

## The Iraqi Quagmire You Don't Hear About

By Michael Cecire : 20 Aug 2007

Say there's a group of people in Iraq fighting what looks increasingly like an unwinnable war. The core of this group is made up of foreigners intent on a mission of 'liberation' in a land historically alien to their ideologies. In the process of enacting their designs, this group has suffered considerable casualties, sunk untold sums in resources, and lost many once-reliable friends. Sound familiar? This is the current state of international jihadism, an institution with a situation grimmer and an outlook more despairing than for the US-led coalition.



There *is* a quagmire going on in Mesopotamia. Lost in the partisan heave-ho is strong evidence of a situation that's proving intractable, perilous, and with no end in sight. Yet, it's not our war; it's the one being waged by the forces of international jihadism. For as much as the Coalition has sacrificed - over a half-trillion dollars, nearly four-thousand dead, over-drafted international political capital, and upsetting the relative stability of certain commodity markets - our enormous commitment is a relative sideshow compared with the problems facing our enemy. Pound for pound, they've lost a lot more than gained and done so at a much more grievous rate than we.

The motivations of anti-coalition forces are vast and often imperceptible to casual observers, but terrorist forces seem to have three major, and perhaps competing, goals in their war in Iraq. First, certain elements seek to remake Iraq into a Sunni-led Islamist State while others seek a Shiite Iranian satellite (perhaps unwittingly). Finally, the jihadists, along with affiliates and sympathizers, yearn to humiliate the west militarily - particularly that of the United States - while demonstrating Islamist cultural and military ascendancy.

Unfortunately for our enemies, none of these goals has come to fruition. While some have become truer than others at various points of the Iraq endeavor, it is highly unlikely that somewhere in Waziristan there's a cave of jihadi intelligence analysts declaring anything resembling victory on any of these fronts. As things presently stand, Sunni opposition has largely fractured between the larger (and more powerful) groups forging alliances with the Coalition in response to the heavy-handedness of their hard-to-get-along erstwhile allies, Al-Qaeda in Iraq. As is now rather well-reported, the terrific gains made by Coalition forces in al-Anbar province are a direct outgrowth of this phenomenon, with further evidence of Sunni tribal cooperation mounting day-by-day. Of course, describing Iraqi Sunnis as a monolith is poor oversimplification, but for the Al-Qaeda in Iraq sorts bent on remaking Iraq as the locus of an international jihadi Sunni state, their support among even the most violently chauvinistic of Sunnis has waned considerably since the summer of 2006.

Meanwhile, Moqtada al-Sadr, the sectarian poster-boy and Iranian stooge, has seen his stock collapse over the past year. His influence has increasingly diminished as he overplayed his once artificially inflated hand. Since then, the Iraqi government and the Coalition has been able to call his bluff, forcing Sadr to flee to Iran on several occasions, fracturing of his once-vaunted Mahdi army, and furthering his party's political isolation. His followers, many of whom form the core of the Shiite extremists, are in one way or another subject to Iranian influence and promote a path towards Iraqi servility to their Persian neighbor. Needless to say, this has not proven to be entirely popular even in Shiite-dominated Iraq since many seem to have higher aspirations than being a Shiite buffer for Iran. Of course, ongoing media coverage of Shiite violence paints a picture of an increasingly belligerent Mahdi Army

while merely footnoting that this reality exists due to Sadr's influence steadily imploding. One could make the argument that that, now that the Madhi Army has splintered, its more aggressive factions are hankering for a fight. But the truth remains that the Sadr militias are today far from being able to wield such power as in 2004 when Shiite militias revolted *en masse* against Coalition forces. Divide & conquer.

Militarily, the United States and some of its allies are seen as being bruised, but this has more basis as a political talking point than as an honest reflection of events on the ground. Without a doubt, morale among US troops is high and continues to rise in proportion to the rate of successes. Where Coalition troops encounter enemy combatants, there is generally but one outcome: victory. Instead, our enemies are increasingly reliant on media misinformation and sensational campaigns to portray their war as being anything other than what it actually is: a downward spiral. Although it's true that the United States military is suffering strains from the extended rigors of warfighting and peacemaking, ours is not a broken army and the enemy sure as hell doesn't have themselves another Afghanistan; as things stand, the enemy is a long way from being able to pop the proverbial corks of (non-alcoholic) champagne and relish American military recession.

Naturally, these are broad points composed of myriad constituent strategies and designs, but as things stand the enemy has a very long road to travel. When Iraq War critics employ loaded terms like 'quagmire' so freely, it's done in a manner that suggests aversion to actual debate on the realities on the ground. This can be best exemplified in Sen. Harry Reid's laughably premature declaration of defeat or Sen. Barack Obama's clumsy reasoning that genocide, as the likely result of impulsive withdrawal, should be of no concern to the United States. Most importantly, such statements highlight an uncomfortable unwillingness on the part of many war detractors to see the situation in a rounder, fuller perspective - that victory is an option and that defeat isn't an exclusively American, or a partisan, problem. Yes, there is much work ahead for the Coalition. And yes, the surprising turnaround of fortune could reverse just as quickly if we do not exploit the situation. But for now, momentum is on our side and not for our enemies.