

Assessing Iraq's Sunni Arab Insurgency

Michael Eisenstadt and Jeffrey White

THREE YEARS after the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the fall of Saddam Hussein, confusion and controversy still surround the insurgency in Iraq's Sunni Triangle. Part of this is due to the nontraditional character of the Sunni Arab insurgency, which is being waged by amorphous, locally and regionally based groups and networks lacking a unifying ideology, central leadership, or clear hierarchical organization.¹

The ambiguities inherent in insurgent warfare also make insurgencies difficult to assess. In conventional military conflicts, we can compare opposing orders of battle, evaluate capabilities, and assess the fortunes of belligerents using traditional measures: destruction of enemy forces, capture of key terrain, or seizure of the enemy's capital city.

Insurgents are often not organized into regular formations, making it difficult (even for their own leaders) to assess their numerical strength accurately. Usually, there are no front lines whose location could offer insight into the war's progress, and, at any rate, military factors are usually less important than political and psychological considerations in deciding the outcome of such conflicts. As a result, we need different analytic measures to assess the insurgency's nature, scope, intensity, and effectiveness.²

The Insurgency's Origins and Nature

Assumptions about the roots and origins of the Sunni Arab insurgency color assessments of its nature and character. Analysts and officials who believe that Saddam Hussein anticipated his defeat and planned the insurgency before the invasion of Iraq tend to downplay the complex array of factors that influenced its origin and development. No evidence exists that Saddam planned to lead a postwar resistance movement or that he played a significant role in the insurgency's emergence. However, prewar preparations for waging a popular war against invading Coalition forces in southern Iraq, or for dealing with a coup or uprising, almost certainly abetted the insurgency's emergence following the regime's fall. The first insurgents were also able to draw on relationships, networks, and structures inherited from the old regime, which helps account for the rather rapid onset of the insurgency in the summer of 2003.³

U.S. officials have also differed over the nature of the violence in post-Saddam Iraq, with some seeing it largely as the work of former regime "dead ends," and others seeing it as a multifaceted insurgency against the emerging Iraqi political order.⁴ Part of the confusion stems from the fact that Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) face a composite insurgency whose

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elements act on diverse motives. These elements include former regime members and Iraqi Islamists, angry or aggrieved Iraqis, foreign jihadists, tribal groups, and criminal elements, each of which draws considerable strength from political and religious ideologies, tribal notions of honor and revenge, and shared solidarities deeply ingrained in the population of the Sunni Triangle.

Among the factors driving the insurgency are—

- The humiliation engendered by the Coalition military victory and occupation.
- The sense of entitlement felt by many Sunni Arabs who consider themselves the rightful rulers of Iraq.
- Anxiety over the growing power of Shiite and Kurdish parties and militias.
- The fear that Sunni Arabs (some 20 percent of Iraq's population) will be politically and economically marginalized in a democratic Iraq.
- A potent brand of Iraqi-Arab nationalism that is deeply ingrained in many Sunni Arabs.
- The popularity of political Islam among sectors of the Sunni population.
- A desire to gain power—as individuals, as members of a dispossessed elite, or as a community.

Some senior civilian and military officials, at least early on, failed to grasp the protracted nature of insurgency and counterinsurgency warfare. On several occasions (after the December 2003 capture of Saddam, the June 2004 transfer of authority, and the January 2005 elections), a number of officials expressed confidence that these events presaged an early end to the insurgency. In each case, their hopes were dashed by subsequent events. Such expectations were unrealistic and ran counter to the weight of historical experience.

Insurgencies are often bloody, drawn-out affairs that last for years, frequently for a decade or more.⁵ This occurs for several reasons:

- Insurgents must act with great caution to avoid being killed or captured by government forces. Even basic tasks take longer to accomplish than they would in a permissive environment.
- It takes time to win over civilians (who tend to remain neutral until one side clearly has the upper hand) and to create new institutions of governance in areas under insurgent control.
- The insurgent and counterinsurgent are locked in a struggle to disrupt and undermine the other's

activities; progress, for both sides, frequently suffers setbacks and reverses.

- Insurgents often see time as an ally in their efforts to clandestinely mobilize and organize the population and to build up their military strength; they consider patience a virtue.

- Insurgents often start off militarily weak and generally avoid engaging government forces decisively until they feel confident of success.

The Sunni Arab insurgency in post-Saddam Iraq, however, has departed from the typical pattern in at least four important ways:

- The insurgents were able to “fall in” on existing structures in Iraqi society—the tribe, religious institutions, and the underground Baath Party—to quickly organize and begin operations.

- Because of insufficient Coalition intelligence and forces, the insurgents were relatively unfettered from the outset, allowing the insurgency to gather momentum quickly.

- The insurgents were well armed because the former regime armed its supporters before the war, many soldiers took their weapons with them when the army went home, and postwar looters cleaned out the regime's weapons stores.

- The insurgents were well financed from the start, using former regime funds and looted monies.

These factors put Coalition forces and the new Iraqi Government at an initial disadvantage, making it more than likely that the struggle in Iraq would be prolonged and difficult.

The Scope of the Insurgency

Because insurgencies are complex, dynamic, adaptive systems, an assessment of the Sunni Arab insurgency should employ both quantitative and qualitative measures and must examine multiple dimensions over time, including the insurgency's operational environment; its structures, processes, and functions; and the degree to which it has penetrated public and private institutions in the Sunni Triangle and won over Sunni hearts and minds.

The insurgency is occurring in a complex and evolving human and geographic “landscape” which it influences and to which it responds. Demographic, social, geographic, religious, and economic factors are key elements of this operational environment.

Demography and insurgent strength. Although numbers might not indicate the insurgents' prospects

for success, they might suggest the amount of popular support the insurgents enjoy, the effectiveness of their recruitment and mobilization efforts, their capacity for action, and the efficacy of Coalition and Iraqi Government countermeasures. Estimates of insurgent strength should include combatants (guerrillas and terrorists who are currently active or available for future operations) and members of the insurgent underground involved in recruiting, training, financing, propagandizing, and conducting political activities in support of the insurgency.⁶

We can assess the insurgency's mobilization potential by looking at Iraq's male Sunni Arab population.

In a total population of about 27 million, 5.4 million are Sunni Arab, with 1.35 million Sunni men of military age (for our purposes, 15 to 49). This is the theoretical mobilization potential of the Sunni Arab community.⁷

Central Command General John Abizaid has stated that the number of Iraqis participating in the insurgency amounts to less than 0.1 percent of the country's population, and most likely does not exceed 20,000 (fighters plus members of the underground).⁸ Historically, insurgent movements have generally mobilized some 0.5 percent to 2 percent of the population.⁹ If insurgents make up less than 0.1 percent of the total population (and given the scope and intensity of the insurgency, this figure might be low), the Sunni Arab insurgency would be among the smallest, percentage wise, in modern times.

Even doubling or tripling this estimate would yield a relatively small insurgency by historical standards, which probably explains why Sunni Arab insurgent groups seem never to lack for manpower or to have problems recouping their losses.¹⁰ Employing only a small fraction of their potential mobilization base means the insurgents have no difficulty recruiting or impressing new members to replace combat losses. Because these groups are organized into compartmentalized cells and networks that recruit locally by drawing on various social solidarities, they are well adapted to replacing losses, though not to the generation of large field forces. Large forces might not be necessary, however, if the insurgents hope to prevail by winning over or intimidating the civilian population, disrupting ISF recruitment, and undermining the U.S. will to fight, rather than by defeating U.S.

forces in combat—as seems to be the case in Iraq.

There are probably hundreds of thousands of Sunni Arab males with intelligence and security, military, or paramilitary training who are prime candidates for recruitment by the insurgency. Furthermore, the number of Sunni Arab males with a strong sense of grievance (the result of losing a family member or being humiliated, mistreated, or wrongly detained by Coalition or Iraqi Government forces) is probably in the high tens of thousands, at the least. This group of “angry Iraqis” provides another source of potential recruits.

Sunni Arab insurgents swim in a largely sympathetic sea, with opinion polls suggesting that broad sectors of the Sunni Arab population support insurgent attacks on Coalition forces. Still, many Sunnis are skeptical of the insurgency's prospects and oppose the use of force for political ends.¹¹ Terrorist-type attacks on Sunni targets are also creating disenchantment with the insurgency's extremist elements, such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and Sunni Arab participation in the October 2005 constitutional referendum and the December 2005 elections indicates that many Sunnis see some positive potential in the political process.

Overall, Sunnis have not stopped supporting the insurgency, especially that part engaged in what is widely considered in Iraq as resistance to occupation. Thus, it is likely that armed Sunni insurgents number in the thousands, that unarmed members of the insurgent underground number in the tens of thousands, and that the insurgents can draw on a large pool of sympathizers, as well as associates, friends, family members, and fellow clan members and tribesmen. The minimum number of Sunni Arabs “involved” with the insurgency in one way or another likely approaches 100,000 (and might be much higher), although the number might fluctuate in response to changing political, military, economic, and social conditions.¹²

The insurgency has probably mobilized only a fraction of the Sunni population that supports attacks on Coalition forces or has some kind of military or paramilitary training. Should insurgent groups exploit this untapped demographic potential more effectively, insurgent violence could further intensify.

Social solidarities. The Sunni insurgency draws on personal and kinship ties, shared military experiences, membership in former regime organizations,

attendance at insurgent-associated mosques, business relationships, and other connections. These relationships bind insurgents and their supporters in complex ways. They overlap and reinforce one another, producing cells and networks founded on multiple associations, and they contribute to the flexibility and resilience of insurgent organizations. They also provide the basis for recruiting, establishing bonds of trust, and fostering cooperation among widely dispersed and ideologically disparate groups.

Geography. Insurgent activity is closely tied to Iraq’s human and physical geography and follows the dominant pattern of urban settlement along those segments of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers that run through the Sunni triangle. There are also multiple corridors or zones of resistance: Baghdad-Fallujah-Ramadi; Tikrit-Baquba; northern Babil province (the so-called Triangle of Death); and the Euphrates River Valley from Husbaya on the Syrian border to Ramadi.¹³

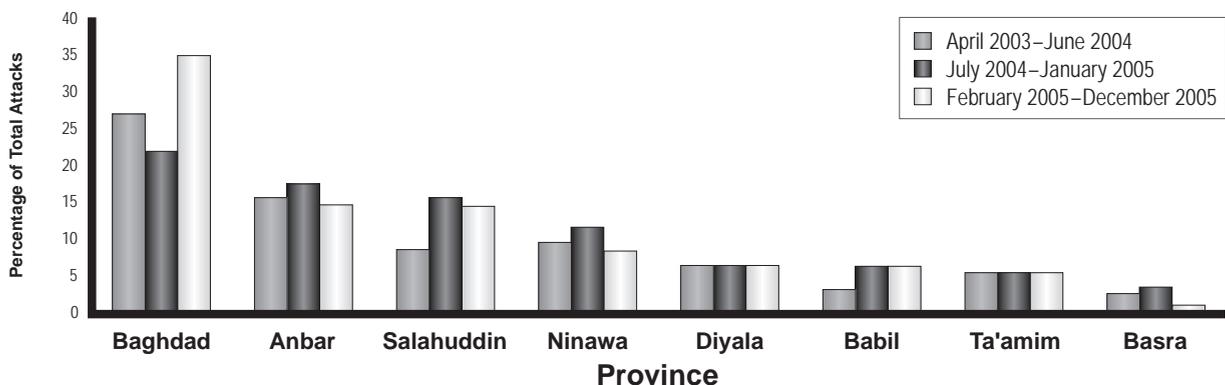
Insurgent cells and networks tend to be concentrated in neighborhoods, villages, and towns that are home to large numbers of ex-Baathists and former regime military and security personnel; in areas where unemployment is rampant; in neighborhoods, villages, and towns associated with certain tribes; and in the vicinity of certain mosques used by insurgents as weapons depots, recruiting centers, and meeting places.

Insurgent armed action in Iraq has been persistent and pervasive. Areas that experienced insurgent activity in 2003 generally continue to do so today, albeit at reduced levels in some important places

(such as Fallujah, Mosul, Tal Afar). Some 75 percent of insurgent violence occurs in the four governorates comprising the Sunni triangle (al-Anbar, Salahuddin, Ninawa, and Baghdad), although significant insurgent activity also occurs in Diyala, Babil, and Ta’amim governorates.¹⁴ By these measures, the insurgency remains widespread in Sunni areas and in areas where Sunnis are a significant presence (figure 1).¹⁵

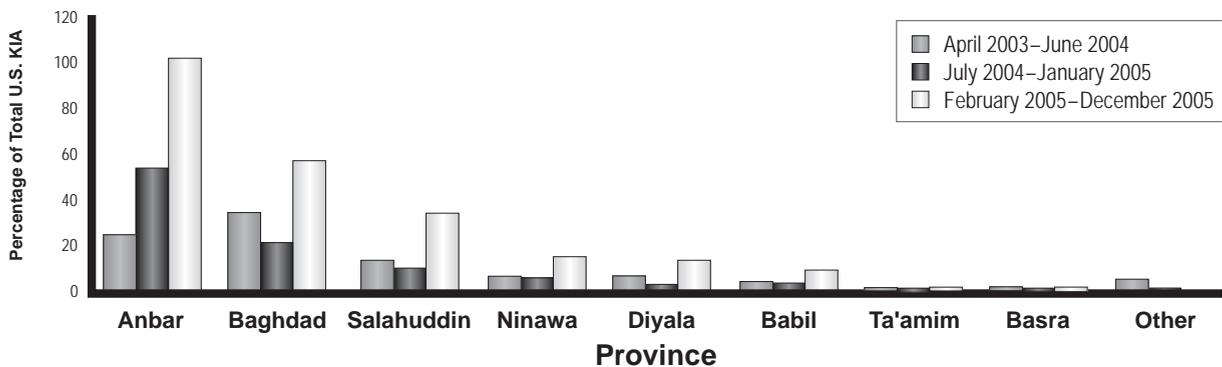
Although a plurality of reported incidents—between 20 and 35 percent—occur in Baghdad, most U.S. troops killed in action (KIA) have fallen in Anbar province (figure 2). This likely reflects the intensity of engagements there, especially Fallujah I and II during April and November 2004, the prolonged struggle in Ramadi, and U.S.-ISF operations in the Western Euphrates River Valley during the second half of 2005. In Anbar, both U.S. forces and the insurgents have evinced a willingness to incur significant casualties to achieve their objectives.

Religion. In Sunni areas, religion offered solace to those who suffered under Saddam’s regime, comfort to those harmed by the post-Saddam order (which brought the humiliation of occupation, de-Baathification, and the dismantling of the Iraqi army), and inspiration for those now fighting Coalition forces. Not surprisingly, Iraqi insurgents, even those who are probably not true believers or Islamists, make extensive use of religious language, symbols, and imagery. About half of all Sunni insurgent organizations mentioned in the media bear Islamic names. Examples include some of the most prominent insurgent organizations, such as the



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Figure 1. Geographic distribution of insurgent attacks (April 2003–June 2004 transfer of authority; July 2004–January 2005 elections; February 2005–December 2005 elections).



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Figure 2. Geographic distribution of U.S. killed in action (KIA) (April 2003–June 2004 transfer of authority; July 2004–January 2005 elections; February 2005–December 2005 elections).

Army of Muhammad, the Islamic Army in Iraq, the Iraqi National Islamic Resistance, the Mujahidin Army, and Ansar al-Sunna.¹⁶

Economy and reconstruction. Many Iraqis consider security and the economy to be the two most urgent issues facing the country.¹⁷ War, sanctions, years of neglecting the country's infrastructure, Coalition policies, and insurgent violence have created an economic environment favorable to the insurgents. Economic conditions have fueled anger against the Coalition and the Iraqi Government and created a large pool of unemployed (25 to 50 percent of the general labor force, and up to 70 percent of the labor force in Sunni areas hit hardest by insurgent violence, some of whom are apparently willing to attack Coalition forces or emplace improvised explosive devices [IEDs] for money).¹⁸ Nearly 3 years after Saddam's fall, electricity and oil production are below prewar levels (although oil revenues have soared thanks to high oil prices). Both industries are frequently the targets of sabotage, resulting in the disruption of basic services, a decline in the standard of living, and lost government revenues.¹⁹

Structures, Processes, and Functions

Although attention tends to center on the most visible insurgent activities (daily violent incidents and mass-casualty attacks) these are but a fraction of the insurgency's range of activities, and they leave in the shadows the structures, processes, and functions that sustain the war.

Organization. The Sunni insurgency is not organized in a strict hierarchy (like the communist

insurgencies in Malaya and Vietnam) and, in this sense, is not a classic insurgency. It is a hybrid with some elements of hierarchy combining with a looser cell structure. It has an informal leadership with elements, entities, and organizations grouped into cells linked by personal, tribal, or organizational ties (figure 3).

According to some reports, the insurgency's senior leadership consists of 8 to 12 individuals who meet occasionally inside or outside of Iraq to discuss organization and tactics. The group includes members of the former regime's intelligence and security services, former Baathists, Iraqi and foreign jihadists, and tribal figures. These leaders reportedly provide resources and direction to many insurgent groups. Personal, family, tribal, and religious ties are believed to facilitate cooperation and coordination.²⁰ Insurgent groups have also created mujahidin shura councils or other collaborative mechanisms to coordinate operations in localities like Fallujah or to synchronize the activities of like-minded groups operating in the Sunni Triangle, such as the Mujahidin Shura Council currently associated with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.²¹

Action elements include insurgent groups and criminal organizations (for example, the Islamic Army in Iraq, the Army of Muhammad, the Mujahidin Army, Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and so on), each with its own leaders and decisionmaking process. These make up a web of networks linked by personal, tribal, or organizational ties that communicate by various means, such as cell phones, the Internet, and couriers. Each group is believed to be involved in a range of activities, including recruitment, training, financing, propaganda, political activities, guerrilla,



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Figure 3. The insurgent system in Iraq.

and (sometimes) terrorist attacks. Terrorist attacks appear to be largely the province of jihadist organizations like Al-Qaeda in Iraq and Ansar al-Sunna, although former regime elements might also be involved, at least in a supporting role.²²

While the jihadists have garnered the most attention because of their emphasis on mass-casualty attacks and because they take credit for almost every major attack that occurs, the “national resistance” is probably responsible for most attacks on Coalition forces and Iraqis associated with the government. The organizational boundaries between these groups, however, are probably not well defined. While Al-Zarqawi did not “hijack the insurgency,” his organization appears to have cooperated at least with Baathist elements of the insurgency to carry out actions and achieve shared tactical and operational objectives.²³

The influence of the jihadists, however, goes beyond the immediate impact of their operations. By striking fear into the hearts of their enemies and drawing the ire of Coalition military officials, they are undoubtedly influencing some Iraqis and inspiring others to join their ranks (as demonstrated by the involvement of four Iraqis in the 9 November 2005 bombing of three hotels in Amman, Jordan, by Al-Qaeda in Iraq). To ensure their long-term viability in Iraq, foreign jihadist groups like Al-Qaeda in Iraq are engaged in a process of “Iraqification,” the recruiting of local members in order to sink roots into Iraqi society.²⁴

Nevertheless, jihadist operations are apparently producing strains within the insurgency, and between jihadist insurgent groups and the Sunni population, particularly the more tribal elements. This strain has been most pronounced in Anbar province, but it has also been noted in Samarra, in Salahuddin province. While disputes and clashes between nationalist and jihadist insurgent groups, and between tribal elements and jihadists, have been reported for some time, these have clearly worsened since summer 2005. However, the extent of any split within the ranks of the insurgents remains unclear, and major insurgent groups, including the Islamic Army in Iraq, the 1920 Revolution Brigades, and the Army of the Mujahideen in Iraq have issued statements denying any such split.²⁵

For both the national resistance and jihadists, cells seem to be the dominant form of organization, although some kind of limited hierarchy exists, with cells controlling the activities of sub-cells. Some cells appear to be multifunctional, carrying out attacks using small arms, light weapons (such as rocket-propelled grenades), and IEDs. Other cells are specialized and might be involved in preparing forged documents or propaganda materials, or in planning and executing attacks with mortars, rockets, IEDs, or vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIEDs).²⁶

Financing. The insurgency’s varied activities require a steady income stream with extensive and sophisticated financing operations. Although open-source information on this topic is scarce,

the insurgents do not appear to lack for financial resources, despite Coalition and Iraqi Government efforts to disrupt their funding.²⁷

The insurgency receives financial support from inside and outside Iraq. Internal sources include donations from sympathizers, charities, and mosques, and income generated by legitimate businesses and criminal activities (robbery, extortion, smuggling, counterfeiting, narcotics trafficking, and kidnapping for ransom). At least some funds have been siphoned off from Iraq's oil industry. External sources include donations from wealthy private donors in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, Europe, and the Gulf States (especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates); expatriate former regime elements; and members of transnational charities. The government of Iran might also be providing some funding for Sunni insurgent activity.²⁸

Insurgents are believed to use at least three types of networks to collect, move, and disburse money: former regime financial networks, traditional informal hawala networks, and clerical networks/charitable religious endowments. Couriers are the preferred means of transport.²⁹ These networks extend across Iraq's borders and are probably interconnected. Until recently, the Syria-Iraqi border was the most important route for such activity, although improvements in security on both sides of the border might be affecting this path (figure 4).³⁰ As with other insurgent activities, their financial operations have evolved and adjusted to changing conditions

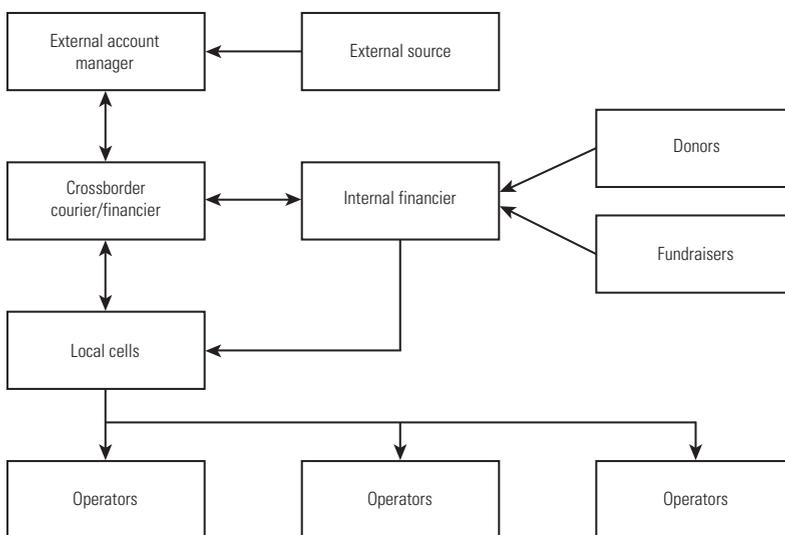
and Coalition and Iraqi Government countermeasures, which has allowed the insurgency to weather the seizure of large amounts of cash, the detention or death of financiers, and the 2003 exchange of Saddam-era currency for redesigned notes.

Political activity. The destruction of Saddam's regime left the Sunnis temporarily leaderless and in disarray. Moreover, because the insurgents violently opposed the January 2005 elections and largely succeeded in preventing meaningful Sunni involvement, Sunni Arabs were left without an effective voice in the Iraqi Transitional Government, although the insurgency provided them with a degree of influence over the political process that they would not have had otherwise.³¹ Nevertheless, virtually from its onset, the insurgency had a political face. The clearest manifestation of this was the rise of the Muslim Clerics Association as a political advocate of the Sunnis and as an overt voice articulating political positions similar to those of the insurgents: opposition to the occupation, the illegitimacy of the occupation-imposed political process, and the right of legitimate resistance.

In addition to overt political groups voicing positions supportive of the insurgents, the insurgents themselves developed political organs.³² These political bureaus or political wings have been used to articulate the political positions of the insurgent groups and to establish that these groups are more than just violently nihilistic with nothing to offer for the future of Iraq. They have also served to

keep the insurgency and its Sunni audience informed of changes in the political situation and the significance of these changes. Thus, both the October referendum and the December election generated insurgent political commentary.³³

A critical issue is the relationship between the insurgency and the overt and legitimate Sunni political parties that have emerged as a result of the political process. While some Sunni parties emerged rapidly after the fall of the regime (especially those such as the Iraqi Islamic Party, which maintained an underground presence in Iraq under the Baath), this



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Figure 4. Representation of insurgent financial operations.

process accelerated after the January 2005 elections and is still continuing. Sunnis now have significant political parties and a significant presence in the parliament (with more than 50 of 275 seats).³⁴

The election of large numbers of Sunnis to the parliament and their aggressive advocacy of Sunni interests have created a political arena with both potential risks and rewards for the insurgents. The insurgents must play in this arena or risk isolation from the Sunni community. While resistance rhetoric (especially that emanating from jihadist elements such as the Mujahidin Shura Council) regarding the legitimacy of the political process remains largely negative, insurgent supporters and insurgents alike are likely involved with and active in the new parties and will almost certainly attempt to use their positions in government to influence governmental activities and policy in ways favorable to the insurgency.³⁵

“Military” operations. The insurgents conduct purposeful activity; they do not attack randomly, as is sometimes suggested. They act along several broad lines of operation:

- Counter-Coalition—attacks against Coalition personnel and infrastructure (excluding convoys and air transport).

- Counter-collaboration—attacks against the ISF, Iraqi Government personnel and facilities, Iraqi translators working for Coalition forces, tipsters, and virtually anyone working for or with the Iraqi Government or Coalition forces.

- Counter-mobility—attacks against convoys; road, rail, and air transport; and bridges.

- Counter-reconstruction—attacks on contractors, oil and power infrastructure, foreign companies and international aid organizations, banks, and medical infrastructure.

- Counter-stability—attacks against civilians; religious sites; tribal, community, and political leaders; foreign (non-Coalition) diplomats; and international and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

A sixth, temporary line of operation—counter-election—was implemented before the January 2005 elections and consisted of attacks against voters, polling centers, election officials, and candidates. No similar line of operation preceded the 15 October 2005 constitutional referendum or the 15 December 2005 general elections, although in

both cases local boycotts, acts of intimidation, and a small number of attacks occurred in a few places.

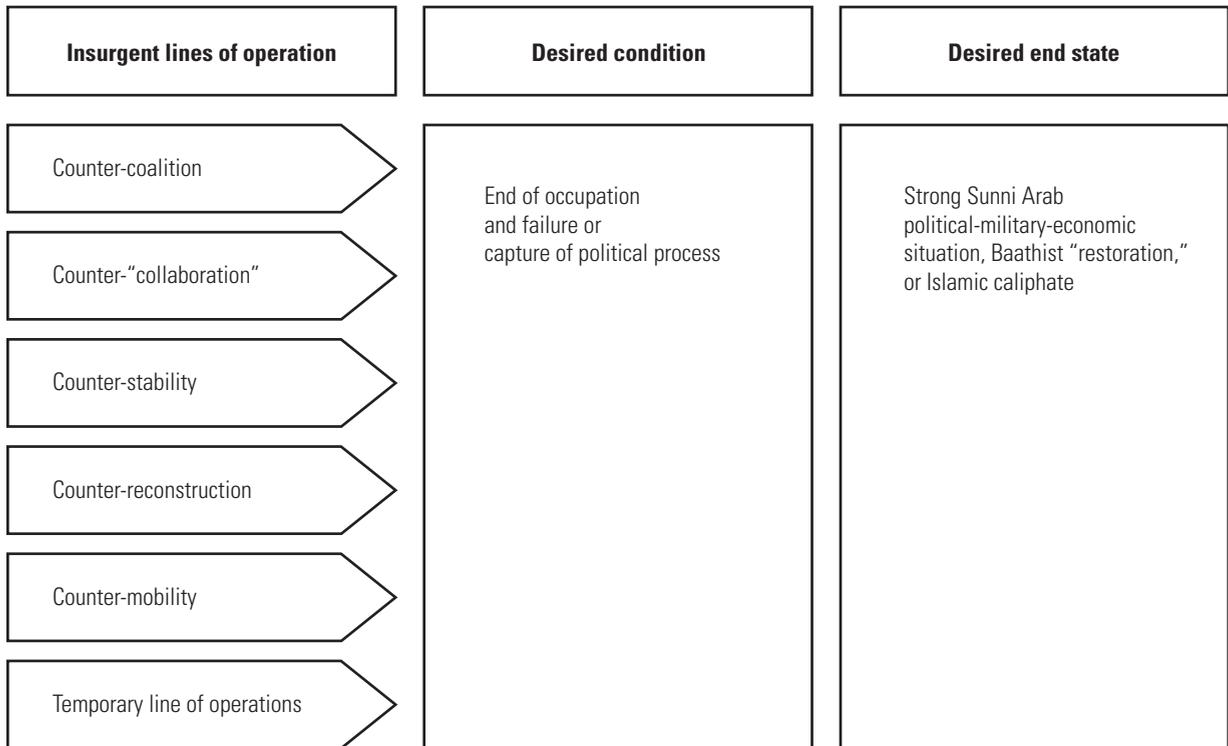
Taken together, the insurgent lines of operation represent the operational expression of the insurgent strategy to achieve consensus objectives: ending the occupation and undermining or taking control of the Iraqi Government. Here, individual incidents and short-term variations are less important than cumulative effects and long-term trends.

To date, the most important insurgent lines of operation have been counter-Coalition, counter-collaboration, and counter-stability (figure 5). Counter-Coalition attacks have taken a significant physical and psychological toll and reduced the Coalition’s operational freedom of action by creating a non-permissive environment. Routine movements by U.S. troops are treated as combat patrols, and in areas where the insurgency is well established, road movements are constrained. Just keeping open the road from Baghdad International Airport to the International Zone in Baghdad requires a substantial commitment of U.S. and Iraqi forces.³⁶ The insurgent campaign against collaborators, including ISF recruits and members, has succeeded in killing large numbers of Iraqis working for the government or connected to the reconstruction effort, and it has intimidated many more; but it has not stopped Iraqis from lining up in large numbers to join the ISF or seek government jobs.

Counter-stability attacks have achieved important successes, leading to a significant reduction in UN and NGO operations, and rising sectarian tensions. In particular, the destruction of the Shiite Askariyya Shrine in Samara in February was a highly successful “shock and awe” operation that greatly increased sectarian violence in Iraq.

Thus far, insurgent operations do not appear to be a form of strategic bargaining, in which the scope or nature of insurgent actions is tied to concessions from the Coalition and Iraqi Government. Rather, insurgent operations have aimed to weaken or frustrate the Coalition, the Iraqi Government, and the political transformation process. Strategic bargaining might come into play, however, as the political face of the insurgency develops.

Shifts in emphasis between lines of operation suggest changes in insurgent effort or strategy. Thus, since the January 2005 elections, counter-collaboration and especially counter-stability



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Figure 5. Notional insurgent strategy in Iraq.

attacks appear to have become more important. This likely reflects an insurgent assessment that the Iraqi Government and the ISF are greater long-term threats and easier targets than Coalition forces and, in the case of the jihadists, that civilians are legitimate, vulnerable, and useful targets.

Rhythms and cycles. Highs and lows in insurgent activity might be associated with the religious calendar (for example, Ramadan, Ashura), seasonal weather patterns, political events (such as elections), or anniversaries (figure 6).³⁷ In Iraq, Ramadan 2003 saw an increase in activity, but any such increase in 2004 was obscured by the large spike in incidents associated with the second battle of Fallujah. Ramadan 2005 coincided with the constitutional referendum in October, so it was again difficult to discern its effect. Jihadist groups apparently seeking to foment civil war have also launched major attacks during the Shiite commemoration of Ashura.

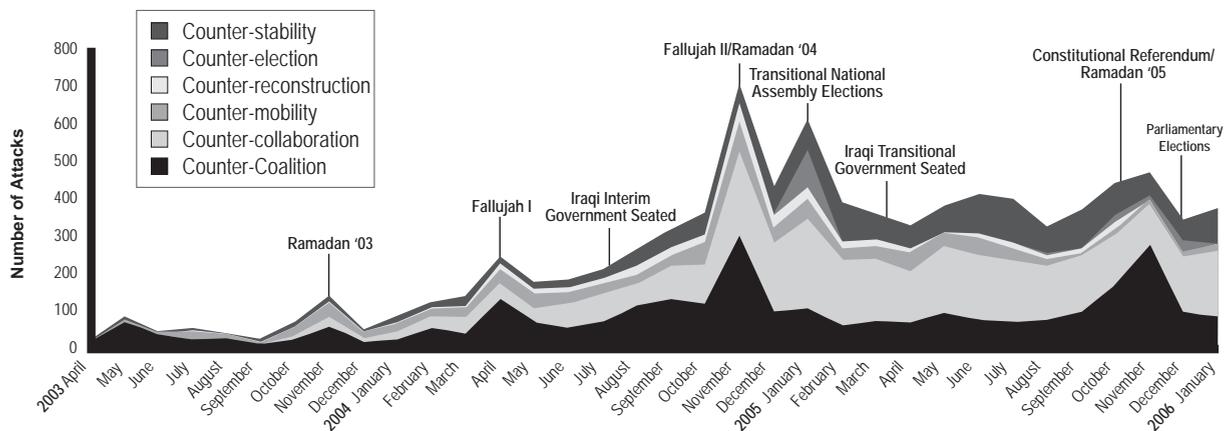
Weather might likewise be a factor in the insurgency in Iraq, although the evidence is ambiguous.³⁸ Thus, February and early March 2004 saw relatively low levels of insurgent activity, as did February and March of 2005. In both cases, insurgent activ-

ity increased after these winter lulls, which might have been caused by inhospitable (cold and/or rainy) weather conditions. This pattern appears to be repeating itself in 2006.

Insurgent activity also declined sharply after the two battles of Fallujah. The insurgents might have needed time to rest and recover, assess their options, and replace their losses following surges in activity during Fallujah I and II (April and November 2004, respectively), and before the January 2005 elections.

The period of intensified insurgent activity preceding the January 2005 elections suggests that the insurgents can temporarily more than double the number of attacks undertaken in support of their strategy. By contrast, insurgent strategy for the October 2005 constitutional referendum and the December 2005 general elections was largely political, with Iraqi insurgent elements by and large supporting "get out the vote" campaigns during October and December.

Resiliency. Arrayed against the U.S. military, the insurgents have fought a ruthless, relentless war. Although thousands of insurgents have been killed and tens of thousands of Iraqis detained, incident



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Figure 6. Sunni insurgent lines of operation in Iraq (April 2003–January 2006, 8,598 reported incidents).

and casualty data reinforce the judgment that the insurgency remains robust and lethal.³⁹

The insurgents have made good on their losses by drawing on their large manpower reserves, augmented by recruits from outside Iraq, although the flow of foreign volunteers has apparently been reduced in recent months, thanks to efforts to seal the border with Syria and to interdict insurgent “ratlines.” Insurgent cells have likewise demonstrated that when they incur losses they can recruit new members or merge with other insurgent cells, while leaders detained or killed by Coalition forces have been replaced without fundamental disruptions to insurgent operations.⁴⁰

Individuals might also be recruited on a “cash” basis to attack Coalition forces (for example, by emplacing IEDs). As long as cash reserves are plentiful and unemployment rates in Sunni areas remain high, the insurgency will be able to hire freelancers to mitigate attrition and enhance its lethal punch.⁴¹

The insurgency’s loosely organized cells and networks contribute to its resilience and effectiveness. Successes against one group are not fatal for others or to the larger cause. Smaller groups are more likely to innovate, and their propensity for sharing expertise and experience (either through face-to-face meetings or via the Internet) ensures that innovations are passed on, allowing groups to achieve broader tactical and operational effects than they could on their own.⁴²

Penetration of Sunni Arab Society

Insurgencies center on the struggle to control or win over the hearts and minds of a society’s civil-

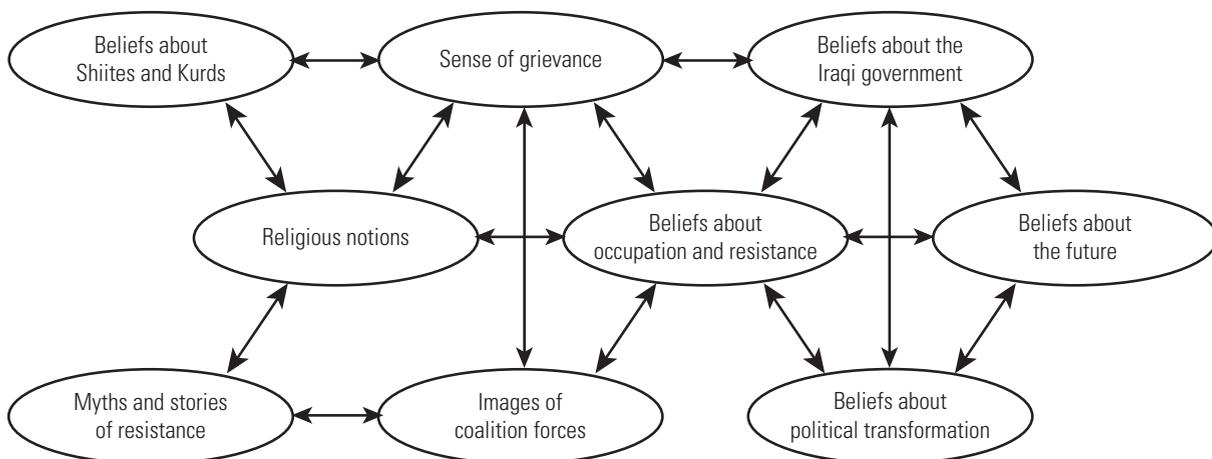
ian population. In Iraq, the status of the insurgency can be measured by the degree to which it has penetrated public and private institutions of the Sunni Arab community and its “thought world” (figure 7).

The insurgency has established a significant presence in broad sectors of Sunni Arab society, including the social, economic, religious, political, and criminal spheres. While the depth of penetration is uncertain, a strategy of combined persuasion and intimidation has enabled the insurgents to largely succeed in undermining efforts to extend government institutions, such as village and town councils, into Sunni Arab areas.

The failure of Sunnis to participate in significant numbers in the January 2005 elections reflected the powerful influence of the insurgents in the Sunni Arab community. The rallying of the Sunnis against the draft constitution during the October 2005 referendum also showed how Sunni Arab attitudes can mesh with insurgent objectives.

The insurgents have also managed to penetrate the Sunni Arabs’ thought world, which consists of at least the following nine elements:

1. Beliefs about the occupation and resistance.
2. Images of Coalition forces.
3. Images, myths, and stories of the resistance.
4. Beliefs about political transformation.
5. Beliefs about the Iraqi Government.
6. Beliefs about Shiites and Kurds.
7. A sense of entitlement and grievance.
8. Religious notions and sensibilities.
9. Beliefs about the future.⁴³



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Figure 7. The “thought world” of the Sunni Arabs.

These interconnected components represent a belief structure shaping Sunni Arab attitudes and actions that determine, to a significant extent, where Sunni Arabs will likely fall on the resistance-“collaboration” spectrum.

Polling data, media commentary, and anecdotal reporting indicate that, among Sunni Arabs in Iraq, ideas and beliefs sympathetic to the insurgency have become widespread, including views of the occupation, Coalition forces, and the Iraqi Government. These findings permit a number of cautious assertions to be made about the beliefs that embody the thought world of many Sunni Arabs:

- The country is headed in the wrong direction.⁴⁴
- The occupation is the proximate cause for the Sunnis’ loss of power and privilege, and for this reason it should come to an end as soon as is practically possible.⁴⁵
- The Coalition came to despoil Iraq’s oil wealth—a view also shared by many Shiite Iraqis.⁴⁶
- The Shiite-dominated Iraqi Government is controlled by Iran (with the connivance of the United States) and is making war on the Sunni Arabs.⁴⁷
- Violent “resistance” against the Coalition is legitimate; attacks on Iraqi civilians, especially Sunnis and security forces, are not.⁴⁸
- The Sunni community is deeply divided over whether its future lies with the insurgency, the political process, or both.⁴⁹
- The insurgent “narrative” runs counter to that of the Coalition and Iraqi Government; it is a blend of fact and (mostly) fiction, and contains vivid images and mythic stories of a heroic, pure resistance.⁵⁰

Sunni Arab political behavior reflects the complexity of this thought world, which varies from place to place in Iraq, and has evolved over time. Attempts to influence the Sunni Arab community that are not based on a sophisticated understanding of this thought world are apt to fail and liable to produce unintended consequences.

Insurgent Effectiveness

An assessment of insurgent effectiveness on the tactical or operational levels must track and assess trends in insurgent strength, number of attacks, and Coalition and ISF casualties. Assessing insurgent effectiveness on the strategic level requires a different set of analytical measures and might, therefore, yield different answers. And because political and psychological factors play critical roles in determining the outcome of insurgencies, analysts must develop measures of success that tap into these dimensions of the conflict. What matters most in insurgencies, however, is the political outcome of the struggle, which is the ultimate measure of insurgent effectiveness.

Measures of tactical and operational effectiveness. At the tactical and operational levels, there is a tendency to rely on quantitative measures—metrics—to assess insurgent effectiveness. But a number of factors might limit the utility of metrics often used to analyze the tactical and operational dimensions of insurgencies: data might be flawed or subject to multiple, conflicting interpretations, and proper interpretation might require a degree of insight into insurgents’ thought and practice that cannot be readily attained.⁵¹

A more fundamental limitation of quantitative measures is that a lack of measurable success on the battlefield might not necessarily prevent the guerrilla or insurgent from attaining key political objectives. Thus, guerrillas or insurgents might lose nearly every battle and still win the war, as did the Algerian National Liberation Front against the French (1954-1962), the Viet Cong against the United States (1961-1972), and Hezbollah against Israel in Lebanon (1982-2000). Nevertheless, tactical or operational metrics might be useful as indicators of strategic success and might provide insight into factors that can influence the strategic direction of the war. (For example, the volume of tips regarding insurgent activity might indicate the degree of popular support for insurgents in Sunni Arab areas.) Other measures (for example, changes in the number or tempo of insurgent attacks) might signal shifts in insurgent strength, capabilities, or strategy, or popular support for their cause. Thus, tactical and operational metrics, if properly understood, can shed light on key trends and developments in the insurgency.

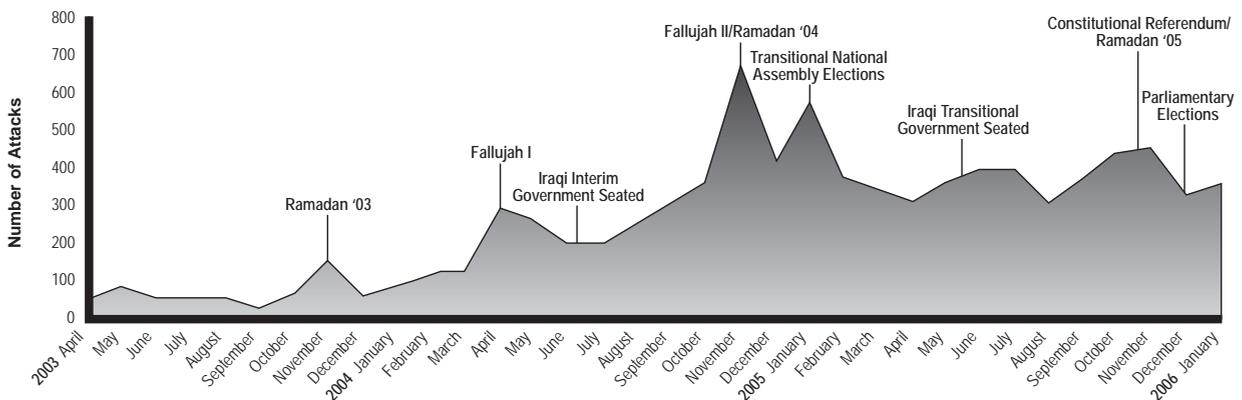
One measure of insurgent activity is incident rates, usually measured as incidents per day, week, or month. Because incidents might differ dramatically in terms of effort invested and effects produced, incident rates represent a relatively crude measure. (For example, a brief sniping incident and a complex attack involving scores of insurgents might both be counted as a single incident.) Incident rates are nonetheless an important indicator of the status of the insurgency (figure 8).

The gradual but generally steady increase in the rate of attacks during the first 30 months of

the occupation (ranging from 10 to 35 attacks/day in 2003, to 25 to 80 attacks/day in 2004, to 65 to 90 attacks/day through most of 2005, according to U.S. Department of Defense [DOD] figures), strongly suggests that the insurgency has grown in strength and/or capability, despite losses, Coalition countermeasures, the rapid growth of the ISF, and the unfolding political process.⁵² As for the dip in attacks since November 2005 (attacks averaged 75/day during this period, according to DOD figures), it is too soon to tell whether the dip is caused by operational rhythms or seasonal cycles, the impact of recent Coalition operations in the Western Euphrates River Valley, or a decision by insurgents to reduce their tempo of operations in order to facilitate the December 2005 elections and subsequent negotiations to form a government.

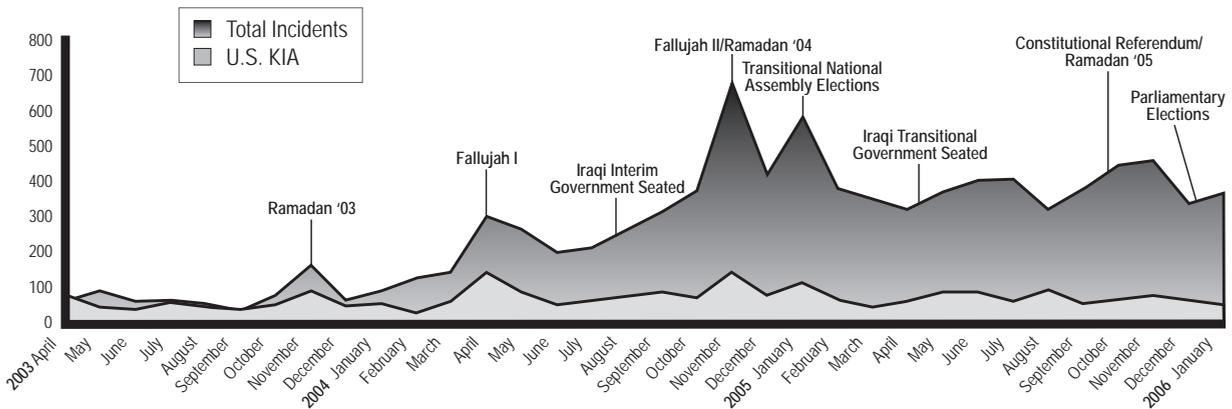
Iraqi and Coalition casualty rates (and, when available, insurgent casualty rates) provide a measure of the intensity of violence and combat in Iraq. Combining incident and casualty rates can help gauge trends in the lethality of the insurgency. American KIA rates have been fairly steady during the insurgency, averaging 49/month in 2003 and 71/month in both 2004 and 2005, for an average of 65 KIA/month since the fall of Baghdad. ISF KIA rates ranged between 100 to 300/month in 2005. The rate at which Iraqi civilians are being killed in violent incidents increased from 750/month in early 2004 to 1,800/month in late 2005.⁵³

Attrition imposed by the insurgents has been steady rather than dramatic, with a few exceptions (for example, April and November 2004). But the costs have added up, and now the insurgency is a



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Figure 8. Reported incidents in Iraq (April 2003–January 2006, 8,947 reported incidents).



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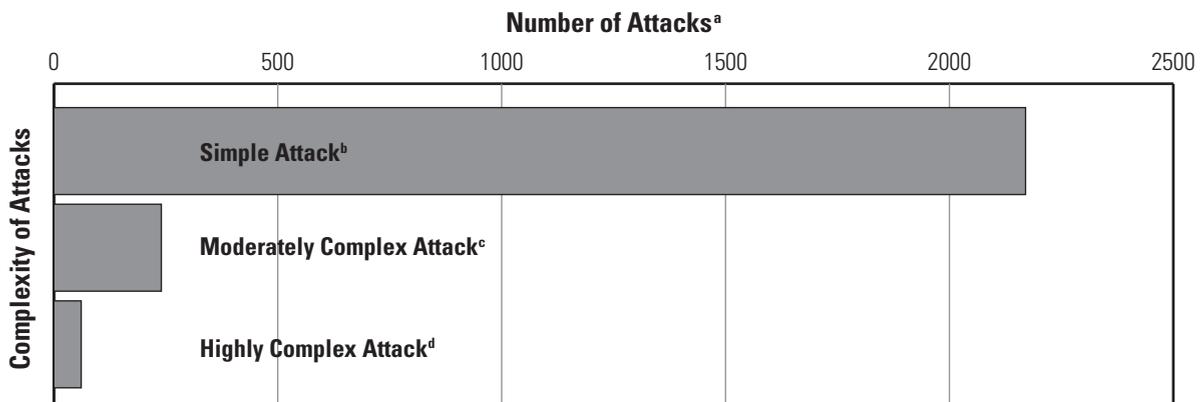
Figure 9. U.S. KIA versus total number of insurgent incidents (April 2003–January 2006).

major factor affecting domestic support for U.S. Iraq policy (figure 9). According to U.S. Government reporting, from the end of major combat operations (1 May 2003) to 1 February 2006, 1,665 U.S. troops had been killed in action, and 16,111 wounded in action in Iraq, for a total of 17,776 combat casualties, which represents nearly 50 killed and 500 wounded per month.⁵⁴ For the insurgents, a small but steady stream of U.S. casualties might be more advantageous politically than large numbers of casualties produced in infrequent, intense clashes.

A key measure of insurgency capability is the complexity and tactical sophistication of its attacks. Elements of complexity include the number of insurgents or insurgent elements involved, scheme of maneuver,

numbers and types of weapons used, numbers and types of targets engaged or objectives assaulted, and use of denial and deception measures.

A review of reported incidents between February and August 2005 indicates that most attacks are relatively simple.⁵⁵ Moderately complex actions are less frequent and generally target the ISF. Highly complex attacks are initiated to achieve important operational or strategic objectives, but they are infrequent (figure 10). A key reason for this is that, generally speaking, the insurgents carefully manage risk, to minimize losses by avoiding large clashes, especially with U.S. forces. However, an emerging trend is an increase in moderately complex attacks against ISF elements, especially the police.



^a Figures represent attacks occurring between February and August 2005.

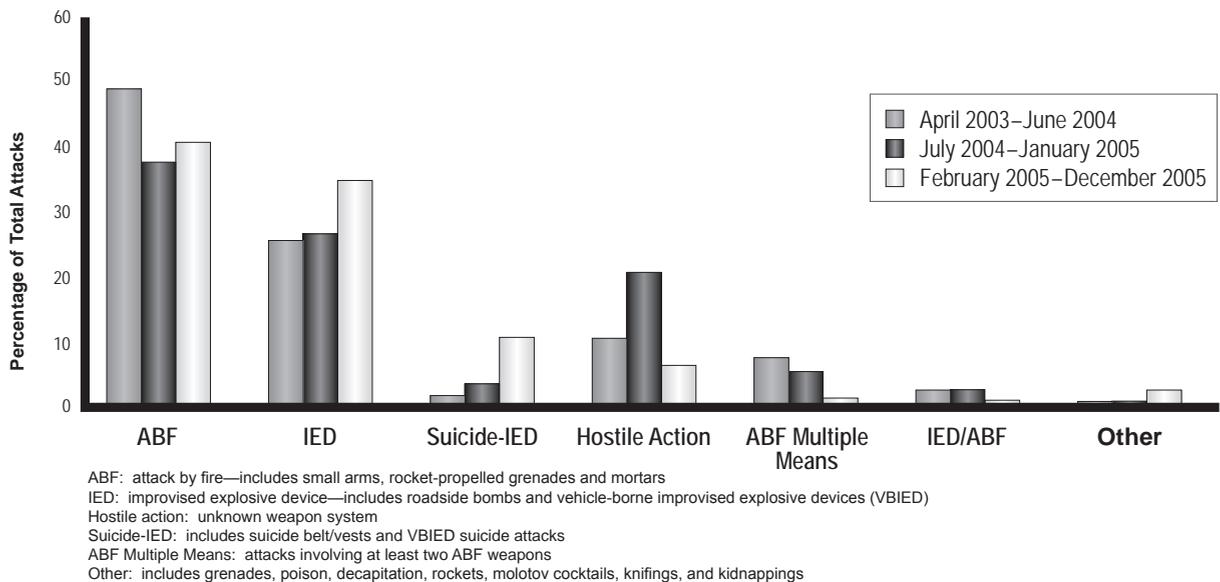
^b Individual or single cell, single type of weapon. Examples: sniping, IEDs, harassment fire, simple ambush. Accounts for most incidents. Intended to harass Coalition and government security forces and create nonpermissive environment. Supports intimidation and physical and psychological attrition.

^c Several cells, coordinated weapons fire. Examples: coordinated attack on a check point. A significant portion of insurgent attacks. Intended to achieve local results, specific tactical objectives. Represents a key form of struggle against the Iraqi Security Forces.

^d Multiple cells/groups, scheme of maneuver, target reconnaissance, multiple types of weapons, direct and indirect fires, tactical deception. Examples: attacks on police stations and prisons. Relatively infrequent large-scale actions intended to achieve significant operational or strategic results.

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Figure 10. Relationships among tactical complexity, frequency, and purpose of attacks.



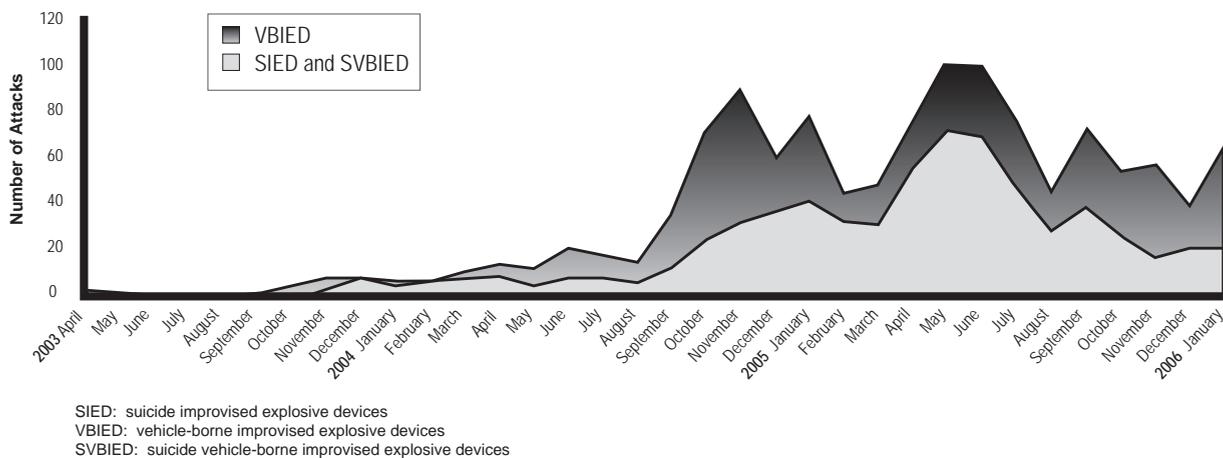
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Figure 11. Attacks by type of weapons: (April 2003–June 2004 transfer of authority; July 2004–January 2005 elections; February 2005–December 2005 elections).

While attacks by fire (ABF) represent the largest category of insurgent attacks, the use of IEDs has increased dramatically over time. They now represent nearly 50 percent of all attacks on Coalition forces and account for more than 60 percent of U.S. KIA.⁵⁶ Suicide bombings, involving either an individual with an explosive vest (SIED) or a suicide car bomb (SVBIED), and VBIEDs, became major categories of attack in 2004 and 2005 (figure 11). The number of IED attacks during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) has been staggering and,

according to DOD figures, includes more than 75 suicide vest bombings, 550 suicide car bombings, 1,300 car bombings, and more than 16,500 roadside bombings in nearly 3 years of combat.⁵⁷ The one-day high for major types of IED attacks included 8 VBIEDs, 9 SIEDs, and 15 SVBIEDs (figure 12).⁵⁸

Suicide attacks generally focus on high value targets: Coalition and ISF convoys, ISF recruiting centers and installations, and concentrations of Iraqi civilians (such as at Shiite religious celebrations).



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Figure 12. SIED, VBIED, and SVBIED (April 2003–January 2006).

Such attacks often result in heavy casualties and are intended to produce instability and a climate of fear and sectarian tension, and to discredit the Iraqi Government and the ISF. The dramatic increase in suicide attacks in fall 2004 and spring 2005 likely reflected changes in insurgent targeting priorities, organizational dynamics, and capabilities. Suicide bombings have been a major tactical and operational success for the insurgents and have driven international and aid organizations from Iraq, dramatically increased sectarian and ethnic tensions, demonstrated the inability of the Coalition and the Iraqi Government to protect the population, and forced the Coalition to devote significant resources to countering the threat.

Insurgent operations and corresponding incident data reveal some important aspects of insurgent effectiveness at the tactical and operational levels. The insurgents—

- Have employed violence effectively to achieve important military and political goals.
- Have, over the course of the insurgency, sustained operations at progressively higher levels and shown that they can more than double the number of attacks during surge periods.
- Continue to exact a growing toll on Iraqi civilians, the ISF, and to a lesser extent, Coalition forces.
- Have managed to enhance their operational capability by employing more sophisticated IEDs and demonstrated an ability to mount complex operations against important targets.
- Retain the initiative and the ability, within limits, to conduct operations at a time and place of their choosing, particularly against Iraqi civilians and the ISF.

On the other hand, what did not happen during the past year is also noteworthy. During 2005, not a single Iraqi police station was overrun—although the insurgents have had substantial success in engagements with ISF, especially police elements. Not one U.S. military adviser was captured by insurgents (although it is not clear that this has been an objective of the insurgents), and not one U.S. base was penetrated by insurgents, despite attempts to do so. Not a single city or town fell to the insurgents, although the insurgents exercised control over a number of towns and neighborhoods during the year, especially in the west, and exercised partial control in others, such as Ramadi.

In sum, the insurgents have scored important tactical and operational successes, particularly against the ISF and the Iraqi Government. They have been able to translate these “battlefield” successes into a number of important short-term political gains, but still face the challenge of using these “military” capabilities to achieve long-term political objectives.

Measures of strategic success. What are the insurgents’ goals in the current phase of the struggle for Iraq? For some, it might be to strengthen their hand in current negotiations to form a government and in future negotiations to amend the constitution. For others, it might be to derail the political transition and seize power. For the jihadists (such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq and Ansar al-Sunna), it might be establishing an Islamic caliphate in Iraq.⁵⁹

The insurgents are pursuing a number of common objectives that each group believes will help them achieve their own particular goals. These common objectives include—

- Bringing an end to the occupation by inflicting a constant toll of casualties on U.S. forces, to turn the American public against the war effort.
- Undermining government institutions and establishing control over predominantly Sunni Arab areas of Iraq.
- Attacking and subverting the ISF, to prevent it from becoming a serious threat to the insurgents.
- Fostering a climate of fear and insecurity to intimidate the population, cripple the economy, and undermine the legitimacy of the government.
- Restoring Sunni Arab pride and honor in order to fan the fires of resistance and bolster the popular standing of the insurgency.
- Bending the political process to support Sunni and insurgent interests.
- Reestablishing the Sunnis as an important, if not dominant, presence in Iraq.

Finally, the jihadists hope to foment a civil war between Sunnis and Shiites in order to prevent the emergence of a predominantly Shiite government in Baghdad, and to inflict a major defeat on the United States.

After nearly 3 years of fighting, what progress can the insurgents claim toward achieving their objectives? They have—

- Succeeded, through assent or intimidation, in establishing themselves as a major, if not the dominant, social and political force in the Sunni Triangle.

- Won the support of large portions of the Sunni Arab population for attacks on Coalition forces and at least tacit support for attacks on the ISF and the Iraqi Government.

- Deterred many residents of the Sunni Triangle from working for or joining the new government and coerced others to quit.

- Made the security situation a major issue of concern for many Iraqis, giving the Sunnis a strong (if largely negative) voice in determining Iraq's future.

- Complicated the political transition by engineering a successful boycott of the January 2005 elections in the Sunni Triangle, and supporting Sunni opposition to the draft constitution in October 2005.

- Slowed the pace and raised the cost of reconstruction, reduced government revenues, degraded the quality of life, maintained high unemployment, and generally undermined confidence in the Iraqi Government and its institutions.

- Contributed to popular dissatisfaction in the U.S. with the war and its handling and to Washington's decision to start drawing down its forces in Iraq in 2006.⁶⁰

The insurgents have, however, experienced a number of setbacks during this period. They have—

- Not succeeded in derailing the political process, which continues to move forward, and many Sunni Arabs now seem committed to influencing the process from within.

- Been unable to deter large numbers of Iraqi youths from joining the ISF.

- Lost (at least temporarily) important sanctuaries in several major towns in the Sunni Triangle to joint Coalition-ISF operations, including Fallujah and Tal Afar.

- Not succeeded in building substantial support among either the Iraqi or the American public for a rapid and total U.S. withdrawal from Iraq.

Moreover, they have alienated many Sunni Arabs because of attacks that have killed numerous innocent civilians and because of the extreme version of Islam some groups imposed on areas temporarily under their sway.⁶¹

While experiencing some setbacks, the insurgents have scored a number of important successes. Most important of all, they have made the Sunni Arabs a force to be reckoned with. The main Shiite and Kurdish parties and the United States have had to recognize the need for substantial, credible Sunni Arab

participation in the political process and to accommodate at least some of the key demands of Sunni Arab representatives in the new government. Sunni politicians will participate in the new government at the ministerial level, and some may be able to alter the dynamics of Coalition and Iraqi Government counterinsurgency decisionmaking, perhaps in ways that will benefit the insurgents. The insurgency's future will depend to a significant degree on its ability to craft a political-military strategy that can guarantee its survival and its relevance while advancing the interests of the broader Sunni Arab community.

Challenges

The Sunni Arab insurgency poses major analytical and operational challenges. It is pervasive in Sunni Arab areas, yet because it lacks a clear ideology, leadership, or organizational center, it defies easy categorization. It is not dependent on external resupply or internal or external sanctuaries, and while the manpower, materiel, and funds that come from external sources are not insignificant, they are not necessary to the insurgency's survival.

The insurgency has access to all the weapons, explosives, and trained manpower it needs in amounts sufficient to sustain current activity levels indefinitely, assuming continued Sunni political support; and its networked nature makes it a resilient and adaptive foe. The insurgency also has at least the beginnings of a political face and enjoys support from overt Sunni political organizations. The insurgents also know that Coalition forces are constrained in how they use force to deal with them. These are among the reasons that combating the insurgency has proven so difficult.

The insurgents' tactical repertoire, however, still consists mainly of IED, hit-and-run, and terrorist-type attacks, and the insurgency has a number of weaknesses that could limit its potential, if properly exploited by the Coalition and the Iraqi Government:

- The insurgency has little appeal beyond the Sunni Arab community; thus, the Coalition must avoid pushing the insurgents into tactical alliances with aggrieved members of other communities.⁶²

- Many Sunni Arabs are ambivalent toward the insurgency and divided over whether their future lies with the insurgents, the political process, or both; they must be convinced that legitimate grievances can be addressed through the political process.

● Some insurgent attacks are done by freelance insurgents on a commission basis; therefore, improving the economy and cutting unemployment might reduce the pool of paid freelancers.⁶³

● The political transition is making it more difficult to preserve unity of purpose among insurgent groups and could help identify those insurgent groups with whom compromise and reconciliation are impossible.

● The extreme beliefs and brutal tactics of the jihadists have alienated erstwhile allies in the insurgency and at least some Iraqi Sunnis, making the jihadists vulnerable to attempts to isolate them from local and external bases of support.⁶⁴

Given their limited military capabilities and the substantial Coalition presence, the insurgents are unlikely to stage a successful coup or to attempt a

march on Baghdad. Moreover, U.S. forces are likely to remain in Iraq for as long as they are tolerated and needed, in part to prevent such an outcome. The resulting stalemate might provide an opportunity for the evolving political process to produce a settlement that all parties can live with.

Thus, the war might yet yield an acceptable outcome—a relatively stable, democratic Iraq—provided that the political process is not undermined from within, derailed by escalating civil violence, or scuttled by a premature U.S. withdrawal. The path to an acceptable outcome is likely to be protracted, costly, and punctuated by additional setbacks. For the U.S., Iraq will be a major test of its national will, its political leadership, and its military's ability to prevail over a new type of enemy, one that it is likely to confront again elsewhere in the future. **MR**

NOTES

1. For convenience, we refer to the Sunni Arab insurgency in the singular, although it actually consists of a number of locally and regionally based insurgencies waged by various groups pursuing diverse objectives.

2. On the challenges of assessing insurgencies, see Thomas C. Thayer, *War Without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985). On the importance of selecting proper analytical measures, see James G. Roche and Barry D. Watts, "Choosing Analytic Measures," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 14, 2 (June 1991): 165-209.

3. For reports that suggest the insurgency was preplanned, see Thom Shanker, "Hussein's Agents Behind Attacks, Pentagon Finds," *New York Times*, 29 April 2004, A1, and Edward T. Pound, "Seeds of Chaos," *U.S. New & World Report*, 20 December 2004, 20-22, 24-26. For a report that suggests Saddam Hussein was the catalyst behind the postwar insurgency, see Joe Klein, "Saddam's Revenge," *Time*, 26 September 2005, on-line at <www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,1106307,00.html>, accessed 12 April 2006. For an explanation of why the insurgency was likely not preplanned, see Michael Eisenstadt, "Understanding Saddam," *National Interest* (Fall 2005): 117-21, on-line at <www.washingtoninstitute.org/opedPDFs/4321a9b706048.pdf>, accessed 12 April 2006. The regime likewise had longstanding contingency plans to deal with the possibility that it might be ousted by domestic rivals and would once again have to go underground, reorganize, and seize power, as it did between 1963 and 1968. Such planning probably also facilitated the emergence of the Sunni Arab insurgency following the conclusion of "major combat operations" in May 2003.

4. See for example, the comments by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld at a Press Stakeout Following Close Briefing for Senators on Iraq, 27 June 2003, on-line at <www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030627-secdef0303.html>, accessed 12 April 2006, and the comments by U.S. Central Command GEN John Abizaid, "DOD News Briefing—Mr. Di Rita and Gen. Abizaid," 16 July 2003, on-line at <www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030716-0401.html>, accessed 12 April 2006.

5. For a more detailed discussion of the history of insurgencies, see Michael Eisenstadt and Jeffrey White, "Assessing Iraq's Sunni Arab Insurgency," *Washington Institute Policy Focus* # 50, December 2005, 5, on line at <www.washingtoninstitute.org/html/pdf/PolicyFocus50.pdf>, accessed 12 April 2006.

6. For more on the insurgent underground, see Andrew R. Molnar and others, *Undergrounds in Insurgent, Revolutionary, and Resistance Warfare* (Washington, DC: Special Operations Research Office, The American University, 1963), 47-124.

7. Even in the socially conservative Sunni Triangle region, women likely participate in the insurgency on some level—although probably in small numbers. (Thus far, only a handful of the more than 600 suicide bombers in Iraq have been women.) For our purposes, to simplify matters, we will count only men in the recruitment pool. The population data cited here are drawn from the U.N. Development Program (UNDP), *Iraq Living Conditions Survey 2004*, vol. 1, 15-19, on-line at <www.iq.undp.org/LLCS/overview.htm>, accessed 12 April 2006. The estimate of men of military age was arrived at by multiplying the UNDP estimates of the number of Iraqi males in the 15- to 49-year-old cohorts by 0.20. It therefore assumes that the age distribution among adult Sunni Arab males mirrors that of the general Iraqi population (UNDP, *Iraq Living Conditions Survey*, 18).

8. Abizaid interview on *Face the Nation*, 26 June 2005, on-line at <www.cbsnews.com/hdtdocs/pdf/face_062605.pdf>, accessed 12 April 2006. One-tenth of one percent of the population would be 27,000 people.

9. Molnar and others, 13-16. These data are not doctrinal norms of any sort, but reflect the simple fact that to survive, insurgent movements generally mobilize only a small fraction of their potential recruitment base in the early phases of their struggle to avoid being detected and crushed by government forces.

10. See Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: The Lessons of Malaya and Vietnam* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 41, for a similar explanation for insurgent resilience in Malaya and Vietnam.

11. See, for instance, Nancy Mendrala and Sarah Hornbach, *Iraqis Do Not Fear Civil War Despite Widespread Security Concerns* (Washington, DC: 8 August 2005), U.S. Department of State (DOS), Office of Research and Opinion Analysis, 2-4; Mendrala and Christopher Cole, *Iraqis Sense Improved Security*, DOS, Office of Research Opinion Analysis (Washington, DC: 18 April 2005), 2, 8; and Dina Smeltz and Mendrala, *Fear a Key Factor on Iraqi Political Outlook*, DOS, Office of Research Opinion Analysis (Washington, DC: 18 January 2005), 4, 9.

12. In trying to assess the strength of any insurgency, one should keep in mind the observation of T.E. Lawrence regarding the Arab guerrilla forces he led during the Arab Revolt in World War I: "No spies could count us . . . since even ourselves had not the smallest idea of our strength at any given moment" (*Seven Pillars of Wisdom* [New York: Doubleday, 1991], 381).

13. U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), Regular Briefing with Pentagon Spokesman Lawrence Di Rita and Chief of Operations, J3, LTG James Conway, 10 May 2005, on-line at <www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2005/tr20050510-2721.html>, accessed 12 April 2006.

14. The Washington Institute, Iraq Incident Data Base. By comparison, according to the DOD, 85 percent of incidents occur in the four major provinces ("Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," Report to Congress, DOD, October 2005, 21), on-line at <www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct2005/d20051013iraq.pdf>, accessed 12 April 2006. The insurgency is the overwhelming fact of life in parts of Iraq, and it has made many Iraqis virtual prisoners of their homes when they are not working, shopping, or going to school. It has curtailed nightlife in parts of Baghdad and greatly influenced public life in large parts of the Sunni Triangle. On the other hand, many areas of the country are virtually untouched by insurgent violence. In those regions, the residents' dominant concern includes inadequate electricity (available only a few hours a day throughout much of the country), ethnic and religious tensions, the presence of Coalition forces, lack of adequate housing, high prices, corruption, unemployment, and crime. For instance, see a recent poll by the International Republican Institute, "Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion," 6-12 September 2005, 13, on-line at <www.iri.org/pdfs/09-27-05-Iraq%20poll%20presentation.ppt>, accessed 12 April 2006. See also Mendrala and Hornbach, 1-2, 6-7, and Ellen Knickmeyer, "Where Charter is Least of Worries: Local Issues Top List in Town in S. Iraq," *Washington Post*, 7 October 2005, A12.

15. Incident data used for the charts in this paper are derived from The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Iraq incident database. This project was initiated in May 2003 under the direction of Jeffrey White, with data search and entry conducted by Washington Institute research assistants. The unclassified database now contains over 8,000 incidents, reaching back to April 2003. Each incident is tracked for a number of variables, including date, location (city/province), forces involved, types of weapons, type of attack, casualties (including Iraqi casualties), and other factors. Data are drawn from open-source reporting and represent a sample of perhaps 15 percent of the incidents reported by the Coalition. The data are used to analyze operational and tactical trends in the insurgency, the effectiveness of insurgent forces, and shifts in operational and tactical activity. Data generally track with broad trends revealed in official data.

16. David Baran and Mathieu Guidère, "Iraq: A Message from the Insurgents," *Le Monde Diplomatique* (May 2005), on-line at <mondediplo.com/2005/05/01iraq/>, accessed 12 April 2006. How many insurgent groups are actually operating in Iraq is unclear. Some organizations might use more than one name, and new names appear with some frequency. Moreover, some of the names used by insurgent groups such

as the Al-Qa'qa' Brigades and the Salah Al-Din Brigades, have both nationalistic and religious connotations. This makes it difficult to discern the group's motives and identity, which at any rate might be mixed. (Al-Qa'qa' bin 'Amr al-Tamimi, was a warrior-poet and hero of the battles of Yarmuk in 636 C.E. and Qadisiya in 637 C.E. Salah Al-Din was a great military leader who led a Muslim army to victory over the Crusaders at the battle of Hittin and in the subsequent reconquest of Jerusalem, both in 1187 C.E.)

17. Mendrala and Cole, 5.

18. T. Christian Miller, "U.S. Criticized on Iraq Rebuilding," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 July 2005, A5. Economic conditions in Iraq are such that some Shiites are alleged to have taken money from the Zaqawi group to attack their co-religionists (Akeel Hussein and Colin Freeman, "Shia Iraqi Hitmen Admit they were Paid to Join Sunni Insurgency," *The Telegraph*, 24 April 2005, on-line at <www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=news/2005/04/24/wirq24.xml&Sheet=News/2005/04/24/ixworld.html>, accessed 12 April 2006.)

19. Michael E. O'Hanlon, Nina Kamp, "Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq," 13 February 2006, 28, 30, on-line at <www.brook.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.pdf>, accessed 14 April 2006.

20. Thanassis Cambanis, "Hussein's Outlawed Former Party Gaining Influence in Iraq," *Boston Globe*, 15 May 2005, on-line at <www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/05/15/MNGAICPIME1.DTL>, accessed 14 April 2006; "US Knows of About 10 Leaders of Iraq's Insurgency," AFP, 26 July 2005, on-line at <www.spacewar.com/reports/US_Knows_Of_About_10_Leaders_Of_Iraqs_Insurgency_Pentagon.html>, accessed 13 April 2006.

21. See for example "The Mujahideen Shura Council Claims responsibility for a Suicide Bombing Targeting Iraqi Police in al-Sayediya"; "Detonation of Several IEDs on 'Crusader' and Iraqi Forces in Baghdad, Diyala, and Samarra," and "Assassinating a Captain of the Iraqi Federal Police in Baquba"; SITE Institute, 2 February 2006, on-line at <http://siteinstitute.org/bin/articles.cgi?ID=publications144606&Category=publications&Subcategory=0>, accessed 13 April 2006; Jackie Spinner and Karl Vick, "Fallujah Talks and Battle Planning Continue," *Washington Post*, 28 October 2004, A21; "Iraqi insurgents unite against al-Qa'ida," Reuters, 26 January 2006, on-line at <www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5744,17930220%255E2703,00.html> (this article is no longer available).

22. See, for instance, Aparisim Ghosh, "Professor of Death," *Time*, 17 October 2005, on-line at <http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,1118370,00.htm>, accessed 13 April 2006, which describes the role of Abu Qa'qa' al-Tamimi, an entrepreneurial former Republican Guard officer and "born-again Muslim" who facilitates and coordinates suicide bombing attacks for various jihadist and nationalist insurgent groups.

23. Bradley Graham, "Zarqawi 'Hijacked' Insurgency: U.S. General Says Foreign Fighters Now Seen as Main Threat," *Washington Post*, 28 September 2005, A17; Ghosh.

24. Greg Miller and Tyler Marshall, "More Iraqis Joining Zarqawi's Cause," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 September 2005, 1.

25. See for example Anthony Loyd, "Murder of Sheikh Provokes Sunnis to Turn on al-Qaeda," *London Times*, 10 February 2006, on-line at <www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,7374-2033304,00.html>, accessed 13 April 2006; Rick Jervis, "General Sees Rift in Iraq Enemy," *USA Today*, 25 January 2006, 1; Louise Roug and Richard Boudreaux, "Deadly Rift Grows Among Insurgents," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 January 2006, on-line at <www.navcops.com/magazine/blogs/45/Deadly-Rift-Grows-Among-Insurgents>, accessed 13 April 2006; Iraqi Resistance Report "Resistance Refutes Puppet Regime Claims of Divisions within Resistance Ranks," for events of 6 February 2006, on-line at <www.freearabvoice.org/Iraq/Report/report422.htm>, accessed 13 April 2006.

26. James Janega, "Obscure Figures Hunted in Iraq," *Chicago Tribune*, 20 April 2005, 3; See for example Greg Grant, "Inside Iraqi Insurgent Cells," *Defense News*, 1 August 2005, 1, 8, 12, for a description of improvised explosive devices (IED) cells. See also Montgomery McFate, "Iraq: The Social Context of IEDs," *Military Review* (May-June 2005): 37-40.

27. Testimony of Acting Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Daniel Glaser and Caleb Temple, Director (Operations), Joint Intelligence Task Force for Combating Terrorism, Defense Intelligence Agency, before the House Armed Services Committee Hearing on the Financing of the Iraqi Insurgency, 28 July 2005, on-line at <www.dod.gov/dodcg/olc/docs/Test05-07-28Temple.doc>, accessed 14 April 2006. See also Michael Knights and Zack Snyder, "The Role Played by Funding in the Iraqi Insurgency," *Jane's Intelligence Review* (August 2005): 8-15.

28. Glaser, 1-2. See also David Enders, "The Business of Jihad," *The Nation*, 7 March 2005, on-line at <www.thenation.com/doc/20050307/enders> (this item is no longer available); Robert F. Worth and James Glanz, "Oil Graft Fuels the Insurgency, Iraq and U.S. Say," *New York Times*, 5 February 2006, 1; Glaser, 1-2.

29. Glaser, 2-4, 5-6; Temple, 2, 3; *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD*, vol. II, "Regime Finance and Procurement," 30 September 2004, 1-299; Douglas Jehl, "U.S. Aides Say Kin of Hussein Aid Insurgency," *The New York Times*, 5 July 2005, A1; Agence France Presse, "U.S. Fears Iraq's Cash Economy Offers Easy Money to Insurgents," 12 May 2005.

30. Ann Scott Tyson, "Tighter Borders Take a Toll in Iraq," *Washington Post*, 11 February 2006, A12, on-line at <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/10/AR2006021001927.html>, accessed 14 April 2006.

31. Sunni Arabs stayed away from the polls in large numbers. In Anbar province perhaps less than 5 percent of the population voted. Anecdotal accounts from other areas (Samarra and Baiji, for example) also suggest the Sunni turnout was small—less than 10 percent. In mixed provinces, voting was higher, but this reflected the nationwide surge to the polls by Shiites and Kurds. In the four provinces most closely identified with the insurgency (Anbar, Salahuddin, Ninawa, and Baghdad) voting averaged 24 percent, but all except Anbar have significant Kurdish or Shiite populations. On balance, 10 to 15 percent is probably a reasonable estimate for the Sunni Arab vote.

32. The Baath party has as its political organ the Political Information and Publication Bureau.

33. See for example Maamoun Youssef, "Militant Groups Denounce Iraqi Elections," *Associated Press*, 12 December 2005, on-line at <www.breitbart.com/news/2005/12/12/D8EEROI00.html>, accessed 14 April 2006.

34. The Iraqi Accord Front gained 44 seats, and the National Dialogue Front gained 11. See Yahoo News, "Iraqi Election Results Certified," 10 February 2006, on-line at <www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2006-02-10-iraq-elections_x.htm>, accessed 14 April 2006.

35. International Crisis Group, "In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency," Middle East Report No. 50, 15 February 2006, 17-19, on-line at <www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?i=1&id=3953>, accessed 14 April 2006. That both insurgent supporters and insurgents are likely involved with the new parties is strongly suggested by the case of Mishan al-Jibouri who, despite links to the former regime, established himself as a legitimate politician. He won election to the parliament but was later implicated in the transfer of oil revenues to the insurgents. See Robert F. Worth and James Glanz, "Oil Graft Fuels the Insurgency, Iraq and U.S. Say," *New York Times*, 5 February 2006, 1, on-line at <www.nytimes.com/2006/02/05/international/middleeast/05corrupt.html?ex=1296795600&en=0b5e95f746f96fa6&ei=5088>, accessed 14 April 2006.

36. Spinner, "Easy Sailing Along Once-Perilous Road To Baghdad Airport: Army Steps Up Presence to Quell Attacks," *Washington Post*, 4 November 2005, A15, on-line at <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/03/AR2005110302600.html>, accessed 14 April 2006.

37. During the Algerian civil war (early to mid-1990s), the onset of the holy month of Ramadan was often marked by an increase in attacks by the Islamic opposition. See Avi Jorisch, "U.S. Military Operations and the Question of Ramadan," Washington Institute PolicyWatch #581, 2 November 2001, 2, on-line at <www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1459>, accessed 14 April 2006.

38. During the Vietnam War, the tempo of communist military activity followed seasonal weather patterns. For instance, the onset of the rainy season (September through January) generally saw a significant slowdown in combat operations (Thayer, 11-13).

39. See Baran and Guidère 20.

40. Prior to the effort to seal the border, 100 to 150 foreign fighters reportedly crossed from Syria into Iraq each month, one or two at a time. See Bradley Graham, "Forces Bolstered in Western Iraq," *Washington Post*, 21 September 2005, A18, on-line at <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/20/AR20050920011527.html>, accessed 14 April 2006. More recent articles give the impression that few if any foreign fighters are now entering Iraq from Syria. See Jonathan Finer, "Among Insurgents in Iraq, Few Foreigners are Found," *Washington Post*, 17 November 2005, A1, on-line at <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/16/AR2005111602519.html>, accessed 14 April 2006; Ann Scott Tyson, "Tighter Borders Take a Toll in Iraq," *Washington Post*, 11 February 2006, A12. Whether the foreign insurgents can adapt to tightened border security remains to be seen; See also Grant, 8.

41. According to one source, some 70 to 75 percent of attacks in Iraq are done on a commission basis by freelancers. This figure, however, seems improbably high, and it is questionable whether reliable data on this phenomenon exist. See LTC David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *Small Wars Journal*, 8, 35, on-line at <www.smallwarsjournal.com/documents/kilcullen.pdf>, accessed 14 April 2006.

42. Jervis, "Militants Sharing Bomb Expertise," *USA Today*, 24 October 2005, on-line at <www.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2005-10-24-roadside-bombs_x.htm?POE=NEWSVA>, accessed 14 April 2006.

43. Thought worlds represent the beliefs on which people, individuals and groups act. They are culturally dependent and can create different perceptions of reality, proper behavior, and truth. For a discussion of the concept of foreign thought worlds, see J.W. Barnett, "Insight Into Foreign Thoughtworlds for National Security Decision Makers," Institute for Defense Analysis, January 2004, on-line at <www.fas.org/irp/eprint/thoughtworlds.pdf>, accessed 14 April 2006; Baran and Guidère.

44. International Republican Institute, *Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion*, 6 September–12 September 2005, 5, on-line at <www.iri.org/09-27-05-IraqPoll.asp>, accessed 14 April 2006. See also, "What the Iraqi Public Wants: A WorldOpinionPoll.org Poll," 31 January 2006, 8.

45. Mendrala and Cole, 3, 9.

46. *Ibid.*, 9.

47. See Sameer N. Yacoub, "Shiite Forces Blamed for Sunnis' Deaths," *Associated Press*, 29 August 2005.

48. The distinction between legitimate and illegitimate resistance is evident in the reaction of Sunnis to terrorist-type actions by the Zarqawi group. Both Sunni Arab political leaders and resistance organizations have condemned specific actions by Zarqawi and his declaration of war against the Shiites. See for example the 1 October 2005 statement by the Iraqi Islamic Party condemning the terrorist attacks in Balad on 29 September 2005 in Spinner, "U.S. Troops Target Rebels in Far Western Iraq," *Washington Post*, 2 October 2005, A21; Narrow to broad majorities of Sunni Arabs surveyed in a June 2005 poll characterized those who attacked Coalition forces as patriots or freedom fighters, while in most Sunni areas polled, large majorities characterized those who attacked Iraqi civilians or soldiers as criminals or terrorists. (Mendrala and Hornbach, 4, 12.) See also, "What the Iraqi Public Wants: A WorldOpinionPoll.org Poll," January 31, 2006, p. 5.

49. Mendrala and Hornbach, 2-3, 9-11.

50. Various myths and stories of resistance have come out of Iraq. These include the myth of Allah's sniper, the wily Sunni Arab who kills U.S. Soldiers from afar with impunity; virgin fighters, young boys who are killed resisting U.S. forces; and wound-less death, the notion that the bodies of martyred resistance fighters do not bear the horrific wounds normally inflicted by modern weapons. How deeply these stories affect Sunni Arabs is impossible to say, but they present powerful images of pure, noble resistance. See, for instance, Halah Jaber, "The Chilling Toll of Allah's Sniper," *The Times*, 20 February 2005, on-line at <www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,2089-1492179,00.html>, (this item no longer available).

51. A drop in the number of incidents in certain areas might indicate that the insurgents are either on the run or that they effectively control the area in question (Thompson, 169).

52. U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO-06-428T), *Rebuilding Iraq: Stabilization, Reconstruction, and Financing Challenges* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 8 February 2006), 6, on-line at <www.gao.gov/new.items/d06428t.pdf>, accessed 14 April 2006. The steady increase in attacks generally mirrors data in The Washington Institute Iraq Incident Database.

53. The exact number of Iraqis killed by the insurgents is unknown but is clearly in the thousands. According to DOD data, the trend in daily Iraqi casualties has been rising since January 2004, with an average of 25/day from January-March, 30/day from April-June, 40/day from June-November, 50 per day during the election period from late November 2004 to early February 2005, slightly below 50/day from February-August, and 60/day from September-October 2005. See "More than 26,000 Iraqis Killed, Injured Since 2004: Estimate," AFP, 30 October 2005, on-line at <http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20051030/pl_afp/iraqusunresttoll>, (this item no longer available). Since January 2005, ISF losses have fluctuated between 100 to 300 killed in action monthly, according to the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, on-line at <www.icasualties.org/oif/IraqiDeaths.aspx>, accessed 14 April 2006.

54. DOD, "Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) U.S. Casualty Status," 13 February 2006, on-line at <www.defenselink.mil/news/casualty.pdf>, accessed 14 April 2006.

It should be noted that the tally of killed and wounded includes casualties incurred during the two Muqtada al-Sadr uprisings of 2004. By way of comparison, in 1968, at the peak of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, U.S. casualties amounted to 14,594 troops killed and 87,388 wounded in combat, which equates to an average of more than 1,200 killed and 7,250 wounded a month (more than the average annual rate for Iraq). During the month-long Battle of Iwo Jima, one of the most intense battles of World War II, U.S. casualties amounted to 7,000 killed and 19,000 wounded. See on-line at <www.swt.usace.army.mil/library/tdr/1998/tdr0398.pdf>, accessed 14 April 2006, and <www.vietnamwall.org/pdf/casualty.pdf>, (this item no longer available).

55. The chart in figure 8 reflects the period since the January 2005 elections, which was a reasonably representative period of insurgent activity. By contrast, the preceding period, lasting from November 2004 to the end of January 2005, was characterized by significant fighting between U.S. and insurgent forces in Fallujah. Because many simple attacks that occur in Iraq are never reported, and are therefore not reflected in the database, the chart at figure 10 probably overstates the percentage of moderately complex and highly complex attacks.

56. John Ward Anderson, Steve Fainaru, and Jonathan Finer, "Bigger, Stronger Homemade Bombs Now to Blame for Half of U.S. Deaths," *Washington Post*, 26 October 2005, A1.

57. Jervis, "Attacks in Iraq Jumped in 2005," *USA Today*, 23 January 2006, 1.

During the second Palestinian intifada (uprising) which lasted from 2000-2004, Palestinian groups launched nearly 150 suicide bomb attacks on Israel.

58. Washington Institute Iraq Incident Database.

59. For more on Al-Qaeda's strategy in Iraq, see Abu Musab al-Zarqawi letter to the leadership of Al-Qaeda, February 2004, on-line at <www.state.gov/p/nea/ris/31694.htm>, accessed 25 April 2006; Reuven Paz, "Zarqawi's Strategy in Iraq—Is there a 'New Al-Qaeda?'" PRISM Occasional Paper, 3:5, August 2005, on-line at <www.e-prism.org/images/PRISM_no_5_vol_3_-_Iraq_strategy.pdf>, accessed 25 April 2006. See also letter from Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri to Al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi July 2005, on-line at <www.dni.gov/release_letter_101105.html>, accessed 25 April 2006.

60. For U.S. public opinion toward the war, see Dana Milbank and Claudia Deane, "Poll Finds Dimmer View of Iraq War," *Washington Post*, 8 June 2005, A1. Regarding the decision to draw down U.S. forces in Iraq, see David Ignatius, "A Shift on Iraq: The Generals Plan a Slow Exit," *Washington Post*, 26 September 2005, A23.

61. See for instance Knickmeyer and Finer, "Insurgents Assert Control Over Town Near Syrian Border," *Washington Post*, 6 September 2005, A20.

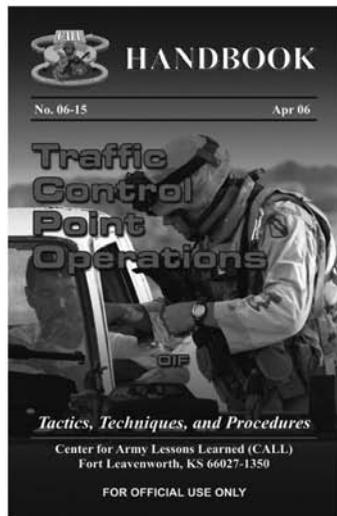
62. The fact that the insurgency in Malaya (1948-1960) was rooted mainly in the country's ethnic Chinese minority and that the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya (1952-1956) involved only the Kikuyu tribe are key factors explaining the failure of those insurgencies. See David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice (Science 101)* (Praeger Security International Paperback, 1964), 20. Ensuring that the insurgency did not spread beyond these minority communities was a key element of British counterinsurgency strategy in Malaya and Kenya.

63. For an assessment showing that improved social services and employment opportunities for the mainly Shiite slum-dwellers of Sadr City in Baghdad led to a sharp decrease in recruitment to and attacks by Muqtada Sadr's Mahdi Army, see MG Peter W. Chiarelli and MAJ Patrick R. Michaelis, "Winning the Peace: The Requirement for Full-Spectrum Operations," *Military Review* (July-August 2005): 4-17. Whether such an achievement can be replicated in the largely Sunni Arab areas of Iraq remains to be seen.

64. For an example of how tensions and factionalism in the insurgency were exploited by Coalition forces in the run-up to and during the second battle of Fallujah, see LTG John F. Sattler and LTC Daniel H. Wilson, "Operation Al Fajr: The Battle of Fallujah—Part II," *Marine Corps Gazette* (July 2005): 12-24. For more on the tensions between foreign Jihadists and Iraqis, see Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, "The New Sunni Jihad: A Time for Politics," *Washington Post*, 27 October 2005, A1. For the vulnerability of Jihadists to strategies of isolation and "disaggregation," see Kicullen, 39-47.

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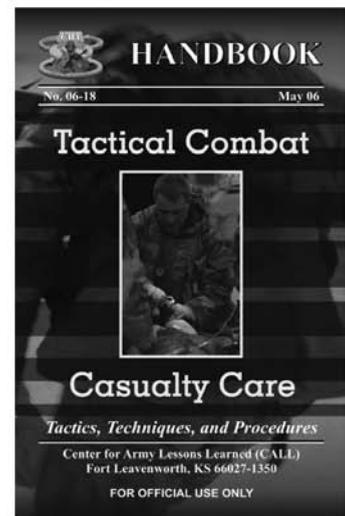
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