



State of the Insurgency in al-Anbar I MEF G-2

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General Situation: As of mid August, 2006, the daily average number of attacks exceeds 50 per day in al-Anbar Province. This activity reflects a 57% increase in overall attack numbers since I MEF assumed control of the province in February. Intensifying violence is reflected in the preponderantly negative outlook of the Sunni population, in the continuing inability to develop adequate Iraqi security forces, and in the near complete failure of reconstruction and development projects across western Iraq. *The social and political situation has deteriorated to a point that MNF and ISF are no longer capable of militarily defeating the insurgency in al-Anbar.*

Social Collapse: Underlying this decline in stability is the near complete collapse of social order in al-Anbar. The tribal system has wholly failed in AO Raleigh and Topeka, and has only limited efficacy in AO Denver. Prominent leaders have exiled themselves to neighboring Jordan and Syria, including some leading imams. Despite the success of the December elections, nearly all government institutions from the village to provincial level have disintegrated or have been thoroughly corrupted and infiltrated by al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) or criminal/insurgent gangs. *Violence and criminality are now the principle driving factors behind daily life for most Anbar Sunni; they commit violence or crime, avoid violence or crime through corruption and acquiescence, or become victims.*

Isolation from Baghdad: Already embroiled in a daily fight for survival, al-Anbar Sunni have little hope for national reconciliation or re-integration into the national polity. From the Sunni perspective, their greatest fears have been realized: Iran controls Baghdad and Anbaris have been marginalized. True or not, this paranoia directly undermines Sunni willingness to envision a unified Iraq under the current structure. These fears also are reinforced by actions of the Shi'a-dominated government, including the failure to pay ISF in al-Anbar, attacks by official Shi'a paramilitary groups against Sunni civilian targets in Baghdad, the unwillingness to confront the Jaysh al-Mandi, bureaucratic attacks on popular Sunni political and military leaders, and minimal support for local government institutions and initiatives from Ramadi to al-Qa'im. This sense of isolation directly undermines Sunni willingness to work within IG and MNF defined social and political boundaries.

Lack of Resources: Although recent reports appear to confirm the presence of natural gas and some oil reserves along the western Euphrates river valley, there is no prospect for exploitation or development of these resources in the foreseeable future. In the absence of security, even the most aggressive investors are unwilling to risk an al-Anbar venture. Wealthy expatriate Ba'athists talk a strong game of support from Amman and Damascus, but have been unwilling to reinvigorate the al-Anbar economy from their accounts. The only resource that matters - oil - is in the hands of the Shi'a government. From the Sunni perspective, oil is the source of real power in Iraq. With oil money comes government largesse, structured public investment, personal position,

and cronyism. Because they lack faith in the political system, many Sunni see the only way to regain control of Iraqi oil is through violence. This sentiment directly feeds the insurgency and is used to justify violent criminal behavior. Anbaris have begun overtly to blame the province's inadequate resource allocation, from the national power grid, for example, to sectarian motivations in Baghdad ministries.

Al-Qaida in Iraq: AQI is the dominant organization of influence in al-Anbar, surpassing nationalist insurgents, the Iraqi Government, and MNF in its ability to control the day-to-day life of the average Sunni. Transitioning to a primarily Iraqi organization in late 2004, *AQI has become an integral part of the social fabric of western Iraq.* With this "Iraqification" came devolution to low-level, semi-autonomous, and criminally financed cells of varying loyalty to the larger AQI organization. While this diffusion has weakened the original Salafi zeal of AQI writ large, it has eliminated the opportunity for a decapitating strike that would cripple the organization - this is why the death of Zarqawi had so little impact on the structure and capabilities of AQI, especially in al-Anbar.

AQI effectively has eliminated, subsumed, marginalized or co-opted all nationalist insurgent groups in al-Anbar. This very deliberate AQI campaign against rival insurgent groups began shortly after national elections in December 2005, when nationalist insurgent groups cooperated to prevent AQI from disrupting polling throughout al-Anbar. Faced with this blatant challenge to their hegemony, AQI destroyed the Anbar People's Council of Mohammed Mahmoud Latif through a highly efficient and comprehensive assassination campaign, thereby eliminating the sole rival nexus of insurgent leadership in al-Anbar. Following this calculated purge, AQI cunningly employed their greater financial resources, superior organization, proven leadership, and brutal tactics to consolidate their hold on most other nationalist insurgent cells in al-Anbar. Parallel to this effort, AQI enacted a tactical alliance with the small Ansar al-Sunna cells operating in some parts of al-Anbar, particularly in the Haditha Triad.

Al-Anbar Sunni now see an entrenched, Iraqi AQI that in some cases has taken on the mantle of nationalism, or more recently, "defender of the faithful" against the Iranian-backed Shi'a. Although most al-Anbar Sunni dislike, resent, and distrust AQI, many increasingly see it as an inevitable part of daily life and, in some cases, their only hope for protection against a possible ethnic cleansing campaign by the central government.

The remaining core of AQI Salafists retain the capability to guide the organization in broad terms; they can shift resources, fund specific groups, and mass combat power for short "campaigns" by pulling in disparate cells from across western Iraq. The zeal of the vanguard remains relatively intact - there can be no realistic expectation that AQI will negotiate with the IG or MNF short of accepting absolute surrender and ascension to power. The perceived indecisiveness and moral weakness of both the IG and MNF directly feed the resolve of AQI, as well as the grudging acceptance of AQI by the populace. As long as the status quo between the central government and the al-Anbar Sunni remains, AQI is an intractable problem.

Sunni Outlook: From the al-Anbar Sunni perspective, there is little hope that the status quo will lead to a better future. The economy in western Iraq provides bare sustenance to the average citizen while enriching criminals, insurgents, and corrupt officials. The

potential for economic revival appears to be nonexistent. Violence and fear are the dominant factors in daily life, reinforcing a predilection for survival behavior nourished under the sanctions period. This behavior in turn feeds criminality and corruption and undermines faith in government institutions.

Increasingly, there appears to be little chance for national reconciliation with the Shi'a. Deep-seated fears of Iranian domination have been realized and embodied in the central government. Although more trust has been placed in MNF to protect and support the average citizen, there is little hope that American troops will remain long enough to provide true stability. Faced with the prospects of an increasingly brutish future, there is every reason to support the insurgency.

Tactical and Operational Considerations: The Sunni outlook underlies the dramatic increase in attacks since February. However, several tactical and operational considerations have contributed to the rise in violence. Despite some success in isolated areas of the province, the insurgency has strengthened in the past six months. Insurgent groups are better organized, increasingly achieve effective operational security, have improved their capabilities to cache and distribute weapons, and have refined and adapted their tactics. Control of criminal enterprise means the majority of insurgents are now financially self-sustaining at the lowest levels. Broad control of the illicit oil trade from Baiji provides millions of dollars per year to AQI, while official profits appear to feed Shi'a cronyism in Baghdad.

With the slight increase in MNF and ISF units operating across al-Anbar, there is more presence in insurgent-dominated terrain; increased presence provides an increase in targets and opportunity. Continuation of the mass prisoner release program feeds the cycle of recidivism across western Iraq, repopulating insurgent groups at regular intervals and preventing tactical progress against their force structure. Although it is likely that attack levels have peaked, *the steady rise in attacks from mid-2003 to 2006 indicates a clear failure to defeat the insurgency in al-Anbar Province.*

Way Ahead: Barring the deployment of an additional MNF division and the injection of billions of dollars of reconstruction and investment money into the Province, there is nothing MNF can do to influence the motivations of al-Anbar Sunni to wage an insurgency. Federalism provides a possible solution:

–Federalism is legally possible under the current constitution. Creating a successful federated Sunni state in al-Anbar would require considerable political and legal wrangling by a unified political block.

–A federated state might provide the Sunni of western Iraq with the general sense of "buy-in" lacking under the centralized, Shi'a-dominated government. This in turn may tempt expatriate Anbari elites, exemplified by the Central Council of al-Anbar, to return to the province or at least increase their support and involvement in al-Anbar economic development.

- Successful federation, providing al-Anbar with a specified and locally controlled budget, could lead to a broad revival in Ramadi. This would in turn necessitate the formation of effective local governments to appeal to the Governor for resources.

- Although a centralized budget carries considerable temptation and risk in such a corrupt and criminal environment, ownership of the budget might encourage an increase in local responsibility and accountability in Ramadi.

- In Iraq, all politics are local, and local politics and government in al-Anbar is anemic or dysfunctional due to insurgent intimidation - Fallujah being a notable exception. That many local officials remain in office despite threats from insurgents and little support from Baghdad is a testament to their resilience and forbearance. This natural impetus to create effective government at the local level will help address a wide range of social and economic problems that feed the insurgency. Unlike a MNF-sponsored government, a self-generated government with a real and accountable budget holds promise for long-term success.

- Al-Anbar potentially could control a sizeable and legally approved paramilitary force, offsetting the fears of Iranian domination or Shi'a pogroms. This force would have a better chance of encouraging local recruitment than a national, Shi'a-dominated military force likely to station Sunni recruits far from their homes.

- Despite a vicious insurgent intimidation campaign, the Iraqi Police in al-Anbar have proven remarkably resilient in most areas, especially when they can rally around an effective leader. When fully formed and properly supported, the Iraqi Police can pose a credible challenge to AQI in al-Anbar.

However:

- Currently, there is no unified Sunni political block interested in establishing a federal state in al-Anbar. The majority of Sunni politicians vocally oppose federalism, primarily based on the fear of economic/budgetary isolation.

- Federalism brings with it a host of potential social problems, including forced migration, sectarian cleansing, and the very real chance of national isolation.

- Iraqi federation could spark a wider conflict between Iran and Sunni Arab countries and interests within the MEF Area of Interest.

- Despite recent friction, there is very little long-term, grass roots friction between Iraqi Sunni and Shi'a. Most al-Anbar Sunni see Iran, not the Iraqi Shi'a, as their most pressing threat. At a visceral level, many Anbaris may not support federalism based on sectarian considerations.

- Federalism will not eliminate AQI or immediately address most of the underlying social issues that feed the insurgency.

Final Consideration: The insurgency in al-Anbar and the suffering of al-Anbar citizens undoubtedly would be far worse now if it was not for the very effective efforts of MNF operations. That we cannot end the insurgency in al-Anbar within the present political conditions is not an indication that our efforts have not had a very real suppressive effect on the insurgency.