to Golden Mosque bombing not clear at this time
- Similar TTPs, proximity, indicates single team; AQI likely responsible
Performance of the ISF

- Immediate response to secure the attack site, security operations in and around Samarra generally well executed; national C2 ineffective, slow to respond
- IP performed their duties within capabilities and IAW the rule of law throughout most of Iraq; allowed militia freedom of movement, abandoned checkpoints and conducted joint patrols with JAM in some areas (Baghdad)
- MOI-MOD confrontation: some low-level green-on-green engagements, cross-ministry detentions; perception of allegiances (MOI-Shi’a; MOD-Sunni) major catalyst for distrust and overreaction
- Mistrust of MOI forces in Sunni areas exacerbated by recent reports of sectarian-driven extrajudicial misconduct
- IA and IP performed well in other parts of Iraq during the crisis (security for demonstrations in the south; security operations in Anbar, other areas); no indication of broad-based disruption in security forces
- Positive popular response to Iraqi Army show of force in Baghdad
- Senior defense/interior leaders willing to dialogue/cooperate after initial friction (with MNF mediation)
Strategic Implications (1 of 2)

- The mosque attack and the ensuing violence have not started a civil war.
- Although the cycle of violence has abated, potential remains high for another significant event to set-off a renewed wave of violence.
- The enemy continues to demonstrate an understanding of strategic targeting and the impact of IO in an attempt to foment civil war.
- The resulting political friction will delay formation of the government and complicate the development of a national compact/national unity.
- The cycle of violence and fear that followed the attack confirms that ethno-sectarian tension is driving the fundamental conflict in Iraq.
- Religious and political leaders outside the government (Sistani, Hakim, Sadr) continue to hold national level influence that rivals Iraq’s elected leaders; demonstrates the need for broad Coalition strategic engagement.
- Muqtadah al Sadr used the event to denounce MNF-I, further political ambition; his actions to gain legitimacy will remain unhelpful.
- JAM and other militias used the crises as a pretext to carry-out overt sectarian activities which question ISF credibility as the legitimate security force responsible for the rule of law; we can expect more of the same unless these groups are addressed.
Strategic Implications (2 of 2)

- Some MOI units failed to police illegal militia activities, perception of indifference hurts legitimacy in Sunni areas; confirms our strategic assessment of MOI/Police capabilities and importance of enhanced focus (Year of the Police)

- Show of strength by Iraqi Army (armored formations) welcomed by the public; confirms our efforts to build capable IA units is paying off— from both capability as well as from an IO standpoint

- Friction between MOD-MOI highlights risk of ISF fracturing; confirms need to continue national-level focus in the security ministries

- MNF-I did not rush to intervene, allowed GOI/ISF to resolve the crisis; confirms our strategic concept of placing Iraqis increasingly in the lead, senior level engagement with security forces critical; overwatch capability essential to future transitions; complicated geographic balance of effort between T&FF areas and mixed ethnic areas

- Some Sunni insurgent groups (1920s Revolutionary Brigade) took on militia-like activities in the crisis; confirms suspected future trends for Sunni insurgent groups

- AQI and Sunni insurgent groups failed to reach consensus on response in aftermath; even in crisis, gap continues to widen between AQI and Sunni insurgent groups

- Continued ethno-sectarian violence will complicate our drawdown decisions—both from a practical standpoint as well as from an IO perspective; our assessment remains that our drawdown decisions should remain on track
Back-up Slides
What We Know

- A bomb detonated in Samarra on 22 Feb 06 at 0655 destroying the Golden Mosque
- The mosque attack and the ensuing violence have not started a civil war
- Government of Iraq slow to respond and friction between MoD/MoD confirms need to continue focus on developing capability at the ministry level
- MNF-I did not rush to intervene, allowed GoI/ISF to resolve the issue
- The MoD and MoI did not initially coordinate their actions, however senior leaders have now signed a joint agreement to improve trust and confidence between the security services
- The ISF did not fracture along sectarian lines; local issues in Baghdad with police units, however throughout most of Iraq, ISF performed well
- In some Sunni areas Coalition Forces are being seen as the guarantor of security and protection from secular ISF and militias
- JAM was the most active and destabilizing militia in the wake of the bombing
- Senior Iraq leadership are willing to invoke limited measures to contain violence such as curfews, but are unwilling to take aggressive action such as enforcing a weapons ban
- Attack levels and civilian casualties have increased in the wake of the bombings
- AQI will continue to pursue their strategic objective of fomenting civil war in Iraq
What We Think

- AQI were behind the Golden Mosque bombing; they will attempt another strategic attack
- Govt emergency measures and ISF actions led to an easing of tensions in the days following the bombing
- Even without another strategic attack, this period of heightened tension will last 30-60 days
- Forming a less than perfect government now is better than waiting months to form a perfect government to lessen the window of vulnerability
- The violence and fear in the wake of the bombing strengthened our contention that the fundamental conflict in Iraq is one between and among ethnic and sectarian groups over the distribution of political and economic power
- The Iraqi Army enjoys an increasing popular trust among the Iraqi people; confirms our efforts to build a capable IA
- Mol forces do not have the same level of trust; our assessment of Mol and IPS forces is accurate; confirms importance of the Year of the Police
- Some militias took advantage of the bombing to carry out a violent agenda while some militias contributed to the restoration of calm
- In some areas the ISF allowed militias to carry out their agenda
- Sectarian Militia action contributed to an increase in civilian casualties
- Shia patience was severely tested by the Golden Mosque bombing
- Non-elected leaders in Iraq will continue to wield substantial power in Iraqi politics
- MAS will continue to pursue a political agenda unhelpful to achieving national unity
What We Don’t Know

- When the new government will form, and what character it will have when it forms
- When and where the next strategic attack will come
- What effect a new government will have on the aftermath of the next attack
- Who was responsible for the Golden Mosque attack
- How widespread any militia attacks on religious sites were
- The degree to which Shia militias have infiltrated the ISF and real level of responsibility for violence against Sunnis in the wake of the bombing
- How the various factions will react to the next attack
- If Shia patience will remain in the wake of another strategic attack
- How this attack should affect our drawdown decisions