

# Insurgency in Iraq: Implications and Challenges

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## Brief Analysis

### **M**ICHAEL EISENSTADT The War and the Resistance

Some have argued that the coalition might not be facing stiff resistance today if it had fought the war differently. To be sure, coalition forces would likely have killed more of the regime's Fedayeen Saddam cannon fodder if they had invaded from Turkey. Yet, those individuals most crucial to the current resistance (e.g., members of the Republican Guard and Special Security Organization; midlevel Ba'athist officials) would most likely have gone to ground and escaped to fight another day. Coalition war planners made a deliberate, fundamental tradeoff, choosing "speed and shock" to promote a rapid collapse of Saddam's regime rather than pursuing a more thorough defeat of specific regime elements from the start. Although they made the correct choice, coalition planners are now dealing with the inevitable consequences of that decision as they face an armed opposition composed of former regime loyalists. Coalition forces should have been better prepared to move quickly into the Sunni Triangle after the fall of Baghdad, though it is unclear whether they would have known who to look for beyond the most senior adherents of the former regime.

## Defining Victory

It is unrealistic to expect a halt to attacks on coalition forces and Iraqis working with the coalition any time soon. Because the insurgency's roots are deeply woven into the fabric of Iraqi society, simply limiting its impact will be a challenge. By their nature, even successful counterinsurgency campaigns take a decade or more to bear fruit, as was demonstrated by the British in Malaya in the 1950s and 1960s; by the Peruvians with the Sendero Luminoso in the 1980s and 1990s; and by the Turks with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) during the same period. Therefore, the coalition must prepare for a long-term challenge. The two main criteria for success are: first, transferring power to a stable, legitimate Iraqi government capable of dealing with insurgents on its own; and second, integrating Sunni Triangle residents into the nascent Iraqi administration and giving them a stake in the future of the country. The next six months will be crucial to meeting both of these criteria.

## Long-Term Effects of the War

Every war sets loose social and political forces that have a greater impact on the ultimate outcome of the war than the actual result of combat itself. For example, Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 led to the emergence of Hizballah, which played a central role in Israel's eventual withdrawal from the country two decades later. The U.S. war to liberate Kuwait in 1991 produced a dramatic military victory, but it was followed by sanctions fatigue, the rise of Osama bin Laden's movement, and U.S.-Saudi tensions. Many of the coalition's current actions will undoubtedly lead to political and social outcomes that, while only dimly perceptible at the moment, may have a dramatic long-term impact on Iraq and, quite probably, the region as a whole. Therefore, it is too early to judge the outcome and consequences of the war.

## JEFFREY WHITE

Resistance attacks against the coalition have increased dramatically since late September, from around twenty attacks per day during the summer to a peak of fifty attacks per day in early November. Indeed, October and November accounted for approximately half of all coalition deaths since the end of major combat operations in May. Despite this evidence of increasing capabilities on the part of the opposition, there was no "tipping point" during which resistance elements achieved a strategic advantage over coalition forces, nor did these elements reach a "high-water mark" in their operations during this timeframe. The resistance has demonstrated that it will continue to adapt to the changing situation on the ground, even as coalition forces adjust their own operations in accordance with resistance activities.

## How Have Resistance Forces Improved Their Capabilities?

- Resistance cells appear to be getting larger. The average size of cells has increased from an average of five to ten members during the summer to as large as twenty-five members today. As many as a hundred highly organized insurgents participated in the intense battles that took place in Samarra on November 30.
- Increased coordination and articulation of attacks. The resistance now seems able to conduct operations with a variety of capabilities rather than merely relying on simple attacks.
- Improved planning capabilities. Incidents such as the rocket attack on the Rashid Hotel on October 26 and the coordinated suicide bombings of Iraqi police stations on November 22 required serious logistical planning.
- Improved targeting of coalition forces. Resistance forces appear to know which targets are most vulnerable. They choose highly visible and symbolic targets and know when and where to strike them. For example, in the Samarra incident, the insurgents were well aware that the convoy was escorting large amounts of Iraqi currency.
- Improved intelligence. Resistance forces have penetrated both coalition facilities and Iraqi security forces. There have been scattered reports that some members of the Iraqi police are cooperating with the resistance by providing

information about the coalition's operations or location.

- Increasingly mobile. Resistance cells are moving from one area to another, mostly within the Sunni Triangle. These resistance elements are reportedly not executing attacks within their own communities, choosing instead to conduct their operations elsewhere.
- A variety of weapons. Many of the early resistance actions featured only one or two weapons systems. More recent attacks, however, have involved a variety of weapons employed in a concerted way (e.g., the Samarra incident, in which insurgents used roadside explosives, rocket-propelled grenades, and automatic weapons, along with efficient means of transport).

#### Implications

- More mobile, deployable cells. Coalition forces may find resistance cells becoming even larger and more coordinated.
- Welding of resistance activities with popular opposition. Incidents such as the Samarra battles, during which coalition forces unleashed massive firepower, can radicalize a local population against the coalition.
- Better resistance commanders. Resistance leaders are constantly learning more about the situation on the ground and becoming more efficient and elusive in commanding their cells.
- New weapons. Although antitank guided missiles have yet to be used against coalition forces, the former regime did have them in its inventory. The resistance may also eventually employ 160-millimeter mortar rounds, which are difficult to aim but extremely destructive.
- More quality attacks. Coalition forces should expect more attacks that feature careful organization, planning, and articulation. Resistance forces may also attempt to isolate and destroy a specific coalition element, as they may have been attempting to do in Samarra.
- Attacks on senior and high-visibility coalition officials. As resistance tactics evolve, they may eventually target those officials most vital to the execution of the coalition activities.

#### MICHAEL KNIGHTS

One of the primary limitations on coalition operations in Iraq is actionable intelligence. The coalition is fighting an enemy whose own intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities are very good. One encouraging trend is the progression from current to predictive intelligence; coalition analysts are now attempting to predict resistance actions and generate early warnings.

#### Intelligence

Human intelligence is clearly the most important tool for defeating the resistance forces, but it takes a great deal of time to set up an effective human intelligence network. Every Iraqi policeman sent out on a patrol becomes a valuable sensor that reports information to the coalition's intelligence liaisons. Moreover, the coalition's increased number of raids and captures are bringing in quality intelligence that often leads to the foiling of attacks by resistance forces. Intelligence analysts are also beginning to use tribal connections to develop human intelligence, even recruiting new Iraqi security personnel from certain tribes.

In addition, coalition forces have been profiling and monitoring areas of resistance activity such as mortar launch sites, ambush sites, and safehouses. An intelligence picture is beginning to form that will expand exponentially over the next several months. One major concern for the coalition is ensuring that it does not lose this intelligence picture once the United States begins its upcoming troop rotation. It is essential to ensure that hard-fought expertise is not lost as intelligence analysts are replaced in Iraq.

## Standoff Strikes

The increase of coalition operations that rely on artillery, helicopter, and air strikes is a logical development in the counterinsurgency campaign. The coalition is facing an increasingly elusive enemy that engages in a greater number of long-range attacks. In response, coalition forces have undertaken standoff strikes of their own. Such tactics enable the coalition to strike at enemy forces nearly instantaneously, regardless of whether they are operating from a great distance. These strikes have taken several forms:

- The killing of enemy personnel. Operations of this sort typically include helicopters or unmanned aerial vehicles that track insurgents and launch a precision strike at an opportune moment. Such strikes are nearly instantaneous and very lethal, as they are not preceded by a warning.
- Suppressing terrain with tactical value. Operations of this sort typically involve the coalition destroying suspected ambush sites, observation posts, or safehouses (which occasionally harbor resistance forces). The fact that resistance forces do not know if or when coalition forces will strike such areas often deters them from using these sites.
- Coercion and signaling to the enemy with military force. Operations of this sort involve using brute military force against targets that the coalition knows are empty and unused. Such targets include abandoned buildings that have previously been used as resistance safehouses.

The first two types of strikes are logical from a military perspective, as they deny the resistance a needed capability. The third type is more problematic, however, as it often sends Iraqi civilians mixed messages about the coalition's overall objective.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Ryan Phillips.

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