

## CIG Assessment, 23 February 2007

### IRAQ: THE STRUGGLE FOR ANBAR

*This paper was discussed by a Current Intelligence Group and approved on 23 February 2007.*

#### Key Judgements

- I. The Sunni insurgency in Anbar remains potent. The Multinational Forces (MNF) have had some successes, but these have often been local and temporary. The insurgents have proved resilient; support for the insurgency in Anbar is undiminished.
- II. Large areas of Anbar are outside effective MNF or Iraqi security force (ISF) control. In several towns and in rural areas insurgents are able to operate freely. Where the MNF has an established presence, or patrol frequently, the insurgents' ability to exert control is less. But Al Qaida in Iraq's (AQ-I) 'Islamic State of Iraq' remains largely aspirational.
- III. Anbar insurgents include Sunni Arab nationalists and jihadists. Divisions between groups are blurred. Tribal and family connections are important, as is the power of money and associated criminal activity. We see no coherent Sunni Arab nationalist leadership, nor the emergence of a single dominant nationalist group.
- IV. Sunni tribal opposition to AQ-I has resurfaced. Prospects for the Anbar tribal groups will depend on their gaining broader support among the Sunni population. This will continue to prove difficult as long as rival tribal and insurgent groups compete for local power and influence. More broadly, most Anbaris have no confidence in local political structures or in Maliki's Shia-dominated government and its efforts at national reconciliation.
- V. Central government's influence in Anbar is weak. The provincial authorities send the right signals about economic and security problems, but they have been able to deliver little. Local administrative capacity is very limited and dogged by tribal rivalries. Living conditions across the province remain poor.
- VI. There is little prospect of improvement in security. In a particularly hostile environment, the Iraqi security forces will require MNF combat support beyond 2007, or risk ceding *de facto* control of further large areas to the insurgents.

## IRAQ: THE STRUGGLE FOR ANBAR

*At the request of the Iraq Senior Officials Group, we examine violence in Anbar and the threat it poses to MNF and Iraq's central government. We consider the prospects for Iraqi-led opposition to Islamist extremists in Anbar and the ability of central government to assert authority.*

### Background

1. Anbar province is at the core of the Sunni heartlands of central and northern Iraq (see map at Annex A). Its population of some 1 million is almost entirely Sunni Arab, mainly living in a series of large towns along the Euphrates River valley leading up to the Syrian border. Under Saddam Anbar proved difficult to control; since 2003, the province has been a centre of resistance to the "occupation" and subsequent emergence of a Shia-dominated Iraqi government. The Sunni population has largely supported the resistance: sporadic polling has shown a high degree of support for attacks on the Multinational Forces (MNF) and for MNF withdrawal. The strength of Sunni feeling, together with proximity to the Syrian border, has made Anbar an attractive base for foreign jihadists.

### Insurgency: tenacious and undiminished

2. Despite the deployment of some 30,000 MNF and (on paper) around 10,000 Iraqi security forces (ISF), the Sunni insurgency in Anbar remains potent. The MNF have had some successes, but these have often been local and temporary. The insurgents have proved resilient: capable of withstanding losses of both personnel (including senior leaders) and material. We judge the strength of and support for the insurgency in Anbar to be undiminished: the trend in reported attacks has been steadily upward since 2003 (see Annex B). (It is too early to conclude that the slight fall since November represents a new trend.) After Baghdad, Anbar is the most violent province in Iraq, accounting for 21% of all reported attacks. Most are against the MNF, causing almost half of their total casualties over the past year; but attacks against ISF have also increased and are now causing around 20% of their total casualties. Most attacks involve improvised explosive devices, mortars, rockets and small arms. Suicide attacks are at about the same level as in Baghdad but cause far fewer casualties, mainly targeting MNF/ISF. With its largely homogenous Sunni population, there is little sectarian violence, although some sectarian car bombings in Baghdad are prepared and mounted from Anbar.

3. The nature of the Sunni insurgency in Anbar is complex. As elsewhere in Sunni areas, we continue to judge that insurgents can be divided loosely into Sunni Arab nationalists and jihadists. But divisions between groups are blurred. Tribal and family connections remain important, as does the power of money and associated criminal activity. The insurgency is closely interwoven with local competition for resources and power with tribal dynamics increasingly overlaid by rival insurgent or jihadist loyalties. Local power rests on the use and threat of force. We continue to see no coherent Sunni Arab nationalist leadership, nor the emergence of a single dominant nationalist group. We judge Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) is the most prominent jihadist group and is the single most potent insurgent network; it is now overwhelmingly Iraqi, albeit partially foreign led.

## Insurgency: disunited

4. The Sunni insurgency is disunited. In the past this has escalated periodically into violence, usually involving clashes between AQ-I and other insurgent groups, notably in Ramadi in late 2005 to early 2006. Reporting indicates that since September 2006 tribal opposition to AQ-I in Ramadi has resurfaced. [...] some tribal groups want to stop AQ-I violence against civilians (while seeking accelerated MNF withdrawal), but we judge the main motivation is to achieve local power and financial gain: some tribal elements are in criminal competition with AQ-I. [...] As in the past, AQ-I is likely to try and suppress any opposition through a sustained campaign of assassination. Propaganda effort has also been increased.

## Who controls Anbar?

5. We judge that large areas of Anbar are outside effective MNF or ISF control. In several towns and in rural areas insurgents are able to operate freely. Where the MNF has an established presence, such as in Fallujah and Ramadi, or where MNF patrol frequently, the insurgents' ability to exert control is less. We judge that the 'Islamic State of Iraq', announced by AQ-I in October 2006 and endorsed by senior Al Qaida leader al-Zawahiri, remains aspirational. [...] attempts to impose Islamist extremist ideology have had only limited and isolated success; in some areas such attempts have bolstered local tribal opposition. We judge support for AQ-I is not driven primarily by their ideology, other factors are more important: their success, their "brand", money, coercion and intimidation.

6. MNF report ISF capability in Anbar is growing. Recruitment remains inadequate but is holding up, due partly to encouragement from some tribal leaders and partly to the need for money. Security control has nominally passed to the Iraqis around Fallujah and parts of Ramadi. The Iraqi army's 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Divisions routinely engage in locally successful counter-insurgency operations with MNF support. But we judge their capability is patchy and fragile. MNF do not know the detailed sectarian composition of the ISF, but assess the large majority of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division to be Shia; most do not come from Anbar. The locally-recruited Iraqi police (largely Sunni) face consistent intimidation. They are under increasing attack – a suicide attack on 14 February killed a Ramadi police chief and 10 others.

7. Central government's influence in Anbar is weak, particularly outside Ramadi and Fallujah. Many of the provincial Sunni leaders have moved abroad. Those who remain and participate in politics have become targets: the governor has survived several assassination attempts; local government officials are frequently murdered. The governorate council and Governor Ma'moun send the right signals about economic and security problems, but they have been able to deliver little. Local administrative capacity is very limited and dogged by tribal rivalries. There is no secure banking system. [...] Tribal, insurgent and jihadist groups compete for control of resources, and the black market in fuel is pervasive. Living conditions across Anbar remain poor. In Fallujah, which has received substantial attention since 2004, most homes have some electricity and water but there is no sewage system. Anbar's Provincial Reconstruction Team is currently unable to implement projects for lack of security; the impact of those projects that have been completed is unclear.

## Prospects

8. Baghdad dominates the new Iraqi security effort. Some additional US forces are to deploy to Anbar, but we judge there is little prospect of significant improvement in security. If the new Baghdad Security Plan works, there is a risk that some Sunni insurgents may be displaced temporarily into Anbar; other Anbar-based insurgents may refocus effort from Baghdad closer to home. In a particularly hostile environment, we judge the ISF will need MNF combat support beyond 2007, or risk ceding *de facto* control of further large areas to the insurgents. MNF have slipped the planned transfer of security authority to the Iraqis in Anbar from November 2007 to early 2008.

9. Prospects for the Anbar tribal groups fighting AQ-I will depend on their gaining broader support among the Sunni population. We judge this will prove difficult as long as rival tribal and insurgent groups compete for local power and influence. More broadly, most Anbaris have no confidence in local political structures or in Maliki's Shia-dominated government and its efforts at national reconciliation. [...]

ANNEX A

**IRAQ: Al Anbar Province**



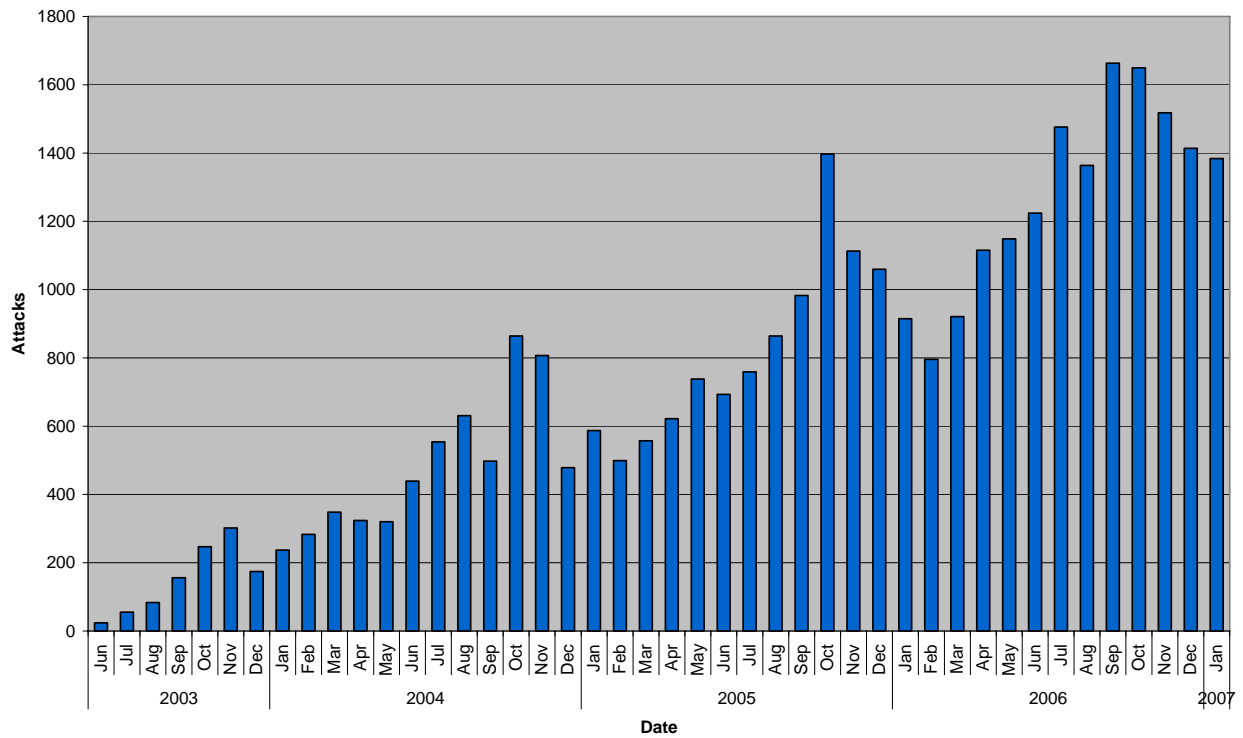
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Anbar province, corresponding to Multinational Division-West (MND-W).

## ANNEX B



Reported monthly attacks in MND-W against MNF or ISF.