

# Gaining Ground—Resistance in Iraq since the Transition (Part II):

## Effects and Implications

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### ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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### Brief Analysis

The effects of resistance operations have been felt in terms of stability and governance, reconstruction, and military security. Sunni resistance has removed some areas from government and coalition control and permitted the emergence of local rule by anticoalition and antigovernment elements. Officials working with the government have been killed, wounded, kidnapped, or otherwise intimidated, again with the effect of limiting government influence.

On July 28, 2004, insurgents surrounded the Ramadi home of the governor of al-Anbar province and kidnapped his three children. Also in late July, Raad Adnan Mahmoud, director-general of the government-owned al-Mansour Contracting Company and a senior official in Iraq's Housing and Construction Ministry, was abducted in a Baghdad neighborhood. Insurgents have also pursued leaders of Iraq's nascent security force in an intimidation campaign that targets officers and their families. On September 11, it was reported that insurgents shot a senior National Guard officer, Brig. Gen. Nashi Jawad Hasan, and his driver as they traveled from Baquba to Baghdad. The same day, insurgents kidnapped the wife and three children of another senior National Guard officer, Col. Khalis Ali Hussein, before burning his home north of Baquba.

Iraqi insurgents have also conducted repeated attacks on the oil and transportation industries. According to the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, approximately 118 attacks on the Iraqi oil infrastructure have been reported since June 2003, with over fifty attacks in the past three months. Although not all of these attacks are the work of Sunni insurgents (especially in southern Iraq, where Muqtada al-Sadr's forces have also attacked oil-related targets), they now have the hallmarks of an organized campaign as opposed to sporadic incidents. Insurgent attacks on convoys and the kidnapping of truckers are aimed at disrupting the movement of both commercial and military freight. Militants abducted more than seventy foreigners between April and August 2004 alone. Such actions have already driven at least seven Turkish companies to abandon operations in Iraq, and have diverted military effort to convoy security. Attacks on relief organizations and their workers, such as the September 7 raid on an Italian aid agency and subsequent abduction of two Italian aid workers and two Iraqi employees, are also designed to retard reconstruction efforts and weaken commitment to the coalition.

The military effects of the resistance are also important. Both coalition units and Iraqi security services are suffering continued attrition. U.S. casualties averaged between 11 and 12 killed in action and more than 160 wounded in action per week between June and September. The resistance has also forced the coalition to shift more resources to security, away from other reconstruction projects. On September 14, Washington announced plans to divert nearly \$3.5 billion in Iraq reconstruction funds to short-term programs focused primarily on improving security. Of these diverted funds, \$1.8 billion will go toward training and equipping the new police force, border patrol, and Iraqi National Guard units.

#### Measures of Effectiveness

Amid conflicting claims about progress and setbacks in Iraq, how should the state of the resistance be judged? An idea can be gained by answering several key questions:

Is the resistance still in the fight? Demonstrably it is. Coalition intelligence estimates have placed resistance strength at some 20,000, and it is possible that the number of those involved in some way is much larger. The insurgency has been able to recover from its human and material losses, and resistance actions continue across a wide area of Sunni Iraq.

Is the resistance getting better organized? It seems to be, with a diversified structure across the Sunni Triangle and supporting organizational elements (finance, recruitment, planning, guidance, and direction) probably in Syria, and likely elsewhere in the region. Coordinated actions both locally and regionally and the ability to sustain fighting also suggest increasing organizational capacity.

Does the resistance control some territory? At least four areas -- Falluja, Ramadi, Tal Afar, and Samara -- appear to be, or have been, largely under resistance control. There are several other areas where control is at least contested.

Are resistance capabilities improving? The ability to engage in sustained battles indicates increasing capabilities. Resistance units are also getting larger, with groups of more than 200 in action. Insurgent forces are also capable of mounting organized resistance with some measure of tactical skill, as in Falluja in April and Baquba in June.

Has the resistance forced changes in coalition, Iraqi, or others' policies? From the beginning of organized resistance in late spring 2003 it has affected the situation in Iraq. It forced changes in military deployments, dramatically accelerated the political process, drove the UN and other international organizations from Iraq, and eviscerated the development of Iraqi government and security organs in parts of the Sunni Triangle. It has retarded reconstruction, driven some firms out of Iraq, and weakened participation in the coalition. Combined with al-Sadr's insurgency, it has forced the Iraqi government to devote major resources to defending itself rather than building a new Iraq.

Does the resistance respond to changing conditions in Iraq? The resistance has shown that it is both adaptive and creative. It has shifted tactical and operational emphasis in response to coalition operations and the emergence of the Iraqi government and security forces as targets of interest. Building on elements of the old regime, it has incorporated and exploited a diverse stream of support, including Sunni Islamists, foreign jihadis, criminals, tribal elements, and Sunni Arab nationalists. It has also seized opportunities provided by coalition actions (e.g., in Falluja and Samara) to assert itself aggressively. It has developed new tactics, especially the kidnapping of foreigners.

#### Scenarios

For the future, four broad scenarios seem consistent with the current state of the insurgency:

--Perhaps the best that can be expected is that politics in Iraq will evolve with a violent edge (perhaps a quite violent edge, as in Weimar Germany), but that some semblance of political and economic progress will come about, with the government able to claim that it more or less rules Iraq.

--The current insurgency could become an embedded feature of the Iraqi political scene, with the central government and its supporters fighting an extended war in the Sunni areas.

--At the upper end of violence would be a descent into civil war, or something like it, with a Shiite-dominated government, with or without the cooperation of the Kurds, waging war on the Sunnis. In this scenario, the central government, supported by the coalition, would essentially be fighting for survival, and not necessarily winning.

--Under some circumstances, the resistance, especially its core of former Baathists, could make a bid for power. This could arise in perhaps three ways: a violent seizure of power against a faltering government and a weakened coalition; a legal assumption of power relying on political means backed by violence; and overt and covert infiltration of the government and political process over time.

## Conclusion

Overall, the prognosis seems to be a violent political future for Iraq, with the real question being just how violent. After a long period of denial, both the coalition and the Iraqi government increasingly appear to recognize the challenge that the Sunni insurgency presents.

The creation of essentially a new team in Baghdad -- at the U.S. embassy, in the command of coalition forces, and in the Iraqi government -- already seems to be changing the approach to combating the insurgency. There appears to be a kind of "campaign plan" for dealing with the Sunni-based resistance, and perhaps with the Shiite insurgency as well. The U.S. and Iraqi governments are betting that they can achieve enough order in Iraq to hold meaningful elections in January 2005. That will not be an easy bet to cover, but it needs to be covered.

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