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New Patterns in the Iraqi Insurgency:

The War for a Civil War in Iraq

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Executive Summary

An Asymmetric War within an Asymmetric War

There are strong indications that there is an asymmetric war going on within an asymmetric war. The primary goal of virtually all insurgents has shifted from efforts to attack the Coalition and drive it out of parts or all of Iraq, to attacking the Iraqi government and its forces and causing the current political process to fail. What makes the most extreme Sunni Insurgents, who are largely “neo-Salafi” different, is that many see a civil war as an end in itself, and as part of a much broader struggle for an Islam dominated by their narrow view of Sunni Puritanism.

In general, native Iraqi Sunni “nationalists” want some mix of a return to a government closer to a Ba'athist regime, a secular regime which Sunnis dominate or where they have a "fair share" of power, or an Iraq in which Iraqi Sunnis -- not Shi'ites -- power and the religious lead. Anger, revenge, economic need, opposition to the US invasion and any government that grows out of it or sheer lack of hope in the current system are all motives as well.

Sunni “neo-Salafi” insurgents – particularly those led by people like Zarqawi – have different goals. They believe they are fighting a region-wide war in Iraq for a form of Sunni extremism that not only will eliminate any presence by Christians and Jews, but also create a Sunni puritan state in which other sects of Islam are forced to convert to their interpretation or are destroyed.

Sunni Islamist extremist insurgents in Iraq are far more willing to use extreme methods of violence like suicide bombs and use them against Shi'ite and Kurdish targets. They are equally willing to use them against Iraqi officials and Iraqis in the military, security, and police services, and Iraqis of all religious and ethnic background that do not support them in their interpretation of jihad. Moreover, they act on the principle ordinary Iraqi citizens can be sacrificed as expendable in a war fought in God's cause: These Sunni Islamic extremists are fighting a war that extends throughout the world, not simply in Iraq, and their goals affect all Arab states and all of Islam.

This ideological rationale has an important implication -- particularly for the insurgent movements with large numbers of foreign Islamists. Such insurgents do not have to “win” in Iraq, at least in any conventional sense of the term. An outcome that leaves Iraq in a state of prolonged civil war, and forces a spreading conflict in Islam between Sunnis and other sects, and neo-Salafists and other Sunnis, would be seen a prelude to a broader eschatological conflict they believe is inevitable and that God will ensure they win. They are not fighting a limited war -- at least in terms of their ultimate ends and means. Compromise is at best a temporary action forced upon them for the purposes of expediency.

From the viewpoint of negotiation and deterrence, it seems almost certain that many cadres and leaders of such groups and cells cannot be persuaded; only defeated. Furthermore, they not only will remain alienated and violent -- almost regardless of what the government and other Sunnis do -- they will remain active diehards until they are rooted out, move on to new countries or areas if force to disperse, and join other extreme Sunni Islamist movements if the ones they currently support are defeated.

Who Are the Neo-Salafi Extremist Insurgents?

No one can reliably estimate how many such neo-Salafi extremists there are in the field. No one fully understands how many movements and cells are involved. It seems fairly clear, however, that such neo-Salafi groups are a small part of the insurgency. It is also fairly clear that they are tactical and lethal in their violence in Iraq.

Most experts guesstimate the number of Islamist extremist insurgents at some 5-10 percent of the total insurgents without being able to say what base number they are a percent of. US experts and officers sometimes make reference to a total of 20,000 insurgents of all kinds, but such experts are among the first to state that these are more nominal mid-points in a range of guesses than real estimates. Other experts guesstimate the total number of Sunni insurgents and active sympathizers insurgents of all kinds at totals from 15,000 to 60,000, with far larger numbers of additional passive sympathizers. These quesstimates would put the Sunni Islamist extremists at anywhere from 1,500 to 6,000.

While most experts agree that the total number of Sunni insurgents is not increasing or decreasing sharply, there is no agreement on the trend in numbers or over the level of expertise that survives constant Coalition and Iraqi government pressure.

Certainly, the insurgents continue to be able to act – particularly in carrying out bloody suicide bombings and other attacks on soft targets like Shi'ite and Kurdish civilians and poorly protected recruits, police, journalists, diplomats,

contractors, and officials. While the Coalition and Iraqi government have long ceased to issue any public estimates, in an effort to downplay the seriousness of the insurgency, Iraq papers are filled with daily reports of insurgent violence, and increasingly with reports of possible reprisals. It is also clear that even when the victims are not identified by sect or ethnicity, the civilian targets and mass killings are largely Shi'ite, some time Kurdish, and normally are only Sunni when an area seems loyal to the government or the civilians involved as associated with Iraqi government, Iraqi forces, or Coalition targets.

The Impact of Foreign Volunteers

There is broad agreement that such foreign volunteers are one of the most dangerous aspects of in the insurgency since they have been involved in those attacks that have done most to provoke a civil war between Iraq's Arab Sunnis and its Arab Shi'ites, Kurds, and other minorities.

Many lower level Islamist/extremist volunteers are not trained or skilled fighters. They come from a wide range of countries, often with little or no training, and the overwhelming majority has only a limited history of affiliation with any organized Islamist or extremist group.¹ The movements they join, however, do have a large percentage of Iraqi and foreign fighters who are considerably better organized, well armed, and capable of effective ambushes and attacks. These more experienced jihadists have shown they can fight hard, and are sometimes willing to stand and die in ways that force MNF-I and Iraqi troops into intense firefights and clashes.

It takes little training to commit some of the most divisive and brutal attacks; in fact, all it takes is a willingness to seek martyrdom. Coalition and Iraqi government sources lack credibility when they make sweeping statements about the unwillingness of Iraqis to conduct suicide attacks or seek martyrdom without any back up or supporting analysis of recent attacks. Most of the suicide bombers in Iraq do, however, seem to have been foreign jihadists. One US defense official estimated that as of July 2005, Iraqis had directly carried out less than 10% of more than 500 suicide bombings.² Islamist extremist web sites have also become filled with the claimed biographies of foreign "martyrs."³ Some such claims are suspect, but they do seem to have carried out most of the suicide car and pedestrian bombings since 2003.

Such attacks accelerated sharply in the spring and summer of 2005; the Associated Press counted at least 213 suicide attacks between January and July 2005. US Air Force General, and MNF-I spokesperson, Don Alston stated, "The foreign fighters are the ones most often behind the wheel of suicide car bombs, or most often behind any suicide situation," and Gen. Abizaid stated that the Coalition had seen a rise in suicide bombers coming from North Africa, particularly Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.⁴

Whatever the numbers of such recruits may be, the officials and counterterrorist experts in Gulf and other Arab countries are deeply concerned about the fact that some clerics and Islamic organizations recruit young Arabs and men from other Islamic countries for Islamist extremist organizations, and then infiltrate them through countries like Syria into Iraq. Such efforts are sometimes scattered and individual, rather than tied to movements like Al Qa'ida in visible ways, and can bypass counterterrorist efforts focused on internal security.

Given past experience, many will survive their experiences in Iraq, and emerge as new cadres of expert terrorists. This will confront Iraq's neighbors and other Islamic countries with a whole new generation of young men being trained as Islamic extremists and Jihadists outside the country.

Islamist Extremist Groups and Zarqawi

It is not only hard to determine the strength of neo-Salafi Islamist extremist groups; it is hard to know the total number of the groups or their affiliations. The Sunni neo-Salafi Islamist organizations that are forming in Iraq, but they are constantly changing and mutating and their affiliation, strength, ideology, and financial backing remain uncertain. Some of these groups could be considered spin-offs of larger groups such as Al Qa'ida and Zarqawi's group.

At the same time, they do seem to have a largely common and consistent belief structure and approach to warfighting. As is clear from the State Department report, there seem to be little difference between Ansar Al-Suna, Ansar Al-Islam, and Zarqawi's group, Jama'at Al Tawhid Wa' al-Jihad other than their names. Such groups adapt different names sometimes to exaggerate the influence of the insurgency and sometimes to appeal to various recruitment pools (Islamist Arabists, Salafists, neo-Salafist, etc.).

Perhaps the most dangerous tendency within these movements is the degree to which some have gone beyond attacking foreign targets like the Coalition, or Iraqi government targets, and have sought to create a religious conflict

within Iraq and Islam. Struggles for influence, power, money, and territory are scarcely humane, but they have natural pragmatic limits. They also do not divide one of the world's great religions against itself.

The Shi'ite Response

The actions and statements by Zarqawi and other Sunni extremists have not yet triggered large-scale revenge seeking by the Shi'ites, although they clearly have increased the tension between Sunni and Shi'ite, and encourage Shi'ite separatism and federalism. Religious leaders from both sides have urged calm in the wake of sectarian tensions. Imams in mosques across Iraq from Baghdad, to Najaf, to Kirkuk have blamed the violence on "outsiders."

Shi'ites have been urged by leading clerics and political leaders not to react to attacks or the Zarqawi's declaration of war against them. A disciple of Ayatollah Ali Sistani urged worshipers that to "[submit] to ones' passion and confusion will bring us to domestic sedition and eventually lead us to failure...We must go forward, to be patient and carry on building the new Iraq."⁵

There have been increasing reports, however, that Shi'ites have started striking Sunni areas. Shi'ite paramilitary groups have reportedly, kidnapped and tortured Sunnis, and seized Sunni mosques in Baghdad.⁶ For example, following a car bomb in Baqubah on September 17, 2005, it was reported that some Shi'ites near Taji, north of Baghdad, blocked the main north-south highway, stopped cars, and ordered drivers to turn back.⁷

The role of hard-line Shi'ite Islamist movements is becoming increasingly uncertain. Moqtada al-Sadr has been publicly supportive of the political process in Iraq on other occasions, and has urged Shi'ites to avoid sectarian fighting with the Sunni population. Yet the strength of his militia remains a concern. The Sadr Organization and other organized religious groups have been accused of political assassinations and kidnappings, as have Kurdish forces in the North. Hard-line Shi'ite Islamists have also steadily expanded their power and control in the area around Basra, and pushed out Sunnis, Christians, and more secular Iraqis in the process. Movements like Sadr's Mahdi Army have experienced a major resurgence in areas such as Basra, while unofficial Shi'ite police and militia have created a growing environment of fear.⁸

Another challenge is presented by uniformed, government-sponsored police and security forces using their power to express loyalties to religious parties or political factions. Some Sunnis increasingly state that largely Shi'ite and Kurdish military and security units have become more and more ruthless in operating in Sunni areas. This problem could become much worse if sectarian and ethnic tension increases because even units with mixes of Sunni officers often have largely Shi'ite manning.

Ties to Bin Laden and Outside Sunni Islamist Groups

A key aspect of the neo-Salafi Sunni Islamist extremist groups is that their struggle extends far beyond the borders of Iraq, as does their support base. The Zarqawi group, for example, has steadily strengthened its ties to outside terrorist groups. In October 2004, Zarqawi publicly pledged allegiance to Bin Laden and changed the name of his organization from Al Tawhid wal Jihad (Unity and Holy War) to Al Qa'ida in the Land of the Two Rivers.⁹ While there is no evidence that the two men have ever met or even directly communicated, Bin Laden issued a statement in December 2004 confirming Zarqawi as the "Emir" of Al Qa'ida in Iraq.

International affiliation provides a stream of outside money and support, tactical advice, and weapons and technology. It helps expand news media coverage and feed satellite news networks. It allows Sunni Islamist extremist inside Iraq to capitalize on anger at the US over the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as exploit dissatisfaction with Arab and other regimes in Islamic countries. The end result is an informal network of neo-Salafi hate groups that extends to Europe and the US, has elements in virtually every country in the Middle East, and elements in Central, South, and Southeast Asia.

A Chronology of A War of Bigotry and Hatred

Actions speak louder than words, and literally so in the case of Iraq. There is no precise way to know exactly which group has been responsible for each attack on Shi'ites or Kurds, or to know what their exact motive has been. The pattern of past attacks does, however, include many cases where Sunni Islamist extremist groups have claimed responsibility for attacks on Shi'ites and Kurds, and the chronology of violence speaks for itself.

Suicide bombings are only one weapon used by Islamist extremists and have been used for a wide variety of purposes other than provoking civil war. At the same time, an Associated Press chronology of the most serious bombings clearly shows they have often been used to provoke ethnic and sectarian hatred between Iraqis:

- Aug. 19, 2003: A truck bomb explodes outside the U.N. headquarters building in Baghdad, killing 22 people.
- Aug. 29, 2003: A car bomb explodes outside mosque in Najaf, killing more than 85 people, including Shi'ite leader Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim. Although officials never gave a final death toll, there were suspicions it may have been higher.
- Oct. 27, 2003: Four suicide bombings target International Red Cross headquarters and four Iraqi police stations in Baghdad, killing 40 people, mostly Iraqis.
- Feb. 1, 2004: Twin suicide bombers kill 109 people in two Kurdish party offices in Irbil.
- Feb. 10, 2004: Suicide bomber explodes a truckload of explosives outside a police station in Iskandariyah, killing 53 people.
- Feb. 11, 2004: Suicide attacker blows up a car packed with explosives in a crowd of Iraqis waiting outside an army recruiting center in Baghdad, killing 47 people.
- March 2, 2004: Coordinated blasts from suicide bombers, mortars and planted explosives strike Shi'ite Muslim shrines in Karbala and in Baghdad, killing at least 181 and wounding 573.
- April 21, 2004: Five blasts near police stations and police academy in southern city of Basra kill at least 55 people.
- July 29, 2004: A suicide car bomb devastates a busy street in Baqouba, killing 70 people.
- Aug. 26, 2004: A mortar barrage slams into a mosque filled with Iraqis preparing to march on the embattled city of Najaf, killing 27 people and wounding 63.
- Sept. 14, 2004: A car bomb rips through a busy market near a Baghdad police headquarters where Iraqis were waiting to apply for jobs, and gunmen open fire on a van carrying police home from work in Baqouba, killing at least 59 people and wounding at least 114.
- Sept. 30, 2004: A series of bombs in Baghdad's al-Amel neighborhood kill 35 children and seven adults as U.S. troops hand out candy at a government ceremony to inaugurate a new sewage treatment plant.
- Dec. 19, 2004: Car bombs tear through a Najaf funeral procession and Karbala's main bus station, killing at least 60 people and wounding more than 120 in the two Shi'ite holy cities.
- Feb. 8, 2005: A suicide bomber blows himself up in the middle of a crowd of army recruits, killing 21 people.
- Feb. 18, 2005: 2 suicide bombers attack 2 mosques, leaving 28 dead, while an explosion near a Shi'ite ceremony kills 2 other people.
- Feb. 28, 2005: A suicide car bomber targets mostly Shi'ite police and National Guard recruits in Hillah, killing 125 and wounding more than 140. Some of the dead and injured are at a nearby market.
- March 10, 2005: A suicide bomber blows himself up at a Shi'ite mosque during a funeral in the northern city of Mosul, killing at least 47 people and wounding more than 100.
- April 24, 2005: Insurgents stage coordinated double-bombings in Tikrit and a Shi'ite neighborhood in Baghdad, killing a total of 29 Iraqis and injuring 74.
- May 1, 2005: A car bomb obliterates a tent crowded with mourners for the funeral of a Kurdish official in the northern city of Tal Afar, killing 25 people and wounding more than 50.
- May 4, 2005: Bomb explodes among Iraqi civilians applying for police jobs in Irbil, killing 60 people and wounding some 150.
- July 16, 2005: Suicide bomber detonates explosives strapped to his body at a gas station near a Shi'ite mosque in central city of Musayyib, blowing up a fuel tanker and killing at least 54 people and wounding at least 82.

The Iraqi Government and Coalition Response

There is no way at this point to predict whether neo-Salafi Sunni extremists can succeed in using violence and hatred to provoke a civil war. It is clear, however, that Iraq is not yet moving towards stability and much depends on the success of the Iraqi political process, the way in which the Coalition and Iraqi government fight the insurgency, and

what economic and other incentives are offered to persuade Iraqi Sunnis to support the political process rather than the insurgency.

The Political Struggle to Prevent a Civil War: A Faltering and Potentially Divisive Process

Iraq has so far been fortunate in its political leadership. Top officials have so far resisted the efforts to create an open civil war, and have continued to make efforts to include Iraqi Sunnis in the political process. The senior Shi'ite and Sunni clerics have made equally serious efforts to prevent civil war and reprisals and revenge killings.

At the same time, there are many serious problems in the Iraqi political process, and the insurgents pushing for civil war are anything but defeated. Shi'ite and Kurdish leaders may push for inclusiveness, but they scarcely have failed to try to maximize their own sectarian and ethnic advantage. They have not produced any clear picture of what the Sunni role would be in Iraq's future, and they have sought to increase their own political power, access to the nation's wealth, and forms of federalism that could benefit them at the expense of the Sunnis.

There is talk about political progress toward inclusion, but evidence of any clear trend is lacking. Quite aside from a lack of convincing public opinion polls, one would hope to see tangible signs of progress towards unity in a key mixed city like Baghdad, and in a key urban area like Mosul. So far, however, there are few samples of political versus military progress, and day-to-day progress in security is lacking. The previous chronologies have made it all too clear that the Coalition and Iraqi government have not established security and support in much of the Sunni areas of Baghdad, and the status of Mosul is uncertain. Certainly, there is still substantial support for the insurgency in Al Anbar and other primarily Sunni areas.

More broadly, the constitution and the referendum to decide on its future so far seem more divisive than uniting. It is unlikely that Sunnis can mobilize a two-thirds opposition vote in three provinces -- particularly if large numbers of Sunnis opt out of the vote. Yet, the content of the constitution, and the timing of the referendum, will then create the of political forces that almost ensure that debates will be polarized along ethnic, sectarian, and religious lines versus secular lines, and with little real popular attention to the constitution's details and options for compromise. This will exacerbate the problems caused by the fact that the constitution is an ambiguous document that raises a large number of highly divisive issues without resolving them.

Once the referendum is over, the Iraqi political structure must then deal with critical issues like what kind of federal areas will be created, and what is their power; who gets what amount of state revenue; what is the relative power of the national government and the federations; who really has legal and police powers at the local level; and what is the legal role of religion. All will have to be fought over -- at least politically -- in the months to come.

While some Iraqis talk about a popular shift towards more secular and national parties once the campaigns for the new election begins, it is hard to see such a shift. It seems much more likely that it will be fought out on intensified Arab Sunni vs. Arab Shi'ite lines with increasing Kurdish separatism. At the same time, it is hard to see why hostile Sunnis will accept the legitimacy of the result if the constitution is accepted, or what they can win in the election to follow. Simply being in the government or participating in the election does not necessarily alter the balance of power or help the Sunnis deal with any of the major problems they have encountered since the fall of Saddam Hussein:

The growing trend towards Shi'ite federalism and the rise of local Shi'ite governments, police forces, and religious militias in areas like Basra also helps the Sunni neo-Salafi extremist cause. It may be unfair to single out mainstream Shi'ite Islamist groups like Al-Dawa, or SCIRI and the Badr forces for their role in pushing for more hard-line Shi'ite approaches to governance, security, and religious orthodoxy. Certainly, Sadr's Mahdi Militia and local Shi'ite elements play a major role. Nevertheless, what Shi'ite party political leaders say at the national level is not always what their followers and subordinates practice at local level.

The Military Struggle to Prevent a Civil War: Uncertain Victories and Uncertain Impacts

The neo-Salafi effort to create a civil war is extraordinarily difficult to defeat unless the Iraqi government and Coalition can deny them the mix of popular support and tolerance that allows them to operate with comparative security and to disperse when they come under pressure or attack. Small groups can continue to conduct extremely violent attacks against soft targets, carry out selective assassinations, fund terrorist attacks, and buy hostages.

Cell structures can be highly informal, and hierarchies can be replaced. Killed or captured leaders become martyrs, and new leaders can be recruited or brought in from the outside. Leaders and experienced cadres can insulate themselves from most operations. Iraqis can be paid to carry out operations or recruited and used against soft targets.

Extreme insurgents can piggyback on the actions of Iraqi Sunni nationalist insurgents, attacking only the key targets and fault lines necessary to encourage civil war. They also can capitalize on the increased Shi'ite efforts in the south and other Shi'ite areas to create Shi'ite enclaves dominated by Shi'ite religious parties and groups to persuade Iraqi Sunnis to polarize and react on religious lines. They have equal capability to exploit the problems in the constitutional process, elections that do not give Sunnis power, and Iraqi force developments that seem or do create largely Shi'ite and Kurdish forces. Operations by largely Shi'ite and Kurdish units in Sunni areas are further source of such opportunities.

The ability to exploit problems in politics and governance are matched by the ability to capitalize on tensions between Coalition forces and the Iraqi people, and the day-to-day frictions involved. These increasingly include the aggressive (and sometimes reckless) acts of contract security personnel, which are often less sensitive to the political impact of their behavior than Coalition forces.

This creates a series of dilemmas for both Iraqi government and Coalition military operations. The Iraqi government and Coalition forces are almost certainly correct in continuing to actively attack neo-Salafi extremist networks actively anywhere they concentrate, and might acquire sanctuaries or local control. Such groups seek to reshape all of the insurgent elements, religious practices, and local governments. Like the Taliban (or Christian Puritans during the English civil war), they want total control and dominance and cannot be allowed to fester.

At the same time, aggressive Coalition operations create more friction with Sunni Iraqis, create more of a "crusader" image, and increase the number of times the "strategic corporal" has a major local political impact because he or she does not understand the language, culture, or local politics. Even the most successful security operations have a political cost as long as so many Sunnis feel excluded from power and see the Iraqi government and Coalition forces as an "enemy."

Successful Iraqi government operations have the same impact, particularly when the units involved are largely Kurdish or Shi'ite -- rather than Sunni or mixed "national" units. This is a growing problem because even when officers are mixed, the enlisted are often largely Shi'ite or Kurdish.

This does not mean that Coalition and Iraqi government military and security operations have to fail, or are not succeeding in some areas. It does mean that the political nature of counterinsurgency operations, and the stability phase, is absolutely critical. Short of occupation and repression, military success depends on the success of political inclusiveness. Effective military operations depend on follow-up and sustained security operations and government. Effective Iraqi force development depends on creating mixed "national" military and security units, and the ability to deploy follow-on security and police that will not be seen as ethnically or religiously hostile.

Operations in areas like Mosul have shown this is possible, but it is clear that the Coalition can never be Iraqi or Islamic, that the Iraqi political process still undercuts military and security efforts, and that Iraqi force development presents major problems.

The Economic Struggle to Prevent a Civil War: Leaving the Sunnis on the Outside?

There are no accurate economic statistics on Iraq, but it is clear that Sunnis face very high levels of unemployment, that many see little real hope of any immediate improvement, and that both outside aid and government funds have gone more into Shi'ite and Kurdish areas -- both for security reasons and because of internal politics.

Pledges are not kept, and money disappears. Reconstruction plans are not fully implemented. Aside from CERP and other local emergency aid, dollars are not used effectively as a substitute for bullets. The result is that economics is not being used as an effective weapon.

The pressure for civil war can also expand to involve outside states. Syria very clearly tolerates and supports Sunni neo-Salafi extremist operations on its territory in spite of its Alawite controlled government. A broader and more intense civil conflict could lead other Arab states to take sides on behalf of the Sunnis -- although Bahrain, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen are just a few of the states that have deep sectarian divisions of their own. Any major divisions within Iraq could reopen the Kurdish issue as it affects Turkey, and possibly Iran and Syria as well.

The most serious wild card in Iraq's immediate neighborhood is Iran. Iran already plays at least some role in the political instability in Iraq and may take a more aggressive role in trying to shape Iraq's political future and security position in the Gulf. Some believe that the Iranians have abandoned their efforts to export their "Shi'ite revolution" to the Gulf. This view has changed since the invasion of Iraq. Officials across the Arab world, especially in Saudi

Arabia and Jordan, have expressed reservation over the right of Iraqi Sunnis, Kurdish and Shi'ite dominance over the Iraqi government, and a new "strategic" Shi'ite alliance between Iran and Iraq.

The Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, have also made their views known regarding the unity of Iraq and their fear of Shi'ite dominance of an Arab country that allies itself with Iran. Saudi Arabia has pushed for more Sunni inclusiveness in the constitution writing process, especially after their lack of participation in the January 2005 elections.

One should not exaggerate Iraq's role in any clash within a civilization, and the more dire predictions of a clash between Sunni and Shi'ite that polarizes the Gulf and Middle East may well be exaggerated. The fact remains, however, that this is what Bin Laden, Zarqawi, and other neo-Salafi extremists are seeking. The battle in Iraq is only part of the much broader struggle by neo-Salafi extremists to capture the Arab and Islamic world. The outcome in Iraq will be critical but only part of a much broader struggle.

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Introduction

It is dangerous to focus on any one element of the war in Iraq, and this includes focusing on Sunni Islamist extremists that have strong foreign elements. One Iraq recent official noted that, "You Americans always want one simple enemy. You need to think and act as if you had 250. Some are outsiders, some insiders. Some are fanatics, and some who might be persuaded to join the political process. We have tribes, cells, mosques, towns, and parts of cities with different goals, and different tactics."

The fact is, however, that Iraq is already in the middle of a low-level civil war, and an increasing amount the fighting in Iraq now centers around one issue: Whether or not the hard-line elements of the resistance can provoke a civil war along ethnic and sectarian lines. As former interim Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi has warned, "The policy should be of building national unity in Iraq. Without this we will most certainly slip into a civil war. We are practically in stage one of a civil war as we speak."¹⁰

To be more specific, the key question that determines the future of Iraq may be whether one element of the insurgency – the various hard-line neo-Salafi elements of the insurgency – can use a combination of suicide bombings, kidnappings, targeted killings, and group killings of Shi'ites and Kurds to turn enough Iraqi Arab Shi'ites and Kurds against all Sunnis to defeat the political process and make the arguments over the constitution and the elections to come largely meaningless.

An Asymmetric War within an Asymmetric War

There are strong indications that there is an asymmetric war going on within an asymmetric war. The primary goal of virtually all insurgents has shifted from efforts to attack the Coalition and drive it out of parts or all of Iraq, to attacking the Iraqi government and its forces and causing the current political process to fail. What makes the most extreme Sunni Insurgents, who are largely "neo-Salafi" different, is that many see a civil war as an end in itself, and as part of a much broader struggle for an Islam dominated by their narrow view of Sunni Puritanism.

Sunni "Nationalist" Insurgents

Any reader of insurgents' statements and web pages quickly becomes aware that motives differ significantly between group and faction, and sometimes within the cells and elements of a given organization. Many insurgents know far more about what they are against than what they are for. Most native Iraqi Sunni insurgents, however, still seem to be primarily nationalist in character. They are not seeking regional or global Jihad, but rather to influence or control events in Iraq.

In general, native Iraqi Sunni "nationalists" want some mix of a return to a government closer to a Ba'athist regime, a secular regime which Sunnis dominate or where they have a "fair share" of power, or an Iraq in which Iraqi Sunnis -- not Shi'ites -- power and the religious lead. Anger, revenge, economic need, opposition to the US invasion and any government that grows out of it or sheer lack of hope in the current system are all motives as well.

Sunni “Neo-Salafi” Insurgents

The Sunni “neo-Salafi” insurgents – particularly those led by people like Zarqawi – have different goals. They believe they are fighting a region-wide war in Iraq for a form of Sunni extremism that not only will eliminate any presence by Christians and Jews, but also create a Sunni puritan state in which other sects of Islam are forced to convert to their interpretation or are destroyed. Non-believers are bad enough from their perspective and neo-Salafis have little of mainstream Islam's tolerance for “peoples of the book,” but they have not tolerance of other interpretations of Islam. Such insurgents are known in the Muslim world as *Takferies*—a term that refers to groups that base their ideology on determining who is a believer in their view. They see those who do not fit their definition of piety as apostates. To some, particularly the group led by Zarqawi, all other Islamic sects like Shi'ites and even other Sunnis, are effectively nonbelievers or *Kafirs*

Granted, such generalizations have severe limits. There is no way to know how many Iraqis support the neo-Salafi and other Sunni extremist elements of the insurgency, any more than there are any precise counts of the foreign volunteers who support them. It is unclear how many members of Sunni extremist groups actually support the group's ideological goals rather than act out of anger, misinformation, and/or a naïve search for martyrdom. There are no clear dividing lines as to belief, the willingness to use given kinds of violence, or the willingness to use Shi'ites and Kurds as targets.

It is also important to point out that, Sunni Puritanism does not, in itself, mean advocating violence against other Islamic sects or those outside Islam. Other Sunni puritan movements call Shi'ites and other sects heretics (*bid'a*), attacker of God's unity (*tawhid*), and even as advocates of polytheism (*shirk*). Some extremist puritan Salafis preachers have called Shi'ites apostates, and advocate shunning them, hating them, and scorning them as *rawafidh* (which means rejectionists; this is a reference to the Shi'ites' rejection of electing Abu Bakr as the first Caliph after the death of the Prophet over Ali, Islam fourth Caliph and Shiites first Imam). Yet, such religious rhetoric has rarely taken the form of violence. Like Christian and Jewish extremists, words do not necessarily mean a commitment to action.¹¹

Some traditional Salafist groups and traditional Shi'ite groups have also coexisted and worked closely together. Notable examples include Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Palestine. Another example was the Muslim brotherhood dealing with Iran after the revolution, despite some of Iran's actions against Iranian Sunnis.

The Justification of Violence

Today's violent neo-Salafi extremist groups differ, however, both in their willingness to use violence against non-combatants and the innocent and in their willingness to use violence against other Muslims. In broad terms, the Sunni Islamist extremist insurgents in Iraq are far more willing to use extreme methods of violence like suicide bombs and use them against Shi'ite and Kurdish targets. They are equally willing to use them against Iraqi officials and Iraqis in the military, security, and police services, and Iraqis of all religious and ethnic background that do not support them in their interpretation of jihad. Moreover, they act on the principle ordinary Iraqi citizens can be sacrificed as expendable in a war fought in God's cause: These Sunni Islamic extremists are fighting a war that extends throughout the world, not simply in Iraq, and their goals affect all Arab states and all of Islam.

This ideological rationale has an important implication -- particularly for the insurgent movements with large numbers of foreign Islamists. Such insurgents do not have to "win" in Iraq, at least in any conventional sense of the term. An outcome that leaves Iraq in a state of prolonged civil war, and forces a spreading conflict in Islam between Sunnis and other sects, and neo-Salafists and other Sunnis, would be seen a prelude to a broader eschatological conflict they believe is inevitable and that God will ensure they win. They are not fighting a limited war -- at least in terms of their ultimate ends and means. Compromise is at best a temporary action forced upon them for the purposes of expediency.

This means there are no clear limits to the willingness of some of the more extreme Sunni Arab insurgent elements to escalate, even if this means trying to drive the nation into a civil war they cannot win. They are also likely to escalate even further as their situation becomes more threatened.

From the viewpoint of negotiation and deterrence, it seems almost certain that many cadres and leaders of such groups and cells cannot be persuaded; only defeated. Furthermore, they not only will remain alienated and violent --almost regardless of what the government and other Sunnis do -- they will remain active diehards until they are rooted out, move on to new countries or areas if force to disperse, and join other extreme Sunni Islamist movements if the ones they currently support are defeated.

Who Are the Neo-Salafi Extremist Insurgents?

The ideological background of these groups is hard to characterize. They are far more political and military activists than theologians. As such, they are not puritans in the sense of Wahabis, nor are they Salafis in the traditional sense of the word. While they are "Islamist," they are not so much religious as committed to a violent struggle for their beliefs. Their foreign leaders and cadres have been created in past wars, and their Iraqi members have been created since the Coalition invasion of Iraq.

No one can reliably estimate how many such neo-Salafi extremists there are in the field. No one fully understands how many movements and cells are involved. It seems fairly clear, however, that such neo-Salafi groups are a small part of the insurgency. It is also fairly clear that they are tactical and lethal in their violence in Iraq.

It is equally true that the neo-Salafi extremist groups, such as that of Abu Musab Zarqawi are the main suspects of suicide bombing, especially the ones directed against the Shi'ites. At times Zarqawi has made his views clear on the permissibility of attacking other Muslims, but he has also been ambiguous at times arguing that Shi'ites that oppose the occupation are not a target.

These neo-Salafi extremists have used religious rhetoric effectively in Iraq, and have tried to link the conflict in Iraq to other Muslim struggles in Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Kashmir. Their statements and recruitment tapes start with references to these conflicts and tie their "struggle" in Iraq as part of this worldwide Islam vs. the West conflict.

This has also proven to be an important factor in the composition of these groups and extending their reach into the Iraqi population. There have been reports that some "nationalists" have joined ranks with these neo-Salafi groups in Iraq. Mowaffag Rubaie, Iraq's national Security advisor, was quoted as saying, "Religion is a strong motive. You are not going to find someone

who is going to die for Ba'athists. But Salafists have a very strong message. If you use the Koran selectively, it could be a weapon of mass destruction."¹²

Guessing at Their Total Strength

Most experts guesstimate the number of Islamist extremist insurgents at some 5-10 percent of the total insurgents without being able to say what base number they are a percent of. US experts and officers sometimes make reference to a total of 20,000 insurgents of all kinds, but such experts are among the first to state that these are more nominal mid-points in a range of guesses than real estimates. Other experts guesstimate the total number of Sunni insurgents and active sympathizers insurgents of all kinds at totals from 15,000 to 60,000, with far larger numbers of additional passive sympathizers. These guesstimates would put the Sunni Islamist extremists at anywhere from 1,500 to 6,000.

Some estimates do put the total number of neo-Salafi Sunni extremists much higher.¹³ Anthony Loyd of the *London Times* has stated that, "An intelligence summary, citing the conglomeration of insurgent groups under the al-Qaeda banner to be the result of rebel turf wars, money, weaponry and fear, concluded that of the estimated 16,000 Sunni Muslim insurgents, 6,700 were hardcore Islamic fundamentalists who were now supplemented by a possible further 4,000 members after an amalgamation with Jaysh Muhammad, previously an insurgent group loyal to the former Baathist regime." Given the difficulty in distinguishing core activists from part time or fringe activists, no one can discount such estimates.

While most experts agree that the total number of Sunni insurgents is not increasing or decreasing sharply, there is no agreement on the trend in numbers or over the level of expertise that survives constant Coalition and Iraqi government pressure. It is clear that significant numbers of ordinary insurgents and part timers have been killed, captured, or dispersed. It is also clear that a number of mid and top level leaders have been captured as well. There is no agreement, however, on the impact of such actions on the overall strength and capability of the insurgent groups and networks that are being attacked. There is no agreement over whether the insurgent groups are taking serious losses to their expertise and competence over time, or are able to rebuild their networks and gain skill and experience faster than they experience losses.

Certainly, the insurgents continue to be able to act – particularly in carrying out bloody suicide bombings and other attacks on soft targets like Shi'ite and Kurdish civilians and poorly protected recruits, police, journalists, diplomats, contractors, and officials. While the Coalition and Iraqi government have long ceased to issue any public estimates, in an effort to downplay the seriousness of the insurgency, Iraq papers are filled with daily reports of insurgent violence, and increasingly with reports of possible reprisals. It is also clear that even when the victims are not identified by sect or ethnicity, the civilian targets and mass killings are largely Shi'ite, some time Kurdish, and normally are only Sunni when an area seems loyal to the government or the civilians involved as associated with Iraqi government, Iraqi forces, or Coalition targets.

The Impact of Foreign Volunteers

The manpower supplied by foreign fighters slipping in and out of Iraq is an "X-factor" in both any effort to estimate the role neo-Salafi extremists are playing in the insurgency, and in the fight against it. CENTCOM estimated in the summer of 2005 that 90 percent of the insurgency was Iraqi and Sunni.¹⁴ Accounting for the non-Sunni Iraqi component of the insurgency leaves a figure of less than 10 percent foreign contribution to insurgent manpower. While relatively

small, this foreign element is recognized as a particularly violent segment of the insurgency, and ideologically driven. Likewise, the foreign element is seen as an important source of money and materiel support to the insurgency.

Interviews with top US and Iraqi officials and commanders indicate that foreign Islamic extremists, or “jihadists” come from many countries -- including Gulf countries, North Africa, Syria, the Sudan, and Central Asia. Some Iraqis singled out Syria as the major problem.

The Number of Foreign Fighters

In the spring of 2004, US officials estimated that there might be a core strength of fewer than 1,000 foreign fighters in Iraq or as many as 2,000. As of June 2005, they made up less than 600 of some 14,000 detainees. Coalition experts also estimated that they then made up less than 5% of insurgent casualties and detainees to date.¹⁵

Experts now guesstimate the number of full time active foreign volunteers at 1,000-3,000. Virtually all agree, however, that like the Bolsheviks before them, they are a minority that can only dominate the insurgency through conspiracy and force. However, some MNSTC-I and Iraqi experts feel so many volunteers are coming in across the Syrian border and other borders that the total is rapidly increasing.¹⁶

There is broad agreement that such foreign volunteers are one of the most dangerous aspects of in the insurgency since they have been involved in those attacks that have done most to provoke a civil war between Iraq's Arab Sunnis and its Arab Shi'ites, Kurds, and other minorities.

Many lower level Islamist/extremist volunteers are not trained or skilled fighters. They come from a wide range of countries, often with little or no training, and the overwhelming majority has only a limited history of affiliation with any organized Islamist or extremist group.¹⁷ The movements they join, however, do have a large percentage of Iraqi and foreign fighters who are considerably better organized, well armed, and capable of effective ambushes and attacks. These more experienced jihadists have shown they can fight hard, and are sometimes willing to stand and die in ways that force MNF-I and Iraqi troops into intense firefights and clashes.

In June 2005, US Lt-Gen John Vines, commanding general of coalition forces in Iraq, identified the foreign fighters as the most violent group in Iraq's ongoing insurgency. According to Vines, insurgent activity among Iraqis was being driven by money, not ideology, and foreign jihadists were using their financial resources to get Iraqis to attack other Iraqis.¹⁸

Their Role in Suicide Bombings and the Effort to Provoke a Civil War

It takes little training to commit some of the most divisive and brutal attacks; in fact, all it takes is a willingness to seek martyrdom. Coalition and Iraqi government sources lack credibility when they make sweeping statements about the unwillingness of Iraqis to conduct suicide attacks or seek martyrdom without any back up or supporting analysis of recent attacks. Most of the suicide bombers in Iraq do, however, seem to have been foreign jihadists. One US defense official estimated that as of July 2005, Iraqis had directly carried out less than 10% of more than 500 suicide bombings.¹⁹ Islamist extremist web sites have also become filled with the claimed biographies of foreign “martyrs.”²⁰ Some such claims are suspect, but they do seem to have carried out most of the suicide car and pedestrian bombings since 2003.

Such attacks accelerated sharply in the spring and summer of 2005; the *Associated Press* counted at least 213 suicide attacks between January and July 2005. US Air Force General, and MNF-I

spokesperson, Don Alston stated, "The foreign fighters are the ones most often behind the wheel of suicide car bombs, or most often behind any suicide situation," and Gen. Abizaid stated that the Coalition had seen a rise in suicide bombers coming from North Africa, particularly Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco.²¹

In August 2005, Saudi authorities announced that they had seized 682 Iraqis who tried to infiltrate Saudi territory in the first six months of the 2005. Interior ministry spokesperson Brig. Gen. Mansour Turki stated that new security measures were being taken along the border with Iraq, including the erection of sand barricades, the deployment of heat sensors and cameras, and round-the-clock patrols. Still, according to Turki, the problem remaining is a lack of security measures on the Iraqi side.²²

Aside from an 800-kilometer border with Saudi Arabia, porous borders with Jordan and Syria remain liabilities in combating foreign assistance to Iraq's Sunni insurgency. These volunteers are recruited by Islamic extremist movements and Islamists in other countries, and sent to Iraq with the goal of seeking "Islamic" martyrdom.

Experts differ over just how many such suicide bombers exist and where they come from:

- Reuven Paz calculated in March 2005 that some 200 suicide bombers could be documented and that 154 had been killed in the previous six months. He estimated that there were 94 Saudis (61%), 16 Syrians (10.4%), 13 Iraqis (8.4%), 11 Kuwaitis (7.1%), 4 Jordanians, 3 Lebanese, 2 Libyans, 2 Algerians, 2 Moroccan, 2 Yemenis, 2 Tunisians, 1 Palestinian, 1 from the UAE, and 1 Sudanese.²³
- Evan F. Kohlmann found 235 suicide bombers named on web sites since the summer of 2005, and estimated that more than 50% were Saudi.²⁴
- In a study that Nawaf Obaid and I conducted, we found records of 47 Saudi suicide bombers in Saudi media in May 2005. We estimated that as of August 2005, the number of foreign fighters in the Iraqi insurgency is approximately 3,000 or 10% of the total insurgency of approximately 30,000. The largest component of the foreign fighters come from Algeria (600 or 20%), followed by Syria (550 or 18%), Yemen (500 or 17%), Sudan (450 or 15%), Saudi Arabia (350 or 12%), Egypt (400 or 13%), and other countries (150 or 5%). Of those 350 Saudi militants in Iraq, the study found that 72 are known active, 150 presumed active, 74 are presumed detained, and 56 are presumed dead.²⁵

Whatever the numbers of such recruits may be, the officials and counterterrorist experts in Gulf and other Arab countries are deeply concerned about the fact that some clerics and Islamic organizations recruit young Arabs and men from other Islamic countries for Islamist extremist organizations, and then infiltrate them through countries like Syria into Iraq. Such efforts are sometimes scattered and individual, rather than tied to movements like Al Qaeda in visible ways, and can bypass counterterrorist efforts focused on internal security.

Given past experience, many will survive their experiences in Iraq, and emerge as new cadres of expert terrorists. This will confront Iraq's neighbors and other Islamic countries with a whole new generation of young men being trained as Islamic extremists and Jihadists outside the country.

The US State Department Assessment of Islamist Extremist Groups and Zarqawi

It is not only hard to determine the strength of neo-Salafi Islamist extremist groups; it is hard to know the total number of the groups or their affiliations. The US State Department *Country*

Reports on Terrorism described the overall level of such terrorist activity in Iraq at the end of 2004, and the role of key Islamist groups, as follows:²⁶

Iraq remains the central battleground in the global war on terrorism. Former regime elements as well as foreign fighters and Islamic extremists continued to conduct terrorist attacks against civilians and non-combatants. These elements also conducted numerous insurgent attacks against Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces, which often had devastating effects on Iraqi civilians and significantly damaged the country's economic infrastructure.

The State Department's report provided a description of the Zarqawi's Group, Jama'at Al Tawhid Wa' al-Jihad.²⁷

...Jordanian-born Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi and his organization emerged in 2004 to play a leading role in terrorist activities in Iraq. In October, the US Government designated Zarqawi's group, Jama'at al Tawhid wa'al-Jihad, as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). In December, the designation was amended to include the group's new name Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (or "The al-Qa'ida Jihad Organization in the Land of the Two Rivers") and other aliases following the "merger" between Zarqawi and Usama bin Ladin's al-Qa'ida organization. Zarqawi announced the merger in October, and in December, bin Ladin endorsed Zarqawi as his official emissary in Iraq. Zarqawi's group claimed credit for a number of attacks targeting Coalition and Iraqi forces, as well as civilians, including the October massacre of 49 unarmed, out-of-uniform Iraqi National Guard recruits. Attacks that killed civilians include the March 2004 bombing of the Mount Lebanon Hotel, killing seven and injuring over 30, and a December 24 suicide bombing using a fuel tanker that killed nine and wounded 19 in the al-Mansur district of Baghdad.

In February 2004, Zarqawi called for a "sectarian war" in Iraq. He and his organization sought to create a rift between Shi'a and Sunnis through several large terror attacks against Iraqi Shi'a. In March 2004, Zarqawi claimed credit for simultaneous bomb attacks in Baghdad and Karbala that killed over 180 pilgrims as they celebrated the Shi'a festival of Ashura. In December, Zarqawi also claimed credit for a suicide attack at the offices of Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), one of Iraq's largest Shi'a parties, which killed 15 and wounded over 50.

Zarqawi has denied responsibility for another significant attack that same month in Karbala and Najaf, two of Shi'a Islam's most holy cities, which killed Iraqi civilians and wounded more than 120. Terrorists operating in Iraq used kidnapping and targeted assassinations to intimidate Iraqis and third-country nationals working in Iraq as civilian contractors. Nearly 60 noncombatant Americans died in terrorist incidents in Iraq in 2004. Other American noncombatants were killed in attacks on coalition military facilities or convoys. In June, Zarqawi claimed credit for the car bomb that killed the chairman of the Coalition-appointed Iraqi Governing Council. In April, an American civilian was kidnapped and later beheaded. One month later, a video of his beheading was posted on an al-Qa'ida-associated website. Analysts believe that Zarqawi himself killed the American as well as a Korean hostage, kidnapped in June. Zarqawi took direct credit for the September kidnapping and murder of two American civilians and later their British engineer co-worker, and the October murder of a Japanese citizen.

In August, the Kurdish terrorist group Ansar al-Sunna claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and killing of 12 Nepalese construction workers, followed by the murder of two Turkish citizens in September. Many other foreign civilians have been kidnapped. Some have been killed, others released, some remain in their kidnappers' hands, and the fate of others, such as the director of CARE, is unknown.

Other terrorist groups were active in Iraq. Ansar al-Sunna, believed to be an offshoot of the Ansar al-Islam group founded in Iraq in September 2001, first came to be known in April 2003 after issuing a statement on the Internet. In February 2004, Ansar al-Sunna claimed responsibility for bomb attacks on the offices of two Kurdish political parties in Irbil, which killed 109 Iraqi civilians. The Islamic Army in Iraq has also claimed responsibility for terrorist actions.

The State Department report provided a description of the role of Mjuahedin-e Khalq (MeK):²⁸

Approximately 3,800 disarmed persons remained resident at the former Mujahedin-e Khalq (MeK) military base at Camp Ashraf; the MeK is a designated US Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). More than 400 members renounced membership in the organization in 2004. Forty-one additional defectors elected to return to Iran, and another two hundred were awaiting ICRC assistance for voluntary repatriation to Iran at the end of the year. PKK/KADEK/Kongra Gel, a designated foreign terrorist group, maintains an estimated 3,000 to 3,500 armed militants in northern Iraq, according to Turkish Government sources and NGOs. In the summer of 2004, PKK/KADEK/Kongra Gel renounced its self-proclaimed cease-fire and threatened to renew its separatist struggle in both Turkey's Southeast and urban centers. Turkish press subsequently reported multiple incidents in the Southeast of PKK/KADEK/ Kongra Gel terrorist actions or clashes between Turkish security forces and PKK/KADEK/Kongra Gel militants.

The State Department report provided a detailed description of the role of Ansar al-Islam (AI) (a.k.a. Ansar al-Sunnah Partisans of Islam, Helpers of Islam, Kurdish Taliban):²⁹

Ansar al-Islam (AI) is a radical Islamist group of Iraqi Kurds and Arabs who have vowed to establish an independent Islamic state in Iraq. The group was formed in December 2001. In the fall of 2003, a statement was issued calling all jihadists in Iraq to unite under the name Ansar al-Sunnah (AS). Since that time, it is likely that AI has posted all claims of attack under the name AS. AI is closely allied with al-Qa'ida and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's group, Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (QJBR) in Iraq. Some members of AI trained in al-Qa'ida camps in Afghanistan, and the group provided safe haven to al-Qa'ida fighters before Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Since OIF, AI has become one of the leading groups engaged in anti-Coalition attacks in Iraq and has developed a robust propaganda campaign.

AI continues to conduct attacks against Coalition forces, Iraqi Government officials and security forces, and ethnic Iraqi groups and political parties. AI members have been implicated in assassinations and assassination attempts against Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) officials and Coalition forces, and also work closely with both al-Qa'ida operatives and associates in QJBR. AI has also claimed responsibility for many high profile attacks, including the simultaneous suicide bombings of the PUK and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) party offices in Ibril on February 1, 2004, and the bombing of the US military dining facility in Mosul on December 21, 2004.

Its strength is approximately 500 to 1,000 members, its location and area of operation is primarily central and northern Iraq... The group receives funding, training, equipment, and combat support from al-Qa'ida, QJBR, and other international jihadist backers throughout the world. AI also has operational and logistic support cells in Europe.

Other sources have also provided profiles of such extremist organizations in Iraq. GlobalSecurity.org, for example, reported about other groups such as Armed Vanguard of Mohammad's Second Army:³⁰

The mission of Armed Vanguard of Mohammad's Second Army is to wage holy war on Coalition Forces in order to force the "foreigners" from their land. The extremist group vowed to fight any Muslim or Arab that cooperates with the U.S.-led reconstruction effort, including the 25- members of the Iraqi Governing Council.

The Armed Vanguard were an unknown group, until it claimed responsibility for the 19 August 2003 attack on the U.N. Headquarters in Baghdad. In its 22 August 2003 statement, the Ramadi-based group said it was responsible for the blast that killed at least 23 people and wounded at least 100. Their two-page statement to Al-Arabiya television station not only stated that the organization was behind the attack, but also defined its continuing mission as being to drive every foreigner from Iraq, most especially Coalition Forces.

According to the statement, the group swore to "continue to fight every foreigner until ... victory or martyrdom" and to "make the Americans regret their occupation of Mohammed's land." The group also vowed to "carry out similar attacks against the agent Governing Council and all coalition forces."

The group was also critical of the U.N. for its alleged support of the U.S-British invasion and occupation of Iraq. The militants condemned the U.N. for its lack of support for the Iraqi civilians during the war.

The Armed Vanguard only sought to fight Coalition Forces in Iraq, but also to wage a global jihad against all U.S. forces and their supporters, as it hoped that its operations would "God willing, reach America and Britain themselves."

U.S. intelligence officials have neither confirmed nor denied the group's involvement in the 19 August 2003 blast on the U.N. Headquarters in Baghdad.

These reports provide an idea of the Sunni neo-Salafi Islamist organizations that are forming in Iraq, but they are constantly changing and mutating and their affiliation, strength, ideology, and financial backing remain uncertain. Some of these groups could be considered spin-offs of larger groups such as Al Qa'ida and Zarqawi's group.

At the same time, they do seem to have a largely common and consistent belief structure and approach to warfighting. As is clear from the State Department report, there seem to be little difference between Ansar Al-Suna, Ansar Al-Islam, and Zarqawi's group, Jama'at Al Tawhid Wa' al-Jihad other than their names. Such groups adapt different names sometimes to exaggerate the influence of the insurgency and sometimes to appeal to various recruitment pools (Islamist Arabists, Salafists, neo-Salafist, etc.).

The Zarqawi Organization in 2005

Zarqawi does not dominate the neo-Salafi and Sunni extremist insurgency in Iraq, but he has become its symbol. Views differ sharply over the size of Zarqawi's movement, the depth of its ties to Bin Laden and Al Qa'ida, how many of its current "fighters" are Iraqi vs. non-Iraqi, and how many other Islamist extremist groups exist and how independent they are of Zarqawi and Al Qa'ida. A number of groups claim affiliation with Zarqawi, but it is unknown how closely tied many of these groups are to Zarqawi. It is likely that some of them either only claim him as an inspiration, or operate as almost totally independent groups and cells. This seems to include a number of elements organized along tribal lines.

At the same time, forces with ties to Zarqawi have been capable of large offensive operations like the spring 2005 attack on Abu Ghraib prison. Many of the insurgent forces the US Marine Corps and US Army have fought in their offensive along the Euphrates and near the Syrian border since May 2005 have either had ties to Zarqawi or were part of mixes of Zarqawi loyalists and other Iraqi Sunni insurgents.

The Zarqawi movement has been under continuous attack, and has lost some key leaders as well as significant numbers of killed and captured. Once again, experts disagree over its current strength, but it seems to consist of a series of cells, with a limited central organization. It probably totals less than 2,000-3,000 full and part time men -- including both Iraqis and foreigners -- and may have a core strength of some 600 to 1,000.

Zarqawi has been able to recruit more outside volunteers since the fighting in Fallujah, and substantially more volunteers for suicide bombings since the January 30, 2005 elections brought a Shi'ite and Kurdish dominated government to power. It is not clear, however, whether this is strengthening his movement, or has simply helped it to cope with the constant attrition caused by MNF-I and Iraqi attacks. The problem of infiltration, however, is serious enough to make improving border security a top Coalition and Iraqi government priority since February 2005, and has been a key factor driving the series of offensives in the Syrian border area since May.³¹

While US claims about the importance of the killings and captures of Zarqawi's senior lieutenants have sometimes seemed exaggerated – as do claims to have nearly killed or captured Zarqawi – there has been a series of real successes since early 2005. On January 10, 2005, then Prime Minister Allawi announced that Izz al-Din Al- Majid, a chief Zarqawi financier, was arrested in Fallujah in early December 2004. Al Majid had more than \$35 million in his bank accounts and controlled \$2 billion to \$7 billion of former regime assets stolen from Iraqi government accounts. His objective, according to interrogators, was to unite the insurgent groups Ansar al-Sunna, Jaysh Muhammad, and the Islamic Resistance Army.

In July 2005, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers announced that the Coalition had captured a long sought after battlefield commander, Abu 'Abd-al-Aziz. According to the US military, al-Aziz had led a foreign fighter cell in Fallujah up until the US took control of the city. Fleeing the city, al-Aziz apparently came to Baghdad and earned the moniker 'the Amir of Baghdad' among fellow insurgents.³² Later that month, the US military announced the capture of what was described as an Al Qa'ida commander and close confidant to Zarqawi.

Khamis Farhan Khalaf Abd al-Fahdawi, or Abu Seba, was captured with approximately 30 other terrorist suspects. It is believed that Seba played a role in the murder of Egypt's ambassador and in the attacks on Pakistan's and Bahrain's envoys. An Internet posting purportedly written by Zarqawi's group claimed that Seba was a low-level leader of a cell in Baghdad and that the US forces were inventing ranks to portray an image of success in taking down the terrorist networks.³³

Abu Azzam, the Al Qa'ida number two man in Iraq, who is seen as the right hand man to Zarqawi and the commander of day-to-day operations, was killed by Iraqi and US forces. According to the US military, the religious advisor to Zarqawi, Azzam, was shot dead in a high-rise apartment on September 25, 2005. It remains, therefore, uncertain how much intelligence the Iraqi forces and the Coalition have gained from killing him—given that he died before interrogation.³⁴

The battles in western Iraq since that time, and other actions in Iraq, have led to the killing or capture of some 80 leaders and senior cadres in Zarqawi's organization. While it has not been publicized in detail, the fighting in Tall Afar seems to have been exceptionally successful in hitting at core elements of Zarqawi's group. There has also been significant progress in the Mosul area.

The impact of such defeats is, however, uncertain. While Zarqawi's group has experienced losses in its ranks. It has been reported that US intelligence believes that there has been an influx of Iraqis, including FRE's, into groups such as Zarqawi's. US officials, however, believe that this represents "a change in the group's makeup rather than a major expansion" in its total strength. This development could give Zarqawi enhanced intelligence, better-trained fighters, and most importantly give such groups the image of being domestic and not as foreigners from neighboring states. It could also reduce the dependence of these groups on the inflow of fighters across Iraq's borders from neighboring states.³⁵

Other insurgent groups have also pledged allegiance to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. For example, on September 26, 2005, a statement was posted on an extremist website signed by Abu Zubaida Al-Babily, "the prince of the Zubair Bin Al-Awam battalion," pledging to join al-Zarqawi's organization. The statement said "For fulfilling the call of God by unifying the fronts against the

Atheists, the battalion of Zubair Bin Al-Awam, is here by announcing the joining of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, under the leading ship of Sheik Abu Musa'ab Zarqawi, to be under his instructions of what ever he asks, to fight for the word of God, and to fight all God's enemies."³⁶

Zarqawi has also tried to mobilize Iraqi tribes to join the insurgency. This is a tactic not only to increase the number of fighters he has or even to give the insurgency more domestic roots, but also to spread the blame for attacks against Iraqis. He has tried to threaten them and turn them against the current Iraqi government and the Shi'ites. He said in his September 14, 2005 tape that "We warn all the tribes that any tribe, party, or association whose involvement and collaboration with the Crusaders and their apostate [followers] is proved, I swear by God, will be targeted exactly as we will target the Crusaders, and we will eliminate its members.... You must choose in which [camp] you want to be."³⁷

Some experts believe that Iraqi tribes have provided Zarqawi with safe haven during last three years. Some have reported that some of these tribes are turning away from Zarqawi for his attacks on Iraqis (some of these tribes have Sunni and Shi'ite members). It remains uncertain and unclear what support Zarqawi is getting from which tribes or even how many of his fighters are members of these tribes.

Perverting Islam into an Ideology of Hate

Perhaps the most dangerous tendency within these movements is the degree to which some have gone beyond attacking foreign targets like the Coalition, or Iraqi government targets, and have sought to create a religious conflict within Iraq and Islam. Struggles for influence, power, money, and territory are scarcely humane, but they have natural pragmatic limits. They also do not divide one of the world's great religions against itself.

In traditional Islam, there is a division between Muslims (those who believe in God and Mohamad as his prophet, which includes Sunnis, Shi'ites, Sufis, etc), believers (those who believe in God, but do not necessarily believe that Mohamad is a prophet and that includes people of the book), and nonbelievers (everyone else). There is another important division—expressed in the term *Shirk*--that means equating anything or anyone with God other than God, or adopting any element of polytheism. This is where the main split between Islam with Christianity occurs, as well as where the main disagreement Sunnis have with Shi'ites occurs. *Some* "extreme puritans Sunnis" believe that the Shi'ites have crossed the boundaries of *Shirk*.

Most Sunni *Ulema* (religious scholars) do not express such beliefs, and base their reluctance to call other Muslim *Kafirs* or *Mushriks* on an important *Hadith*, a saying by Prophet Mohammad. According Ibn Umar, the Prophet Muhammad said "Any person who calls his brother: O Unbeliever! (then the truth of this label) would return to one of them. If it is true, (then it is) as he asserted, (but if it is not true), then it returns to him (and thus the person who made the accusation is an Unbeliever)."³⁸

From the time of Ali, the fourth Caliphate who ruled between 656 AD and 661AD, until the present, there have always been theological and intellectual debates between Sunnis and Shi'ites. This phenomenon is not new in Islamic history, and has been commented on by many Muslim scholars. It is equally true that traditional Salifs have had intellectual and theological disagreements with the Shi'ite hierarchy through out history. Traditional Salafi scholars do not, however, go so far as to call Shi'ites *Kafirs* and do not advocate violence against them.

Neo-Salafi Threats against Shi'ites

Neo-Salafi Sunni movements differ sharply over the way in which they view other Islamic sects, and often do advocate such violence. This does not mean that they give priority to this aspect of their struggle, and they can be opportunistic in reaching out to other sects when this is tactically convenient.

Zarqawi, for example, made efforts in the past to remake his organization's reputation to reduce tensions with Iraqi Sunnis, and possibly Iraqi Shi'ites as well. His website pronouncements claimed that the group had tried to avoid Muslim casualties with the notable exception being the Iraq military and security forces. It quickly denounced attacks on civilians like the massive suicide car bombing in Hilla in March 2005.³⁹ An increasing number of bloody suicide bombings and other attacks on Shi'ites and Kurds have had support from elements loyal to Zarqawi as well as other neo-Salafi groups.

Yet, voices like Zarqawi have been ambiguous or contradictory about their tolerance of other elements of Islam even when they have appeared to seek accommodation. For example, a tape attributed to Zarqawi in May 2005 was anything but reticent.⁴⁰ In the one hour and 14 minute tape, he explained why Muslim civilians were being killed in his attacks and justified them on the basis of research by "Abu Abdullah al Muhajer." He claimed that many operations were cancelled because they were going to kill large numbers of Muslims, but mistakes were made and "we have no choice...It's impossible to fight the infidels without killing some Muslims." He stated that Muslims were killed in 9/11, Riyadh, Nairobi, Tanzania, and if these were considered illegitimate then it would mean stopping jihad in every place.

He said that Iraq's geography made a direct combat with the enemy difficult, and the only way was to intensify combat was suicide operations. He compared Iraq to Afghanistan with its mountains, and to Chechnya where there were woods, and said it was easier for the 'mujaheddin' to have a safe place to hide and plan after fighting with the enemy. He stated that it was difficult for the "mujaheddin" to move in Iraq because of the checkpoints and the US bases, therefore suicide operations are easy to carry out and to force the enemy to leave the cities to places where it would be easier to shoot them. "These operations are our weapon...If we stop them jihad will be weaker...If the enemy gets full control of Baghdad it will implement its plan and control the whole nation. The whole world saw what they did in Abu Ghraib, Camp Bucca and prisons in Qut, Najaf and Karbalaa...that's when they did not have full control, so what would happen if they do?"

Killing of Shi'ites in Iraq are more than collateral damage. In recent months, targeted killings and assassination of civilian Shi'ite are becoming widespread. On September 26, 2005, for example, five Shi'ite schoolteachers along with their driver were dragged into their classroom, lined up, and executed by insurgents. The attack took place in the notorious "Triangle of Death," but what makes this attack different is that the majority of schoolchildren are Sunnis.⁴¹

He attacked Iraq's Shiites and Shi'ites in general. He said his group never attacked other sects in Iraq who are not considered Muslims, but fought the Shi'ites because they assist the enemy and are traitors. He claimed he Shi'ites only pretend they care about civilian casualties...he mentioned operations carried out by Failaq Badr (with dates, locations, numbers of people killed) during the 1980s and '90s. He also claimed there was a plan to eliminate the Sunnis in Iraq, and that Sunni mosques were being handed over to Shi'ites and that Sunni clerics, teachers, doctors

and experts are being killed. He claimed that Sunni women were being kidnapped and that Shi'ite police participated in raping women at Abu Ghraib.

He claimed there were problems at Iraqi government-run prisons in Iraq, including one in Qut, which he said being run by Iranian intelligence, and a prison in Hilla run by a Shi'ite major general called Qays, who "cuts Muslims' bodies and rapes women". He mentions a specific story where Qays threatened to rape the wife of one of the fighters (evidently Major General Qays Hamza, chief of al Hillah police). He says his fighters tried to kill Qays but he survived. (There was a web statement dated March 30th about a suicide bombing in Hilla that targeted major general Qays).⁴²

Another tape attributed to Zarqawi aired on July 6, 2005. In the tape, Zarqawi reaffirmed that targeting Iraqis was legitimate and called the Iraqi security forces apostates. He called on Iraqi clerics who disapprove of targeting Iraqis to reconsider their views. Zarqawi asserted in the message that the US went to war with Iraq in order to advance Israel's interests and refers to the conflict in Iraq as a 'quagmire.' He declared that the US will soon invade the lands of Sham (Greater Syria) on the pretext of stopping insurgent infiltration, and that this had not yet happened due to the ferocity of the militant attacks. He also announced the creation of a new brigade charged with killing the members of the Failaq Brigade, a Shi'ite militia.

Since that time, Zarqawi has been increasingly anti-Shi'ite. A report in the *London Times* states that,⁴³

"His organisation is believed already to have gained domination of smaller resistance groups in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province in western Iraq and a centre of gravity for the Sunni insurgency. An Iraqi resistance insider there last week told The Times that al-Zarqawi's men had already caused thousands of Shia to flee the city over the past six weeks. "His men announced through leaflets that all Shia should leave Ramadi or face 'the iron fist'," the Ramadi resident said. "At first local Sunnis didn't want anything to do with it. But they know how powerful Zarqawi's group is, that it doesn't hesitate to kill and is not afraid to die." ... "They control Ramadi now. They have the best weapons and the most money, and more and more men. They walk openly on the streets when the Americans aren't around. So the Shias left, by their thousands."

Zarqawi also asserted that many Iraqi females have come to him asking to be dispatched on suicide missions. He uses this to try to shame Iraqi males into seeking suicide missions and to try and convince their wives and girlfriends to shame them into such missions.⁴⁴

In his September 14, 2005 statement, Zarqawi accused the US military along with the Shi'ites of using poisonous gas and rapping Sunni women in the town of Tall Afar, near the Syrian border. He also declared an all out war against the Shi'ites led by the current Iraqi government, which he accused of declaring war against the Iraqi Sunni population. He declared that:⁴⁵

The government, the servants of the crusaders headed by Ibrahim al-Jaafari, they have declared war on Sunnis in [Tall] Afar. The al-Qaida Organization in the Land of Two Rivers is declaring all-out war on the Rafidha, (a derogatory term for Shia), wherever they are in Iraq...

You must choose between the good side and the bad side. Any religious group that wants to be safe from the blows of the Mujahideen must denounce the government of al-Jaafari and its crimes. Otherwise it will suffer the same fate as that of the crusaders. Any tribe whose allegiance to the crusaders and their agents is proven will be targeted by the Mujahideen in the same way the crusaders are...

The battles in Tall-Afar are commanded by the Mujahideen brothers of Al-Qaida in the Land of the Two Rivers and the Mujahideen rely on Allah alone for support. They convey that the Cross Worshipers have received a big blow and are tasting the humiliation at the hand of the

Mujahideen. Martyrdom operations are ongoing at Tal-Afar; in addition to planting explosive devices, and luring the enemy into street fights avoiding civilian casualties between Muslim women and children. We withdrew from some neighborhoods just for this purpose alone; you have received from the Mujahideen news that relieves the Muslim chest, this is by the grace of Allah...

This declaration prompted Shi'ite leaders and journalists to call upon Iraqi Sunnis to condemn Zarqawi's call for violence against the Shi'ites. Muqtada al-Sadr demanded that Sunnis to distance themselves from Zarqawi. Al-Sadr's representative, Abdulhadi al-Darraji, was quoted as saying that "We want [the Sunni Muslim Clerics Association] to issue a fatwa (religious edict) forbidding Muslims from joining these groups that deem others infidels... This will be crucial to ending terrorism." This call for an Iraqi Sunni rejection of Zarqawi was accepted by some leading Iraqi Sunni leaders.⁴⁶ Mu'yyad al-Aadhami, a member of the Muslim Clerics Association was quoted as saying "we (the Sunnis) are not with Zarqawi," and urged Zarqawi to retract his statement.⁴⁷

Zarqawi reacted by proposing an opportunistic modification to his earlier statement. On September 19, 2005, he seems to have issued another statement regarding his declaration of war against the Shi'ites. The voice on the audio tape attributed to Zarqawi said, "It has become known to our group that some sects, such as the Sadr group ... and others, have not taken part in the massacres and not helped the occupier," the group said in a statement posted on an Islamist Web site often used by al Qaeda... So we have decided not to hurt these groups in any way, as long as they do not strike us."⁴⁸ He sought to divide the Shi'ites and drive groups such as that of Muqtada Al-Sadr away from the political process and against the interim government of Prime Minister Ibrahim Al-Jafari.

Zarqawi focused his attack on six Shi'ites and Kurdish groups that he said he will continue attacking. These groups, he asserted were helping the US occupation of Iraq: Al-Dawa Party (represented by Al-Alquami Jaafari), The Higher Revolutionary Party (represented by (Safawi) Al-Hakim Abdul Alaziz), National Conference Party (represented by Ahmad Jalabi), Al-Wifaq Party (represented by Ayad Allawi), Kurdistan Democratic Party (represented by Masa'oud Al-Barazani), and Kurdistan United National Party (represented by Jalal Talabani).

His choice of targets was as much political as religious, but other Shi'ite groups immediately rejected his approach. Riyadh Nuri, a spokesman for Muqtada Al-Sadr's movement, was quoted by *Al-Hayat*, as saying that al-Zarqawi exempted al-Sadr's group to "rip the Shi'ite unity apart to try to instill division and sedition within (the Shi'ite) sect." Nuri added that al-Sadr's 'trend' treats "al-Qa'ida and al-Zarqawi as its worst enemy," and that "if Zarqawi fell in al-Sadr's hands, he will tear him into pieces."⁴⁹

The reasons for this exercise in opportunism go beyond Shi'ite reactions. It has been reported that Zarqawi's retraction came as response to straining of relations between his group and other Iraqi "armed" groups that objected to his war declaration against the Shi'ites. There have been reports that Iraqi armed groups are threatening foreign groups from attacking Iraqi Shi'ites. For example, a group composed of foreign fighters, named "al-Muhajereen" or immigrants, was asked to leave the country by Iraqi armed groups following Zarqawi's declaration. *Al-Hayat* reported that these Iraqi groups included "Ba'athist" and "tribal groups" in the Sunni areas.⁵⁰

A statement posted on an Islamist website in summer 2005, allegedly written by Zarqawi, revealed a strained relationship between the two extremists. Al-Barqawi was interviewed on Al Jazeera satellite television saying that the suicide bombings in Iraq had killed too many Iraqis

and that the militants should not target Shi'ite Muslims. Zarqawi's statement addressed the interview, questioning al-Barqawi's statements and imploring the preacher to not 'turn against the mujahideen.'⁵¹ If authentic, the posting seems likely to confirm what Zarqawi's letter to Bin Laden suggested: that the front of support Zarqawi expected to come forth in Iraq and the Middle East has yet to materialize on the scale he envisioned.

In short, the fact remains that movements like Zarqawi's not only designate most Shi'ite movements in Iraq as enemies, they repeatedly attack Shi'ites in general. Moreover, Zarqawi has become extreme even by extremist standards. Zarqawi has long been identified with the militant Islamist preacher Isam Mohammed al-Barqawi, or Abu Mohammed al-Maqdisi, with whom Zarqawi shared a cellblock in a Jordanian prison in the mid 1990s. Zarqawi has referred to al-Barqawi as his 'sheik,' and the preacher is considered the terrorist's, as well as many other militants', spiritual guide.⁵²

The Shi'ite Response

The actions and statements by Zarqawi and other Sunni extremists have not yet triggered large-scale revenge seeking by the Shi'ites, although they clearly have increased the tension between Sunni and Shi'ite, and encourage Shi'ite separatism and federalism. Religious leaders from both sides have urged calm in the wake of sectarian tensions. Imams in mosques across Iraq from Baghdad, to Najaf, to Kirkuk have blamed the violence on "outsiders."

Shi'ites have been urged by leading clerics and political leaders not to react to attacks or the Zarqawi's declaration of war against them. A disciple of Ayatollah Ali Sistani urged worshipers that to "[submit] to ones' passion and confusion will bring us to domestic sedition and eventually lead us to failure... We must go forward, to be patient and carry on building the new Iraq."⁵³

We have seen some signs of change. There have been some reports of prominent Shi'ites calling and advocating revenge. For example, Ayatollah Mohammed al-Yaaqubi, Shi'ite cleric, issued a religious edict on September 26, 2005 in which he allowed his followers to "kill terrorists before they kill... Self-restraint does not mean surrender. ... Protecting society from terrorists is a religious duty," but Ayatollah al-Yaaqubi reiterated what other Shi'ite religious leaders have called for: to "deepen dialogue with Sunnis ... [that are not]... terrorists or Saddamists."⁵⁴

Such edicts are dangerous because extremist Shi'ites can define any one as a terrorist or Saddamist, and we might see more Shi'ite killings. There have been increasing reports, however, that Shi'ites have started striking Sunni areas. Shi'ite paramilitary groups have reportedly, kidnapped and tortured Sunnis, and seized Sunni mosques in Baghdad.⁵⁵ For example, following a car bomb in Baqubah on September 17, 2005, it was reported that some Shi'ites near Taji, north of Baghdad, blocked the main north-south highway, stopped cars, and ordered drivers to turn back.⁵⁶

Earlier that week, seven Shi'ite members of the Tamimi tribe were killed execution style after being pulled from their home. Sunni tribes in the area feared revenge by the Shi'ites and took up arms themselves. Fearing that the sectarian violence would spiral, US and Iraqi forces moved into the area that afternoon.⁵⁷

On August 31, nearly 1,000 Shi'ite pilgrims were killed in a stampede in Baghdad. The pilgrims were crossing the al-Aima bridge en route to the shrine of Moussa al-Kadhim when rumors began to spread that there were Sunni suicide bombers in their midst. The resulting panic ended in 953 Shi'ites dead, according to the Iraqi interior ministry.

The Muslim Scholars Association had already urged Zarqawi to “retract these threats,” asserted that declaration of war on the Shi’ites “harms the image of jihad, obstructs the success of the resistance in Iraq, and leads to more innocent Iraqi bloodshed.”⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the Moqtada al-Sadr vowed vengeance against Sunnis, who he believed organized the pandemonium. Later in a sermon, Sadr spoke out against the Coalition’s presence in Iraq, as it hampered a sectarian war, which he asserted had already begun.⁵⁹ This sermon placed the Mehdi Army’s uneasy truce with Coalition troops in question. Prior to the stampede, Moqtada al-Sadr had publicly opposed Shi’ite participation in sectarian warfare.

In recent weeks, there have been reports of revenge killings. Between August and mid-September 2005, in the Ghazaliya, a mixed neighborhood of Baghdad, more than 30 people were murdered. Reports show that these killing all appear to be sectarian attacks and that the dead are both Sunnis and Shi’ites. Despite the larger presence of police, in July 700-1,100 corpses were brought to a Baghdad morgue with gunshot wounds, and it is unclear how many bodies did not make it to the morgue. Doctors in Baghdad’s central morgue believe that most of these gunshots were targeted assassinations, many bodies with multiple gunshot wounds and many are around the chest.⁶⁰

Ethnic minorities in neighborhood around Iraq are selling their homes and moving to areas where they are the majority to avoid the sectarian violence. It remains uncertain if this will become more widespread and force further isolation of Iraq’s ethnic groups, and some experts believe that this “exodus” is reminiscent of the Balkans. One of these experts is Ed Joseph, a fellow at the Wilson Institute, who was quoted by the *Los Angeles Times* saying “...if [minorities] start leaving, then watch out...Huge danger. That is what people only belatedly realized in the Balkans: Once displacement starts, it is a never-ending cycle.”⁶¹

The role of hard-line Shi’ite Islamist movements is becoming increasingly uncertain. Moqtada al-Sadr has been publicly supportive of the political process in Iraq on other occasions, and has urged Shi’ites to avoid sectarian fighting with the Sunni population. Yet the strength of his militia remains a concern. The Sadr Organization and other organized religious groups have been accused of political assassinations and kidnappings, as have Kurdish forces in the North. Hard-line Shi’ite Islamists have also steadily expanded their power and control in the area around Basra, and pushed out Sunnis, Christians, and more secular Iraqis in the process. Movements like Sadr’s Mahdi Army have experienced a major resurgence in areas such as Basra, while unofficial Shi’ite police and militia have created a growing environment of fear.⁶²

Another challenge is presented by uniformed, government-sponsored police and security forces using their power to express loyalties to religious parties or political factions. Some Sunnis increasingly state that largely Shi’ite and Kurdish military and security units have become more and more ruthless in operating in Sunni areas. This problem could become much worse if sectarian and ethnic tension increases because even units with mixes of Sunni officers often have largely Shi’ite manning.

It has been reported that many of the 1,300 documented murders in Basra during the year 2005 have been carried out by police forces. According to a report in the *London Daily Telegraph*, senior officials in the Basra Police asserted that his police force had “effectively been taken over by the Mahdi Army, the most radical [Shi’ite] armed group in Iraq.” According to this official, the Mahdi Army “came in with a lot of money and bought the loyalty of internal affairs.”⁶³

The figures the Coalition and Iraqi government issue on the police illustrate another aspect of the problem. The Coalition only counts the police it trains and equips, but there are many more official and semi-official police it does not train and equip, and over which the Iraqi government has little practical control. Once again, there is also a serious risk that this can exacerbate the growing movement towards creating a Shi'ite Islamist enclave in the south.

In August 2005, Basra police Chief Hassam Sawadi said that he had lost control over three-quarters of his police force, and those men in his ranks were using their power to assassinate opponents.⁶⁴ Reports indicate that government police and military forces in the Kurdish north are similarly using their power to intimidate Sunnis through abductions and assassinations. Such activity poses the threat of deepening regional fissures. Likewise, the misuse of power by Coalition-sponsored forces could deepen resentment toward Coalition forces, particularly among the Sunni population.

Ties to Bin Laden and Outside Sunni Islamist Groups

Another key aspect of the neo-Salafi Sunni Islamist extremist groups is that their struggle extends far beyond the borders of Iraq, as does their support base. The Zarqawi group, for example, has steadily strengthened its ties to outside terrorist groups. In October 2004, Zarqawi publicly pledged allegiance to Bin Laden and changed the name of his organization from Al Tawhid wal Jihad (Unity and Holy War) to Al Qa'ida in the Land of the Two Rivers.⁶⁵ While there is no evidence that the two men have ever met or even directly communicated, Bin Laden issued a statement in December 2004 confirming Zarqawi as the "Emir" of Al Qa'ida in Iraq.

Movements like the Army of Ansar al-Sunna, which claimed responsibility for the attack on the US mess tent in Mosul in December 2004 and for many other suicide attacks, seem to have a mix of links to Zarqawi and possibly Al Qa'ida. They seem to be largely Iraqi, but their mix of Sunnis and Kurds is uncertain, as is the extent to which the group and its cells are at least partly a legacy of Ansar al-Islam – an active Islamist group that reportedly provided sanctuary for Zarqawi before the war. In November 2004, Ansar al-Sunna claimed that it had twice collaborated with Zarqawi's group and another group known as the Islamic Army in Iraq.

In February 2005, a leaked US intelligence memo indicated that an intercepted communication, reportedly from bin Laden to Zarqawi, encouraged Iraqi insurgents to attack the American homeland.⁶⁶ Even so, US intelligence analysts view bin Laden and Zarqawi as separate operators, and it remains unclear as to what – if any – organizational or financial support Bin Laden provides Zarqawi's organization.⁶⁷

Another "Zarqawi letter," written on April 27, 2005 by one of his associates (Abu Asim al Qusayami al Yemeni), seemed to reflect Zarqawi's complaints about the failure of some of his volunteers to martyr themselves, and calls for more support that he has used both to try to gain more support from Bin Laden and from Arabs outside Iraq.⁶⁸

Some analysts believe that Bin Laden made a strategic error by declaring Zarqawi the "emir" for operations in Iraq. Iraqis are deeply distrustful of outsiders and, in particular, neighbors in the region. Bin Laden's declaration could be seen by Iraqis in highly nationalistic terms as a Saudi ordering a Jordanian to kill Iraqis. These analysts believe that this will turn patriotic Iraqis away from the insurgency, and encourage them to offer their support to the Iraqi government.

This may be true, but the other side of the story is that international affiliation provides a stream of outside money and support, tactical advice, and weapons and technology. It helps expand

news media coverage and feed satellite news networks. It allows Sunni Islamist extremist inside Iraq to capitalize on anger at the US over the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as exploit dissatisfaction with Arab and other regimes in Islamic countries. The end result is an informal network of neo-Salafi hate groups that extends to Europe and the US, has elements in virtually every country in the Middle East, and elements in Central, South, and Southeast Asia.

This also raises serious questions about what the capture or killing of a figure like Zarqawi or Bin Laden would do. Rather than cut off the head of a rigid hierarchy and collapse a movement, the end result could be to create an instant martyr, see new leaders emerge, and/or strengthen rival or parallel groups and cells. In Iraq, such tactical victories could lead to new waves of volunteers and suicide bombings and have only a limited impact on the war to create a civil war.

A Chronology of A War of Bigotry and Hatred

Actions speak louder than words, and literally so in the case of Iraq. There is no precise way to know exactly which group has been responsible for each attack on Shi'ites or Kurds, or to know what their exact motive has been. The pattern of past attacks does, however, include many cases where Sunni Islamist extremist groups have claimed responsibility for attacks on Shi'ites and Kurds, and the chronology of violence speaks for itself.

Suicide Bombings as a Weapon of Civil War

Suicide bombings are only one weapon used by Islamist extremists and have been used for a wide variety of purposes other than provoking civil war. At the same time, an Associated Press chronology of the most serious bombings clearly shows they have often been used to provoke ethnic and sectarian hatred between Iraqis:

- Aug. 19, 2003: A truck bomb explodes outside the U.N. headquarters building in Baghdad, killing 22 people.
- Aug. 29, 2003: A car bomb explodes outside mosque in Najaf, killing more than 85 people, including Shi'ite leader Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim. Although officials never gave a final death toll, there were suspicions it may have been higher.
- Oct. 27, 2003: Four suicide bombings target International Red Cross headquarters and four Iraqi police stations in Baghdad, killing 40 people, mostly Iraqis.
- Feb. 1, 2004: Twin suicide bombers kill 109 people in two Kurdish party offices in Irbil.
- Feb. 10, 2004: Suicide bomber explodes a truckload of explosives outside a police station in Iskandariyah, killing 53 people.
- Feb. 11, 2004: Suicide attacker blows up a car packed with explosives in a crowd of Iraqis waiting outside an army recruiting center in Baghdad, killing 47 people.
- March 2, 2004: Coordinated blasts from suicide bombers, mortars and planted explosives strike Shi'ite Muslim shrines in Karbala and in Baghdad, killing at least 181 and wounding 573.
- April 21, 2004: Five blasts near police stations and police academy in southern city of Basra kill at least 55 people.
- July 29, 2004: A suicide car bomb devastates a busy street in Baqouba, killing 70 people.
- Aug. 26, 2004: A mortar barrage slams into a mosque filled with Iraqis preparing to march on the embattled city of Najaf, killing 27 people and wounding 63.

- Sept. 14, 2004: A car bomb rips through a busy market near a Baghdad police headquarters where Iraqis were waiting to apply for jobs, and gunmen open fire on a van carrying police home from work in Baqouba, killing at least 59 people total and wounding at least 114.
- Sept. 30, 2004: A series of bombs in Baghdad's al-Amel neighborhood kill 35 children and seven adults as U.S. troops hand out candy at a government ceremony to inaugurate a new sewage treatment plant.
- Dec. 19, 2004: Car bombs tear through a Najaf funeral procession and Karbala's main bus station, killing at least 60 people and wounding more than 120 in the two Shi'ite holy cities.
- Feb. 8, 2005: A suicide bomber blows himself up in the middle of a crowd of army recruits, killing 21 people.
- Feb. 18, 2005: Two suicide bombers attack two mosques, leaving 28 people dead, while an explosion near a Shi'ite ceremony kills two other people.
- Feb. 28, 2005: A suicide car bomber targets mostly Shi'ite police and National Guard recruits in Hillah, killing 125 and wounding more than 140. Some of the dead and injured are at a nearby market.
- March 10, 2005: A suicide bomber blows himself up at a Shi'ite mosque during a funeral in the northern city of Mosul, killing at least 47 people and wounding more than 100.
- April 24, 2005: Insurgents stage coordinated double-bombings in Tikrit and a Shi'ite neighborhood in Baghdad, killing a total of 29 Iraqis and injuring 74.
- May 1, 2005: A car bomb obliterates a tent crowded with mourners for the funeral of a Kurdish official in the northern city of Tal Afar, killing 25 people and wounding more than 50.
- May 4, 2005: Bomb explodes among Iraqi civilians applying for police jobs in Kurdish city of Irbil, killing 60 people and wounding some 150.
- July 16, 2005: Suicide bomber detonates explosives strapped to his body at a gas station near a Shi'ite mosque in central city of Musayyib, blowing up a fuel tanker and killing at least 54 people and wounded it least 82.

The Worst Day of Hatred to Date: September 14, 2005

This pattern is intensifying and not abating. On September 14, a series of well-coordinated suicide bombings took place in Baghdad that killed 152 people, producing the highest death toll since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. Almost all of the dead and wounded were poor Shi'ite workers – clearly targets on religious lines hit by a massive car bomb in a square in a Shi'ite neighborhood.

According to a report in the *London Times*, Zarqawi claimed responsibility in an audio message released on an Islamic website and declared that, "The al-Qaeda organization in Mesopotamia is declaring all-out war on the Rafidha (a pejorative term for Shias), wherever they are in Iraq" He also called upon Sunni Muslims to "wake up from your slumber" and join the fight... We would like to congratulate the Muslim nation and inform them the battle to avenge the Sunnis of Tal Afar has begun... Our brigades have joyfully set off to uphold their religion through death ... we will inform you of the details of our operations in Baghdad and other parts of the country soon and we ask for your prayers," ⁶⁹

If one looks at the overall pattern of attacks on that day -- as reported by Reuters and the Associated Press -- a much broader effort to target Shi'ites and provoke a civil war emerges:

- Baghdad - At least 114 people were killed and more than 180 wounded when a suicide bomber blew up a minibus in the mostly Shi'ite district of Kadhimiya in Baghdad. Police said most of victims were labourers lining up to find work for the day. It was one of the deadliest suicide bombings Iraq has seen.
- Taji - 17 people were killed by gunmen in Taji, north of Baghdad. Police said the gunmen rounded up their victims in the middle of the night and shot them outside their homes. They were taken from a mixed Shia and Sunni neighborhood, but were either Shi'ite or seen as supporters of the government.
- Baghdad - Five people were killed and 24 wounded in a suicide car bomb in the Shula district of Baghdad, police said. The blast went off outside the offices of a Shi'ite cleric, and at a time a US patrol was nearby.
- Baghdad - Three Iraqi soldiers and three civilians were killed when a car bomb targeted their patrol in the Adel district of western Baghdad, police said.
- Baghdad - 11 civilians were killed and 14 wounded when a suicide bomber in a car blew himself up in the Huriya district, northwestern Baghdad. The victims were gathering to refill gas canisters, police said.
- Baghdad - Two policemen were killed and one wounded when a car bomb exploded targeting Iraqi police patrol in the Aadamia district, northern Baghdad, police said.
- Baghdad - Two guards were killed and three officials in the interior ministry were wounded when gunmen attacked their convoy in the Waziriya district, northern Baghdad. When reinforcements came and cordoned off the area, a suicide bomber driving a car blew himself up near them, wounding four policemen.
- Baghdad - A roadside bomb destroyed a US Humvee vehicle in the western Amiriya district of Baghdad. There was no immediate word on casualties. In a nearby attack, a car bomb wounded two Iraqi policemen, police said.
- Baghdad - Suicide car bomb attack against US patrol in underpass in Centre of Baghdad. 2 US soldiers wounded
- Baghdad - Suicide car bomb detonated near US convoy in South East Baghdad. No injuries
- Baghdad - Suicide car bomb attack against US M1 Abrams tank in East, centre Baghdad. Bomb failed to go off. Driver found alive trapped in wreckage
- Baghdad - Suicide car bomber under overpass by the main national railway station and Al Muthana Air Base [main recruitment centre]. Initial reports from saying 4 Iraqi's killed, 20 wounded (incl police and civilians). Unconfirmed reports say the bomber targeted an Iraqi police commando patrol.

What is equally striking is that while such violence certainly reached a new peak that day, the killings went on without pause at lower "usual" level the next day. If one only considers major reported killings in Baghdad, they included:

- A suicide bomber killed 15 police commandoes in the Dora district of Baghdad, police said. The blast wounded 21 people.
- Three bodies of people who had been shot dead were found in the Shula district of Baghdad, police said.
- Three bodies were found in the New Baghdad district. Police said they had been shot dead.
- Three Shi'ite pilgrims heading to the southern city of Kerbala for a religious event were killed by gunmen in northern Baghdad.

The Broader Chronology of Efforts to Provoke Civil War

Suicide bombings are generally the bloodiest forms of attack, and get the most media attention, but they are only part of the story. Once again, it is not possible to develop an accurate chronology of all the attacks against Shi'ites and Kurds, Iraqi officials and leaders in the new government, or other targets that could help provoke a civil war. The true cause of such attacks is

often unclear as is the motive. Moreover, only partial reporting is available on attacks on Sunnis that may be the result of Shi'ite and Kurdish reprisals and revenge.

These problems are compounded by the failure of the Coalition, US, or Iraqi government to provide any useful reporting on the patterns in the war, and the steady cutbacks in the limited data provided in 2004. As a result, analysis has to rely on press sources that are often contradictory or prove to be inaccurate over time.

Nevertheless, even a press-derived chronology of attacks on Iraqi officials, Iraqi forces, and Iraqi civilians over the two month period before September 14th provides a much broader picture of the kinds of violence now going on in Iraq, and shows how often the fighting has pushed towards worsening the civil conflict:

July 14, 2005: Two suicide bombers struck near the Green Zone, killing two policemen and wounding at least nine others.

In Kirkuk, gunmen kill three policemen.

Gunmen kill three policemen in western Baghdad.

Gunmen kill five Iraqi employees of an American base in Baqouba, northeast of Baghdad.

Gunmen attack an Iraqi television crew in Baghdad, wounding three.

The Associated Press reported that in the first six months of this year Iraqi civilian deaths exceeded those of soldiers or police. Between January 1st and June 30, 1,594 civilians were killed compared to only 895 security forces (275 Iraqi soldiers; 620 policemen). According to the Iraqi government, 781 insurgents were killed during this period. More than 1,600 Iraqis have been killed since the formation of Prime Minister Jaafari's government in April.

July 15, 2005: Eight car bombs (seven of them suicide attacks) in Baghdad kill at least 30 and injure more than a hundred:

A late-night suicide attack on a bridge near the home of President Talabani killed four security guards and injured nine others.

Eight Iraqis died when a suicide car bomber struck an Iraqi Army base in the Shaab neighborhood of northern Baghdad.

A suicide car bomb exploded near a police commando patrol in western Baghdad killing six policemen and wounding more than forty.

A suicide car bomb exploded near an Iraqi patrol in central Baghdad killing two Iraqi soldiers and wounding six.

A suicide car bomb near the former Defense Ministry building in northern Baghdad killed two Iraqi soldiers and injured 14.

Five Iraqi soldiers and one civilian are killed when a suicide car bomber detonated his car near Haswa, south of Baghdad. At least 17 civilians were wounded.

Gunmen kill three Iraqi policemen at a checkpoint near Baqouba, northeast of Baghdad.

A suicide car bomb detonated prematurely in Kirkuk, killing the two insurgents inside along with one civilian.

July 16, 2005: A suicide bomb detonated near a gasoline tanker in Musayyib, south of Baghdad, kills 98 and wounds 160.

In Mosul, a suicide attack outside a police station kills 5 Iraqi police officers.

July 17, 2005: A total of six car bombings, four of them suicide attacks, struck Iraq:

A suicide car bomb killed 2 policemen and 1 civilian and injured 8 in the eastern part of New Baghdad.

A suicide car bomb near Bay'a bus station in southern Iraq killed 3 police commandos and 4 civilians and injured 3 more.

A suicide car bomb narrowly missed a U.S. convoy but struck two minibuses in Mahmoudiya, killing 6 civilians.

A bomb in southeast Baghdad kills five members of Iraq's independent electoral commission and one policeman.

A car bomb exploded near an Iraqi checkpoint, killing three commandos and wounding 10 civilians.

July 18, 2005: Gunmen kill eight police officers in three separate incidents in and around Baghdad.

At least 20 other police officers, soldiers and government workers are killed. In one incident, insurgents in Dora gunned down Maissa Jassim, a government employee of the Iraqi Trade Minister.

July 19, 2005: Gunmen assassinate Shaykh Ahmad al-Juburi, the imam at Al-Taqwa Mosque in Al-Dawrah in southern Baghdad.

Insurgents attack an oil storage facility south of Baghdad.

A Sunni delegate and an advisor (Mijbil Issa and Dhamin Hussein al-Obeidi) to the committee responsible for drafting the constitution along with a bodyguard are gunned down outside a restaurant in Baghdad.

A roadside bomb in Kirkuk kills one police officer and one civilian.

In Tikrit, a police officer is killed when a roadside bomb detonated near his vehicle.

Gunmen attack a minibus carrying Iraqi workers to a U.S. air base near Baquba, killing 13.

July 20, 2005: A car bomb in Tuz Khormato, near Kirkuk, wounds two civilians.

Insurgents attack an oil pipeline south of Samarra.

A suicide attack at the recruiting center near the Muthanna airport in Baghdad kills 10, including a Sunni member of the constitutional drafting committee and wounds more than 20.

Gunmen kill seven Iraqi officers and wound one in an ambush in Mosul.

The 12 remaining members of the Sunni Arab delegation to the constitution committee (two had resigned earlier after being threatened by insurgents) suspend their membership in protest over the murder of a fellow Sunni delegate.

July 21, 2005: A suicide car bomb exploded near an Iraqi Army checkpoint in Mahmoudiyah, killing six soldiers and injuring 13 (including five civilians) others.

A suicide car bomb killed one Iraqi soldier and wounded six in the Baghdad suburb of Bueitha.

Gunmen kill members of the Qadisiyah provincial council in Khadhra.

Gunmen kill Salman Lazim Shikara, an employee of the Ministry of Trade, in Sadr City, Baghdad.

A bomb near a British security firm in the western Yarmouk neighborhood kills one Iraqi guard and injures two.

A roadside bomb in Latifiyah, south of Baghdad, kills three Iraqi soldiers and injures another three.

In Mansour-a district in Baghdad-gunmen kidnap two Algerian diplomats: Ali Belaroussi, Algeria's charge d'affaires and chief of the Iraqi mission, and Azzedine Ben Kadi).

Gunmen kidnap and kill two policemen and one Sunni cleric (all brothers) in northern Baghdad.

July 22, 2005: In Baghdad, gunmen shoot a police officer and his wife.

Gunmen kill two policemen and injure another two in eastern Baghdad.

Mortars struck Major-General Anwar Amin's (commander of the Iraqi Army Fourth Brigade) house, killing one policeman and wounding three others.

Mortal shells kill one Iraqi policeman and injure another in Dumiz.

July 23, 2005: Iraqi police arrest thirty people in Al-Yusufiyah and AL-Musayyib, south of Baghdad.

A bomb in Al-Qal'ah, in western Samarra kills one Iraqi soldier and wounds three others.

The government of Iraq condemned the bombings in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt.

July 24, 2005: A suicide truck bomb exploded near Rashad police station in eastern Baghdad killing at least thirty and wounding several dozen.

A roadside bomb in Haswa, south of Baghdad, kills one child and injures six other civilians.

July 25, 2005: The Sunni Arab delegation involved in the drafting of the constitution ends its boycott and returns to the committee.

A truck bomb outside a Baghdad police station kills thirty-nine people.

Gunmen kill Subhi Thamir Hussein al-Badri, his wife and two sons in Samarra.

A car bomb near Harithiyah Bridge in western Baghdad kills two policemen and injures 11.

A suicide car bomb at Sadeer hotel in central Baghdad kills 12 and injures 18.

A suicide car bomb kills two commandoes and injures another 10 at a Ministry of Interior Police building.

A bomb exploded near the Iraqi-Syrian border killing two Iraq policemen.

An Iraqi soldier is killed in Ramadi. In response, U.S. forces closed Al-Warrar and Al-Jazeera bridges.

July 26, 2005: Gunmen kill 16 Iraqi government employees and wound twenty-seven in western Baghdad.

In two separate incidents, gunmen kill a policeman and a government employee in Baghdad.

In Basra, gunmen attack and kill two people (including a policeman). Several others are injured.

In Kirkuk, two roadside bombs injure five.

20 gunmen attack a water plant killing seven Iraqi soldiers in Tarmiyah, north of Baghdad.

July 27, 2005: The group al-Qaida in Iraq announced it had killed two Algerian diplomats, kidnapped on July 21st.

In Mosul, the U.S. military captured Ammar Abu Bara (aka Amar Hussein Hasan), a cell leader of al-Qaida in Iraq.

A suicide car bomb kills six civilians and wounds eight soldiers in western Baghdad.

July 28, 2005: Gunmen attack Iraqi Army checkpoints in Ba'qubah and Khan Bani Sa'd, northeast of Baghdad, killing six Iraqi soldiers and wounding eight.

The Electricity Ministry announced a further reduction in electricity supplies to Baghdad, following a series of attacks on that city's power grid. Baghdad now receives half-an-hour of electricity followed by a six-hour blackout period.

A bomb struck an oil pipeline belonging to the Beiji Oil Refinery, southwest of Kirkuk.

A roadside bomb in front of a police station in southern Baghdad kills an Iraqi policeman and wounds four others.

July 29, 2005: A suicide bomber struck an Iraqi Army recruiting center in Rabiha, near the Syrian border, killing at least forty and wounding several dozen.

A suicide bicycle bomber struck a busy carrying Iraqi Army trainees, killing two and wounding two others, outside of Balad.

A suicide bomb struck a convoy of military trucks in the Al-Tarmiyah area of northern Baghdad, killing the driver and injuring another.

A suicide car bomb in the Al-Sarafiyah district of Baghdad kills one and wounds 10.

More than a thousand Sunni Arabs gathered near the Green Zone in Baghdad to protest the recent killings of Sunnis.

July 30, 2005: A roadside bomb outside of Basra kills two contractors guarding a British convoy.

A car bomb exploded near the National Theater in Baghdad killing seven (including three policemen) and wounding twenty-five.

July 31, 2005: Iraqi delegates drafting the new constitution said they would require more time (beyond the August 15 deadline) to finish their work.

A car bomb kills seven people and wounds another 10 (including several policemen) in Al-Haswah, south of Baghdad.

Gunmen attacked a Baghdad convoy carrying members of the Iraqi National Congress killing one and wounding three.

August 1, 2005: A suicide car bomb near the Syrian border wounds several U.S. soldiers along with an embedded journalist.

Gunmen kill six U.S. soldiers in Haditha, western Iraq.

A car bomb kills a U.S. Marine in Hit, southeast of Haditha.

In Baghdad, gunmen storm the house of Haider Mohammed Ali al-Dujaili, an aide to Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Chalabi, killing him.

August 2, 2005: A roadside bomb exploded wounding twenty-nine civilians.

In Samarra, an explosion damaged a fuel pipeline.

A car bomb in Baqouba kills one civilian and injures nine others (mostly policemen).

The Defense Ministry announced that 1,413 civilians had been killed since April 1st.

In Mosul, a suicide car bomb struck a police checkpoint, killing four (including three policemen).

August 3, 2005: In Baghdad, gunmen kill General Abdel Salam Rauf Saleh, the head of the Interior Ministry's commando unit.

Gunmen in Baghdad kill a police colonel and two finance ministry employees.

A car bomb in Baquba kills one civilian and wounds nine.

An explosion near Abu Ghraib kills one civilian.

A bomb in Kirkuk wounds two civilians.

August 4, 2005: Gunmen kill four Iraqi soldiers in Dujail, north of Baghdad.

In Kirkuk, gunmen kill three policemen.

A car bomb between Tal Afar and Kirkuk kills four civilians and wounds three others.

Gunmen kill an Iraqi soldier and his family in Diyala. In a separate attack, gunmen also kill the director of planning for the region.

A car bomb kills two Iraqi soldiers from the elite Wolf Brigade in Daquq, south of Kirkuk. The soldiers were part of a unit escorting the Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and his aides back from Tal-Afar. Two clerics were also killed in the attack.

A suicide bomb in Ba'qubah kills four Iraqi soldiers and injures four more.

August 5, 2005: A suicide bomb kills an Iraqi soldier in southern Baghdad.

August 6, 2005: In eastern Baghdad, a suicide car bomb wounds three civilians.

August 7, 2005: In Baghdad, gunmen kill three Iraqi soldiers and wound another.

A suicide bomber struck an empty fuel tanker in Tikrit killing at least two policemen and injuring another nine.

A suicide car bomb struck a police recruitment center in Tikrit killing five and wounding more than a dozen.

In Al-Samawah, citizens protesting the lack of clean water and electricity clashed with security forces. One person is killed and eight are wounded.

A car bomb detonated in Ramadi.

August 8, 2005: Clashes between Iraqi civilians and security forces in Al-Samawah kill one and injure more than two dozen.

In Baghdad, gunmen kill two members of the Oil Ministry and wound two others.

Gunmen kill two employees of the Northern Oil Company in Kirkuk.

In Baghdad, gunmen kill an employee of the Al-Dawrah electricity station.

August 9, 2005: In four separate incidents, gunmen kill 10 Iraqi policemen in Baghdad.

A suicide bomb in downtown Baghdad kills at least seven, including one U.S. soldier, and injures almost a hundred.

Alaa al-Timimi, the mayor of Baghdad, is fired.

The mayor of Samawah resigned under pressure.

Gunmen assassinate Abbas Ibrahim Mohammed, an Iraqi Cabinet employee, in Baghdad.

August 10, 2005: In Kirkuk, gunmen kill a police officer.

Gunmen kidnap Brig. General Khudayer Abbas, head of administrative affairs for the Ministry of the Interior.

August 12, 2005: Two roadside bombs south of Kirkuk kill two and injure five.

In Mosul, Iraqi security forces kill Mohammed Salah Sultan, also known as Abu Zubair, a lieutenant of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

August 13, 2005: A suicide car bomb kills one Iraqi and wounds another in southern Baghdad.

In eastern Baghdad, a bomb injures five Iraqi soldiers.

August 14, 2005: Captured insurgents lead Iraqi police to a grave containing thirty bodies in southern Baghdad.

In Baghdad, gunmen kidnap Husam Kazim Juwayid, general manager of the central bank. Kurds in Arbil, Al-Sulaymaniyah and Dahuk protest demanding independence.

Gunmen kill an Iraqi soldier and a civilian north of Baghdad.

Gunmen kill six (including three policemen) in Ba'qubah.

A suicide bomber kills one civilian and wounded another four in Al-Mahawil, south of Baghdad.

August 15, 2005: After failing to meet the deadline for drafting a constitution, the Iraqi parliament votes to give delegates until August 22nd to come up with a draft. Outstanding issues are: federalism; oil wealth; women's rights; and, the role of Islam.

In Abu Ghraib, Iraqi forces capture sixty-seven insurgents. In Taji, north of Baghdad, an additional eighty-two-including several foreigners-are arrested.

In Al-Amiriyah, gunmen kill one Iraq soldier and injure another.

A mortar attack on the Interior Ministry in Baghdad injures 20 (including five security officers).

Gunmen assassinate Muhammad Husayn, a member of the municipal council of Al-Khalis.

In Ba'qubah, gunmen attack a checkpoint killing three Iraqi soldiers.

A failed assassination attempt is carried out on Iraqi Vice-President Adil Ab-al-Mahdi in Al-Azim.

A suicide bomb at a restaurant in Al-Karradah injures 15, including six policemen.

In Ba'qubah, an explosion kills an Iraqi journalist and wounds two others.

August 16, 2005: The IMF issues its first report in twenty-five years on the state of the Iraqi economy. The group said it now expected this year's GDP growth to be 4 per cent (not the previously estimated 17 per cent), blaming the fall on the heavy number of insurgent attacks targeting the country's oil industry.

Gunmen attack the Baghdad-Al-Rusafah Civil Defense Center in Sadr city killing two policemen and wounding four others.

Gunmen attack and wound several bodyguards of former Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.

Insurgents struck an oil pipeline in the Jurf al-Sakhr area of Al-Musayyab, south of Baghdad. In subsequent clashes one guard is killed and three are wounded.

In Mosul, clashes between insurgents and police kill one civilian and injure another. In another attack, gunmen kill a policeman.

In Baghdad, gunmen kill one and wound two others.

August 17, 2005: Three car bombs kill at least forty-three and wound fifty-eight in Baghdad. Zarqawi's al-Qaida organization claimed responsibility.

The first two attacks struck Baghdad's al-Nahda bus station, with the third exploding near the al-Kindi hospital.

In Fallujah, a car bomb kills three civilians and injures another seven.

Gunmen assassinate Ali al-Shimmari, a local imam and a member of the Association of Muslim Scholars, in northeastern Baghdad.

Gunmen attack convoy of trucks near Beiji in northern Iraq, killing three.

August 18, 2005: Iraq's Electoral Commission ruled that Iraqis living abroad would not be allowed to vote in the October referendum on the constitution. Iraqis from all around the world participated in the January 30 elections.

Gunmen assassinate Jasim Waheeb, a Baghdad judge.

August 19, 2005: Major General David Rodriguez, commander of U.S. forces in northwestern Iraq, announced that U.S. forces had killed or captured 170 foreign fighters in recent months.

Three members of the Iraqi Islamic Party, Iraq's main Sunni party, are gunned down in Mosul.

Gunmen kill Aswad al-Ali, an Arab member of a local council near Kirkuk.

In Kirkuk, gunmen kill an Iraqi contractor working with the U.S. military.

In Tikrit, a roadside bomb kills two Iraqis and wounds a third.

August 20, 2005: In Mosul, a roadside bomb wounds six Kurdish militiamen. A second roadside bomb wounds six civilians.

Gunmen kill Yasser Abed Moussa, a retired brigadier general in Saddam's army.

Insurgents attack a market in Fallujah with grenades, injuring 20 civilians.

August 21, 2005: Iraq accuses Jordan of sheltering members of Saddam Hussein's family as well as those responsible for terrorist attacks in Iraq.

Sunni Arabs appeal to the U.S. and UN to prevent Shi'ites and Kurds from pushing a draft of the new constitution through parliament without their consent.

A car bomb in a Shi'ite district of Baghdad kills four civilians.

Residents flee Rawah following clashes between U.S. and Iraqi forces and insurgents.

A roadside bomb kills three people, including a policeman, and injures five others, in southern Baghdad.

In Fallujah, a roadside bomb kills three people, including one civilian, and wounds two others.

Gunmen kill two Iraqi policemen in western Baghdad.

A number of Shi'ite and Kurdish militias are being formed to combat increasing levels of violence.

August 22, 2005: Insurgents attack power stations in central Iraq, causing blackouts and costing the country \$60 million in lost oil revenues.

For a second time in as many weeks, Iraqi leaders fail to reach consensus on a draft constitution. Delegates ask for three more days to complete negotiations.

August 23, 2005: A suicide attack against Diyala Police Directorate in Baghdad kills five, including an Iraqi colonel, and wounds five Iraqi policemen. A number of multinational forces are also injured.

August 24, 2005: Insurgents attack Iraqi police patrols in western Baghdad. In a tactic the U.S. military calls 'swarming', three car bombs (two of them suicide car bombs) are immediately followed by gunfire. The attack kills forty (including 13 policemen, and one U.S. soldier) and wounds several dozen.

Fighting breaks out between rival Shi'ite groups in southern Iraq after supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr try to re-open his office Najaf, killing four.

August 25, 2005: A third deadline for completion of the new Iraqi constitution comes and goes, with little progress apparent.

Gunmen attack a bus near Al-Khalis, killing four and wounding seven.

In Baqouba, seven Iraqis (mostly new recruits) are wounded in a mortar attack on a police station.

A roadside bomb in Al-Hawijah kills an Iraqi soldier and wounds two.

A mortar attack kills one Iraqi soldier and wounds another in Al-Musayyib.

Gunmen attack the convoy of Iraqi president Jalal Talabani south of Tuz Khormato killing two bodyguards and wounding three others.

Iraqi police discover thirty-six bodies in southeastern Baghdad.

August 26, 2005: Two bombs strike an Iraqi supply convoy, killing two drivers and wounding a security guard.

Gunmen assassinate an Iraqi police officer and a civilian in northeast Baghdad.

Fighting between residents of Al-Qa'im and foreign and Iraqi gunmen erupts in western Iraq.

Thousands of Sunni Arabs demonstrate against the proposed draft constitution in central and northern Iraq.

Gunmen kill one Iraqi soldier in the Dawra neighborhood of Baghdad. Also in Dawra, a roadside bomb kills one police officer and wounds two others.

In Mosul, gunmen kill Jiyah Hussein-a leader of the local Reform Prty-and his son.

August 27, 2005: Gunmen kill Lt. Col. Mohammed Salih near Kirkuk. Also in Kirkuk, an insurgent is killed when his bomb detonated prematurely.

A bomb kills two Iraqi soldiers and wounds eight others in northern Baghdad, near Tikrit.

In Kirkuk, a roadside bomb struck an Iraqi Army patrol, wounding eight officers.

Also in Kirkuk, gunmen kill Lt. Col. Muhammad Fakhri Abdullah.

Gunmen kill an Iraqi police officer in Baghdad.

Clashes among Sunni tribes erupt in western and northern Iraq. In Qa'im, thirty-five are killed in mortar, rocket and gunfire attacks between rival tribes.

August 28, 2005: Iraqi Shi'ites announce they are ending negotiations on the constitution although they have yet to receive an endorsement of the draft from Iraq's Sunni Arabs. Iraq's parliament approves the draft constitution.

August 29, 2005: Thousands of Sunnis protest against the new constitution in Tikrit.

A rocket attack on the Oil Ministry in Baghdad wounds one.

Gunmen kill Brig. Gen. Numan Salman Faris, director of rapid response for Baghdad's Azamiyah district.

Iraq's electoral commission extends the registration period in Anbar province by one week. Stations across Iraq have been registering Iraqis for the October 15 referendum since August 3.

Members of the Iraqi National Dialogue Council reject the draft constitution, calling it 'illegal'.

Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jafari says there is no place for the Baath party in the new Iraq.

An explosion damages an oil pipeline north of Baghdad.

Insurgents set fire to an oil pipeline in Kirkuk.

A poll by the Iraqi Centre for Development and International Dialogue shows 88% of polled Iraqis plan on participating in the October referendum.

August 31, 2005: A stampede caused by a rumor of a nearby suicide bomber kills at least 953 Shia pilgrims and wounds hundreds more in a religious procession in

Baghdad. The Iraqi government declared three days of official mourning in response to what was the single deadliest incident in Iraq since the war began.

A roadside bomb kills one U.S. soldier and wounds three others in Samarra.

September 1, 2005: Tribal groups clash in Baghdad, near the site of Wednesday's deadly stampede.

Two consecutive roadside bombs wound seven in Kirkuk.

September 2, 2005: In Basra, thousands of Shi'ites rally in support of Iraq's new constitution.

A bomb struck an Iraqi convoy traveling near Beiji, killing five Iraqi soldiers and wounding nine.

In Tikrit, 2,000 Sunni Arabs meet and urge Iraq's Sunni population to reject the new constitution. Sunni led protests also occurred in Ramadi.

In Baghdad, two bombs explode, injuring one person. Also in Baghdad, gunmen kill two Sunnis and injure four others outside a mosque following Friday prayers.

Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim, the head of SCIRI-the largest Shi'ite party in the country-says there is a 'conspiracy to annihilate the Shi'ite sect in Iraq.'

September 3, 2005: Gunmen attack three checkpoints in Diyala Governorate in central Iraq, killing 19: in Al-Uzaym, insurgents kill four soldiers; in Baquba, insurgents kill six policemen; and in Al-Abbarah, insurgents kill seven policemen and two soldiers.

A rocket attack on Samarra kills three civilians and wounds 14.

Insurgents bomb an oil pipeline in Kirkuk, disrupting all oil exports to the Turkish port of Cheyhan.

A mortar attack in Samarra kills four civilians and wounds 11.

Gunmen abduct three Iraqi contractors near Taji air base in northern Baghdad.

Police discover three bodies in the Tigris River north of Baghdad.

Gunmen set fire to stalls in a market in a Sunni neighborhood of western Baghdad.

September 4, 2005: In Kirkuk, a roadside bomb exploded near an oil pipeline killing one civilian and wounding another.

Drive-by shootings in Baghdad kill four.

A suicide car bomb struck an Iraqi checkpoint in Iskandariyah killing one policeman and injuring two.

September 5, 2005: Insurgents attack Baghdad's Interior Ministry with rocket propelled grenades and gunfire in daylight, killing two police officers and wounding several others. Also in Baghdad, a car bomb kills four civilians and wounds four others.

The bodies of three district leaders who refused to cooperate with local insurgents are found in Tal Afar. Also in Tal Afar, insurgents kill eight civilians, most of them children.

A car bomb in Hit kills eight civilians and three Iraqi soldiers. 16 others are wounded.

In Baqouba, a mortar attack kills four civilians and wounds four others.

15 hundred Sunni Arabs protest against the constitution in Ramadi.

President Jalal Talabani announced a compromise over wording in the new constitution had been reached. In addition to being described as an Islamic country, the constitution now also makes reference to Iraq as an Arab country. That designation had previously been left out in order to avoid antagonizing the country's Kurdish population.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan says Iraq is now a bigger 'center for terrorist activities' than Afghanistan was under the Taliban.

Zarqawi's forces capture the city of Qaim, near the Syrian border, and kill those suspected of collaborating with the U.S.

September 6, 2005: A suicide bomb struck a checkpoint in Haditha, in western Iraq.

September 7, 2005: Gunmen kill Maj. Gen. Hadi Hassan Omran, the director general of the Iraqi Defense Ministry in Baghdad. Also in Baghdad, insurgents attack an Interior Ministry commando patrol, killing Col. Ammar Ismail Arkan and wounding four bodyguards.

In Basra, a roadside bombing kills Lt. Col. Karim Al-Zaidi. Also in Basra, a roadside bomb kills four U.S. contractors.

Insurgents bomb a pipeline carrying oil from Khanaqin-near the Iranian border-disrupting the flow of oil to Baghdad's Dora refinery.

A suicide car bomb kills 15 and wounds 10 outside a restaurant in Basra's Hayaniyah market.

September 8, 2005: A bomb exploded next to Sadir hotel in downtown Baghdad. The hotel is frequented by foreigners and western security contractors.

Police find 14 bodies near Mahmoudiya, south of Baghdad.

A bomb detonated near Umm al-Tubal Mosque in western Baghdad killing a police officer.

September 9, 2005: A car bombing near Sadir hotel in central Baghdad killed one and injured two.

Two simultaneous car bombs in Tal Afar kill five Iraqi soldiers. Also in Tal Afar, the bodies of 10 decapitated Iraqis are found.

September 10, 2005: A roadside bomb struck a police convoy south of Baghdad, killing two policemen and three civilians.

Iraqi police discover a large cache of explosives near Karbala, days before thousands of Shi'ites were to converge on the city for a religious festival.

September 11, 2005: In Baghdad, gunmen assassinate Maj. Gen. Adnan Abdul Rihman-director of police training at the Interior Ministry.

September 12, 2005: A car bomb detonated outside a restaurant in the Mansour neighborhood of Baghdad killing at least two and wounding 17.

Gunmen fire on crowds in Baghdad, killing six and wounding two. Elsewhere in Baghdad, police discover the bodies of 10 Iraqi men who appear to have been executed.

In Kirkuk, gunmen fire on the headquarters of the provincial government, killing two policemen. Also in Kirkuk, a Kurdish militiaman is killed.

September 13, 2005: In Hilla, a bomb on a minibus kills two and wounds six.

The body of a former judge, a member of Saddam's regime, is found in Sadr City.

In Baqouba, gunmen kill two Sunni clerics.

In an attempt to crack down on terrorists and rising violence, the Iraqi National Assembly is considering expanding the list of crimes punishable by the death penalty.

September 14, 2005: A dozen bombings in nine hours rocked the Baghdad, killing more than 150 Iraqis and wounding several hundred. It was Baghdad's worst day of bloodshed since the war began. The deadliest attack occurred in the Khadamiya district, a Shi'ite neighborhood in northern Baghdad, when an insurgent detonated his van near a crowd of day laborers, killing 112 and wounding scores more. A breakdown of the attacks: (Source: The Associated Press)

- 6:30 a.m., suicide car bomber struck a group of day laborers killing at least 112 and wounding more than 200.
- 7:30 a.m., roadside bomb in eastern Baghdad, wounds three policemen.
- 9:30 a.m., suicide car bomb in northern Baghdad kills two civilians and wounds six.
- 10:10 a.m., U.S. troops foil attempted suicide car bombing.
- 10:25 a.m., a suicide car bomber struck a U.S. military convoy in southeast Baghdad.
- 11:10 a.m., a car bomb struck an Iraqi Army patrol in northern Baghdad, killing one soldier and wounding one civilian.
- 12:25 p.m., U.S. troops foil a suicide car bomb attack.
- 1 p.m., gunmen open fire on an Iraqi police convoy in western Baghdad, killing two high-ranking Iraqi police officers; an Iraqi Army patrol responding to the attack is hit by a suicide car bomber, killing three soldiers and four police.
- 1:05 p.m., two car bombs explode near a U.S. military convoy in western Baghdad.
- 1:10 p.m., a suicide car bomber struck an Iraqi special police patrol, wounding 14 officers.
- 2 p.m., a roadside bomb exploded near an American military convoy in southern Baghdad, killing one civilian.
- 3:15 p.m., suicide car bomb in western Baghdad struck an Iraqi-U.S. security checkpoint, wounding at least three security guards at a nearby gasoline station.
- 3:45 p.m., a suicide car bomber targets a U.S. military convoy in northern Baghdad.

In Taji, north of Baghdad, insurgents dressed as soldiers kill 17 Shi'ite men.

The number of attacks on the Baghdad road to the International Airport, known as "Route Irish", have dropped by 41% since May. The last suicide car bombing there occurred in April. The seven-mile highway had previously been considered the most dangerous road in Iraq.

September 15, 2005: In a statement posted on a website, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi announced: "The al-Qaeda organization of Mesopotamia is declaring all-out war on the Rafidha [Shia]...in Iraq." The statement also claimed responsibility for the recent upsurge in violence in Baghdad. According to some estimates, Zarqawi's followers now number 16,000; of those, 6,700 are considered to be 'hard-core' Islamic fundamentalists. A further 4,000 members of the Jaysh Muhammad-an insurgent group loyal to Saddam's Baath Party-recently joined forces with Zarqawi.

A bomb exploded at Rawdat al-Wadi mosque in Mosul killing the Shayk Hikmat Husayn Ali, the imam of the mosque.

In Kirkuk, a roadside bomb struck a police patrol killing two policemen and wounding four others.

A roadside bomb struck a Ministry of Industry bus in eastern Baghdad, killing three civilians and wounding 13.

A suicide car bombing in southern Baghdad killed 16 policemen and five civilians. Hours later, two suicide car bombs only minutes apart, killed seven policemen in the same neighborhood.

More and more Iraqi nationals, according to U.S. and Iraqi officials, are joining Zarqawi's al-Qaida affiliated group. One U.S. official said Iraqis now account for "more than half his organization".

September 16, 2005: In Tuz Khormato, a suicide car bomb detonated near a Shi'ite mosque, killing 12. Police foiled a second suicide bomber later in the day.

In Baghdad, gunmen kill three laborers and wound 12 others.

A car bomb in Haswa killed three policemen and wounded four others.

In Iskandariya, gunmen assassinated the mayor of the town along with his four bodyguards.

In Sadr City, gunmen assassinated Sheik Fadil al-Lami, a cleric at Imam Ali mosque.

This chronology is only a fraction of the actual pattern of events since the insurgency began, and even to the full range of attacks in recent months. Once again, the Coalition and Iraqi government have made a consistent effort not to provide any detailed tracking of such events, particularly, which clearly identifies ethnic and sectarian attacks. The fear is that this will exacerbate the risk of an escalating civil war, further weaken the Iraqi political process, and serve insurgent interests. These concerns may have some validity, but they attempt to cover up the obvious, and help breed misinformation, rumor, and conspiracy theories. In short, they may be doing more harm than good.

The Iraqi Government and Coalition Response

There is no way at this point to predict whether neo-Salafi Sunni extremists can succeed in using violence and hatred to provoke a civil war. It is clear, however, that Iraq is not yet moving towards stability and much depends on the success of the Iraqi political process, the way in which the Coalition and Iraqi government fight the insurgency, and what economic and other incentives are offered to persuade Iraqi Sunnis to support the political process rather than the insurgency.

The Political Struggle to Prevent a Civil War: A Faltering and Potentially Divisive Process

Iraq has so far been fortunate in its political leadership. Top officials have so far resisted the efforts to create an open civil war, and have continued to make efforts to include Iraqi Sunnis in the political process. The senior Shi'ite and Sunni clerics have made equally serious efforts to prevent civil war and reprisals and revenge killings.

At the same time, there are many serious problems in the Iraqi political process, and the insurgents pushing for civil war are anything but defeated. Shi'ite and Kurdish leaders may push for inclusiveness, but they scarcely have failed to try to maximize their own sectarian and ethnic advantage. They have not produced any clear picture of what the Sunni role would be in Iraq's future, and they have sought to increase their own political power, access to the nation's wealth, and forms of federalism that could benefit them at the expense of the Sunnis.

Those Sunnis who have been in the new government from the start often feel they are treated as second class members of the political process and fear they may be excluded or purged from key positions in politics, the ministries, and the Iraqi forces. Many fear that Shi'ites will push a Shi'ite federal and religious agenda at the expense of a truly national agenda and a more balanced approach to the role of religion in government and law. They equally fear a growing Kurdish shift toward independence, and resent Kurdish efforts to limit Iraq's identity as an Arab state.

At the same time, the Sunnis have failed to create anything approaching a cohesive political identity. They remain deeply divided, find it difficult to propose viable compromises and political options, and often seek a return to a level of power and influence that they have made little serious effort to win politically and which their share of the population does not entitle them to.

Public opinion polls do not cover enough of the high risk and insurgent areas to provide a clear picture of what Iraqis think and feel, but interviews and media sources do seem to reflect a growing ethnic and sectarian polarization among ordinary Iraqis that both neo-Salafi Sunni

extremists and hard-line Shi'ite Islamists may be able to capitalize upon. Sunnis feel themselves more the losers in the political process. Shi'ites and Kurds the victims in the insurgency. Most Iraqi Sunnis may play no role in the insurgency, but many do not oppose it and sympathize with some of its goals. Many Shi'ites do talk about revenge and reprisals. Many Kurds do talk about independence.

The January 30th election has inspired some Sunnis to move towards a more active political role, but often more to oppose or reduce Shi'ite and Kurdish power than anything else. National parties have not emerged. Shi'ite and Kurdish parties clearly have.

There is talk about political progress toward inclusion, but evidence of any clear trend is lacking. Quite aside from a lack of convincing public opinion polls, one would hope to see tangible signs of progress towards unity in a key mixed city like Baghdad, and in a key urban area like Mosul. So far, however, there are few samples of political versus military progress, and day-to-day progress in security is lacking. The previous chronologies have made it all too clear that the Coalition and Iraqi government have not established security and support in much of the Sunni areas of Baghdad, and the status of Mosul is uncertain. Certainly, there is still substantial support for the insurgency in Al Anbar and other primarily Sunni areas.

More broadly, the constitution and the referendum to decide on its future so far seem more divisive than uniting. It is unlikely that Sunnis can mobilize a two-thirds opposition vote in three provinces -- particularly if large numbers of Sunnis opt out of the vote. Yet, the content of the constitution, and the timing of the referendum, will then create the of political forces that almost ensure that debates will be polarized along ethnic, sectarian, and religious lines versus secular lines, and with little real popular attention to the constitution's details and options for compromise. This will exacerbate the problems caused by the fact that the constitution is an ambiguous document that raises a large number of highly divisive issues without resolving them.

Once the referendum is over, the Iraqi political structure must then deal with critical issues like what kind of federal areas will be created, and what is their power; who gets what amount of state revenue; what is the relative power of the national government and the federations; who really has legal and police powers at the local level; and what is the legal role of religion. All will have to be fought over -- at least politically -- in the months to come.

Acceptance of a divisive constitution on October 15, 2005 also means another rapid national election on December 15, 2005. That means a new government must follow the new constitution, leaving many constitutional issues uncertain and delaying effective action at the national level until a new government actually takes form at some point several months into 2006. However, rejection of the constitution could have roughly the same political impact under even more divisive conditions.

While some Iraqis talk about a popular shift towards more secular and national parties once the campaigns for the new election begins, it is hard to see such a shift. It seems much more likely that it will be fought out on intensified Arab Sunni vs. Arab Shi'ite lines with increasing Kurdish separatism. At the same time, it is hard to see why hostile Sunnis will accept the legitimacy of the result if the constitution is accepted, or what they can win in the election to follow. Simply being in the government or participating in the election does not necessarily alter the balance of power or help the Sunnis deal with any of the major problems they have encountered since the fall of Saddam Hussein:

- The loss of Sunni power, income, and status.
- Fears of Shi'ite and Kurdish dominance, reprisals, and further purges.
- Hostility to the US and Coalition and a feeling the invasion lacked legitimacy.
- Alienation from more than two years of fighting in Sunni areas.
- Massive and growing unemployment.
- The feeling government services, utilities and infrastructure, and aid and budget money are being spent on Shi'ites and Kurds.
- Fears of separation and exclusion from oil income and other national resources.
- A lack of belief in the fairness of the new national political structure.
- Limited representation in the National Assembly, government offices, and many elements of the security forces.

These developments may well interact with a growing and more angry polarization among local militias, and divisions within the security forces and police. Rumors and conspiracy theories already abound, and there are serious incidents and unexplained mass killings, and body dumpings..

The growing trend towards Shi'ite federalism and the rise of local Shi'ite governments, police forces, and religious militias in areas like Basra also helps the Sunni neo-Salafi extremist cause. It may be unfair to single out mainstream Shi'ite Islamist groups like Al Dada, or SCIRI and the Badr forces for their role in pushing for more hard-line Shi'ite approaches to governance, security, and religious orthodoxy. Certainly, Sadr's Mahdi Militia and local Shi'ite elements play a major role. Nevertheless, what Shi'ite party political leaders say at the national level is not always what their followers and subordinates practice at local level.

Some Shi'ite polarization is inevitable. Not only do Iraqi Shi'ites feel they are under attack at the local-level, many seem to see less meaning in electoral victories that elect governments that do not bring security, economic recovery, and stability. Certainly, the constitutional drafting process produced growing indications that Shi'ites see their future more in terms of their own federal areas, own police and security forces, and security and development at the local and provincial level.

The Military Struggle to Prevent a Civil War: Uncertain Victories and Uncertain Impacts

The neo-Salafi effort to create a civil war is extraordinarily difficult to defeat unless the Iraqi government and Coalition can deny them the mix of popular support and tolerance that allows them to operate with comparative security and to disperse when they come under pressure or attack. Small groups can continue to conduct extremely violent attacks against soft targets, carry out selective assassinations, fund terrorist attacks, and buy hostages.

Cell structures can be highly informal, and hierarchies can be replaced. Killed or captured leaders become martyrs, and new leaders can be recruited or brought in from the outside. Leaders and experienced cadres can insulate themselves from most operations. Iraqis can be paid to carry out operations or recruited and used against soft targets.

Extreme insurgents can piggyback on the actions of Iraqi Sunni nationalist insurgents, attacking only the key targets and fault lines necessary to encourage civil war. They also can capitalize on the increased Shi'ite efforts in the south and other Shi'ite areas to create Shi'ite enclaves dominated by Shi'ite religious parties and groups to persuade Iraqi Sunnis to polarize and react on religious lines. They have equal capability to exploit the problems in the constitutional process, elections that do not give Sunnis power, and Iraqi force developments that seem or do create largely Shi'ite and Kurdish forces. Operations by largely Shi'ite and Kurdish units in Sunni areas are further source of such opportunities.

The ability to exploit problems in politics and governance are matched by the ability to capitalize on tensions between Coalition forces and the Iraqi people, and the day-to-day frictions involved. These increasingly include the aggressive (and sometimes reckless) acts of contract security personnel, which are often less sensitive to the political impact of their behavior than Coalition forces.

This creates a series of dilemmas for both Iraqi government and Coalition military operations. The Iraqi government and Coalition forces are almost certainly correct in continuing to actively attack neo-Salafi extremist networks actively anywhere they concentrate, and might acquire sanctuaries or local control. Such groups seek to reshape all of the insurgent elements, religious practices, and local governments. Like the Taliban (or Christian Puritans during the English civil war), they want total control and dominance and cannot be allowed to fester.

They also will exploit any security they can achieve to attack targets in Shi'ite, Kurdish, and mixed areas, and can do so by concentrating on soft targets, and using hit and run techniques like suicide bombings. Unlike Iraqi Sunni nationalist groups, they do not need to worry about the political impact of such tactics – in fact, they are precisely the tactics that produce the most result.

At the same time, aggressive Coalition operations create more friction with Sunni Iraqis, create more of a “crusader” image, and increase the number of times the “strategic corporal” has a major local political impact because he or she does not understand the language, culture, or local politics. Even the most successful security operations have a political cost as long as so many Sunnis feel excluded from power and see the Iraqi government and Coalition forces as an “enemy.”

Successful Iraqi government operations have the same impact, particularly when the units involved are largely Kurdish or Shi'ite -- rather than Sunni or mixed “national” units. This is a growing problem because even when officers are mixed, the enlisted are often largely Shi'ite or Kurdish.

Such operations are particularly damaging when the government cannot follow up by actually providing effective police and security forces, fails to establish a meaningful government presence, fails to deliver aid and government services, and makes symbolic appearances and promises it does not follow up upon. The Coalition still has chronic problems in following up its military sweeps and activities with anything approaching effective local stability operations. Its good intentions and plans often are not translated into effective action. The Iraqi government is far worse.

These problems are compounded by the fact that Coalition and Iraqi government attacks on Sunni nationalist, “Ba’athist,” and former regime loyalists seem to be steadily undercutting the

strength of the more secular and pragmatic insurgent groups, which are not being replaced. This is not the case with the Islamist extremist groups. In spite of considerable Coalition and Iraqi government successes in attacking their leadership and members, the neo-Salafi extremist groups seem to find it substantially easier to recruit new members and find new leaders. Moreover, the polarization of Sunnis and Shi'ites at the political level pushes Sunnis towards religious movements. The end result is a kind of power vacuum that can aid the extremists.

This does not mean that Coalition and Iraqi government military and security operations have to fail, or are not succeeding in some areas. It does mean that the political nature of counterinsurgency operations, and the stability phase, is absolutely critical. Short of occupation and repression, military success depends on the success of political inclusiveness. Effective military operations depend on follow-up and sustained security operations and government. Effective Iraqi force development depends on creating mixed "national" military and security units, and the ability to deploy follow-on security and police that will not be seen as ethnically or religiously hostile.

Operations in areas like Mosul have shown this is possible, but it is clear that the Coalition can never be Iraqi or Islamic, that the Iraqi political process still undercuts military and security efforts, and that Iraqi force development presents major problems.

The Economic Struggle to Prevent a Civil War: Leaving the Sunnis on the Outside?

There are no accurate economic statistics on Iraq, but it is clear that Sunnis face very high levels of unemployment, that many see little real hope of any immediate improvement, and that both outside aid and government funds have gone more into Shi'ite and Kurdish areas – both for security reasons and because of internal politics.

Pledges are not kept, and money disappears. Reconstruction plans are not fully implemented. Aside from CERP and other local emergency aid, dollars are not used effectively as a substitute for bullets. The result is that economics is not being used as an effective weapon.

Creating a "Shi'ite Crescent?" Regional Spillover & the War of Words

The pressure for civil war can also expand to involve outside states. Syria very clearly tolerates and supports Sunni neo-Salafi extremist operations on its territory in spite of its Alawite controlled government. A broader and more intense civil conflict could lead other Arab states to take sides on behalf of the Sunnis -- although Bahrain, Lebanon, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen are just a few of the states that have deep sectarian divisions of their own. Any major divisions within Iraq could reopen the Kurdish issue as it affects Turkey, and possibly Iran and Syria as well.

Iran as a "Wild Card"

The most serious wild card in Iraq's immediate neighborhood is Iran. Iran already plays at least some role in the political instability in Iraq and may take a more aggressive role in trying to shape Iraq's political future and security position in the Gulf. Some believe that the Iranians have abandoned their efforts to export their "Shi'ite revolution" to the Gulf. This view has changed since the invasion of Iraq. Officials across the Arab world, especially in Saudi Arabia and

Jordan, have expressed reservation over the right of Iraqi Sunnis, Kurdish and Shi'ite dominance over the Iraqi government, and a new "strategic" Shi'ite alliance between Iran and Iraq.

Jordan's King Abdullah has claimed that that more than 1 million Iranians have moved into Iraq to influence the Iraqi election. The Iranians, King Abdullah argued, have been trying to build pro-Iranian attitudes in Iraq by providing salaries to the unemployed. The King has also said that Iran's Revolutionary Guards are helping the militant groups fighting the US in Iraq, and warned in an interview with the *Washington Post* of a "Shi'ite Crescent" forming between Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. He was quoted as saying:⁷⁰

It is in Iran's vested interest to have an Islamic republic of Iraq.

If Iraq goes Islamic republic, then, yes, we've opened ourselves to a whole set of new problems that will not be limited to the borders of Iraq. I'm looking at the glass half-full, and let's hope that's not the case. But strategic planners around the world have got to be aware that is a possibility.

Even Saudi Arabia is not immune from this. It would be a major problem. And then that would propel the possibility of a Shi'ite-Sunni conflict even more, as you're taking it out of the borders of Iraq.

The same sentiment has been echoed by the former interim Iraqi President, Ghazi Al-Yawar, a Sunni and a pro-Saudi tribal leader. "Unfortunately, time is proving, and the situation is proving, beyond any doubt that Iran has very obvious interference in our business -- a lot of money, a lot of intelligence activities and almost interfering daily in business and many [provincial] governates, especially in the southeast side of Iraq." Mr. Al-Yawar, however, asserted that Iraq should not go in the direction of Iran in creating a religious oriented government. He was quoted in a *Washington Post* interview as saying "We cannot have a sectarian or religious government... We really will not accept a religious state in Iraq. We haven't seen a model that succeeded."⁷¹

These comments were rejected by both Iran and Iraqi Shi'ites. Iran called King Abdullah's comment "an insult" to Iraq. Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Hamid Reza Asefi, also called on Ghazi Al-Yawar to retract his statement and accusing King Abdullah II and Al-Yawar of wanting to influence the election against Iraqi Shi'ites. Asefi said "Unfortunately, some political currents in Iraq seek to tarnish the trend of election there and cause concern in the public opinion...We expect that Mr. al-Yawar takes the existing sensitive situation into consideration and avoids repeating such comments."⁷²

Iraqi Shi'ites also reacted to King Abdullah's comment about the fear of a "Shi'ite Crescent." Jordan's King Abdullah was asked to apologize by Shi'ites. The Najaf Theological Center issued a statement, in which they accused the King of meddling in Iraq's internal affairs:⁷³

Distorting the truth and blatantly interfering in Iraqi affairs, provoking tribal sentiments in the region against Iraqi Shi'ites, provoking great powers against Iraqi Shi'ites, intimidating regional countries and accusing them of having links with Iran, displaying a great tendency for ensuring Israel's security and expressing worries about the victory of Shi'ites in the upcoming elections tantamount to insulting millions of people in Iran, who have been insulted just because they follow a religion that the Jordan's king is opposed...

Najaf Theological Center is hopeful that the Jordanian monarch will apologize to the Shi'ites of the region and Iraq, and their religious authorities, because of the inaccurate remarks made against them.

The Views of the Arab Gulf States

The Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, have also made their views known regarding the unity of Iraq and their fear of Shi'ite dominance of an Arab country that allies itself with Iran. Saudi Arabia has pushed for more Sunni inclusiveness in the constitution writing process, especially after their lack of participation in the January 2005 elections.

When a draft constitution did not acknowledge Iraq's Arab and Muslim identity, the General Secretary of the GCC called the Iraqi constitution "a catastrophe." The Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal, also warned that if the constitution does not accommodate the Iraqi Sunni community, it would result in sectarian disputes that may threaten the unity of Iraq.⁷⁴

Prince Saud al-Faisal later urged the US to pressure Iraqi Shi'ites and Kurdish government leaders to work to bring the Iraqi people together. He said, "[Americans] talk now about Sunnis as if they were separate entity from the Shi'ite." al-Faisal reiterated his fear of an Iraqi civil war and the danger of it. He said, "If you allow civil war, Iraq is finished forever."⁷⁵

According to al-Faisal, a civil war in Iraq could have dire consequences in the region. He reiterated the Kingdom's fear of an Iran-Iraq alliance. The Saudi Foreign Minister asserted that "We (US and Saudi Arabia) fought a war together to keep Iran out of Iraq after Iraq was driven out of Kuwait." He added that the US policy in Iraq is "handing the whole country over to Iran without reason." Iranians have established their influence within Iraq, al-Faisal said, because they "pay money ... install their own people (and) even establish police forces and arm the militias that are there."⁷⁶

A Clash within a Civilization

One should not exaggerate Iraq's role in any clash within a civilization, and the more dire predictions of a clash between Sunni and Shi'ite that polarizes the Gulf and Middle East may well be exaggerated. The fact remains, however, that this is what Bin Laden, Zarqawi, and other neo-Salafi extremists are seeking. The battle in Iraq is only part of the much broader struggle by neo-Salafi extremists to capture the Arab and Islamic world. The outcome in Iraq will be critical but only part of a much broader struggle.

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