



THICKENING THE LINES: SONS OF IRAQ, A COMBAT MULTIPLIER

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Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them.

—T.E. Lawrence, "Twenty-Seven Articles," *The Arab Bulletin*, 20 August 1917

Over time, if you build networks of trust, these will grow like roots into the population, displacing the enemy's networks, bringing them out into the open to fight you, and seizing the initiative. These networks include local allies, community leaders, local security forces...in your area.

—LTC David Kilcullen, "Twenty-Eight Articles," *Military Review* (May-June 2006)

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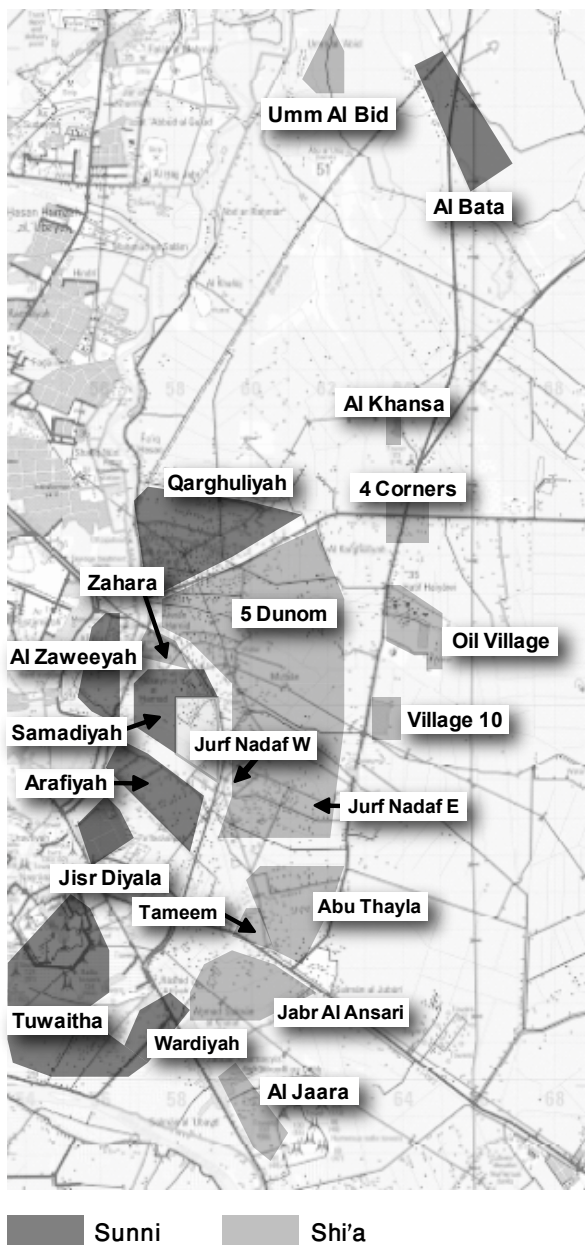
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PHOTO: Sons of Iraq guard a checkpoint in Qarguhliyah. (courtesy of the author)

WHEN 3RD SQUADRON, 1st U.S. Cavalry Regiment, deployed to Iraq in March 2007 as part of 3d Heavy Brigade Combat Team (HBCT), 3d Infantry Division (Mechanized), the third of five "surge" brigades, the unit inherited a complex battlespace that had not been routinely occupied by large numbers of coalition forces (CF) since late 2004. Only two under-strength cavalry troops conducting economy-of-force operations for Multi-National Division-Baghdad patrolled the entire Mada'in Qada, an area east of the Diyala and Tigris Rivers approximately the size of Rhode Island. As a result, the security situation deteriorated to the extent that forces operating out of central Baghdad labeled it the "wild, wild East." Large and well-organized extremist forces—both Shi'a and Sunni—operated with impunity and virtually held citizens and local government representatives hostage. Although the surge of American forces brought CF units there for the first time in several years, the complex environment and poor security situation made counterinsurgency progress slow and difficult. After creating forward deployed bases to better project troops into the population, 3-1 CAV had to overcome some initial challenges to make progress.

In late July, a coincidence of outside events and the application of counterinsurgency (COIN) fundamentals presented a way to improve security through the use of local nationals as security contractors to protect critical infrastructure. What started as a grass-roots movement that gained traction in one small portion of the battlespace became a fundamental part of the squadron's COIN strategy; improved security allowed for economic, political, and social development, which won the sustained support of the people.

This extraordinarily effective strategy used "Sons of Iraq" security contractors to thicken CF lines, facilitate reconciliation in local villages,



empower Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), connect the local government to the people, and improve economic conditions.

Wave from the West

The idea behind the Sons of Iraq originated in the Al Anbar province of Western Iraq. During the summer of 2006, insurgents associated with Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) assassinated a prominent Sunni sheik and hid his body from the family for three days so that they could not arrange for its burial in accordance with Muslim customs. The

outrage over this act, in combination with improved local security, encouraged a group of Sunni tribal leaders led by Sheikh Abdoul Sattar Buzaigh al-Rishawi to form an alliance with CF against AQI. They called the movement *Sahwah al Anbar*, or “Awakening in Anbar.”

Supported by CF and the Iraqi government, the alliance eventually encompassed 41 tribes or sub-tribes, mostly Sunni, in the Anbar Province. The alliance conducted a highly successful counteroffensive targeting AQI. By the summer of 2007, the Anbar Awakening had largely driven AQI from the province and killed dozens of key AQI leaders. The success earned Sheikh Sattar personal meetings with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and U.S. President George W. Bush. The results of the Awakening were concrete and provocative. The increased security meant that stability and reconstruction operations could begin, prosperity could return, and disenfranchised Sunnis could have a chance at returning to the polity. These tangible benefits planted the seeds for further expansion in the summer of 2006.

During the intervening year, AQI had conducted a protracted campaign to separate Shi'a areas in Baghdad from their lines of communication to Iranian support. The resulting violence had a devastating effect on prosperous areas along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. By summer 2007, deteriorating security and essential services in the Mada'in Qada made the Awakening an attractive prospect to Sunnis living along ethnic fault lines. This spread of the Awakening coincided with the surge of U.S. combat forces in Iraq and the introduction of a brigade-sized unit into the Mada'in Qada. Increased CF presence helped lift the pall of fear and strengthened the will of Iraqi Security Forces; local citizens, tired of endless violence, viewed the Awakening as a chance to end chaos.

From a military point of view, using the Awakening to solve problems in the Jisr Diyala Nahia made perfect sense. During weekly operational assessments, squadron leaders and staff discussed the development of an Awakening-type movement made up of Iraqi security volunteers to augment under-strength Iraqi police and military units in the squadron's area of operation. It quickly became clear that the volunteers had the potential to be much bigger than just a local security augmentation force.

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As Colonel Wayne W. Grigsby, Jr., commander of the 3d HBCT, 3ID, stated, the security volunteer movement “may represent an opportunity to implement the art of COIN warfare by applying pressure on extremists along multiple lines of operation.”

For the COIN fight, volunteers would provide great military value. Local citizens knew most of the members of their communities and could easily pick out those who did not belong. They knew which neighbors were tacit or active supporters of insurgent groups. They knew who could provide timely and accurate information on insurgent activity, and they gave the squadron commander vital human intelligence essential to success. Additionally, the squadron’s attached human intelligence collection teams (HCTs) could develop and mature these local sources to create a more detailed, accurate picture of insurgent and criminal cell networks and organizations.

The squadron staff saw the immediate economic impact of hiring mostly young, unemployed local nationals to perform security functions in their neighborhoods. This hiring quickly injected cash into the local economy and generated additional spending and growth as local shop owners increased stocks or expanded their stores to keep up with increased demand. Additionally, the security volunteer movement reduced the insurgent and criminal pool by providing an alternate source of employment to young Iraqi males, thus making them less susceptible to enticement by insurgents, criminals, and extremists.

The movement also increased buy-in among local residents. The individual sense of pride that stemmed from taking positive action to reduce violence in their local areas would spread to entire communities. Buy-in by local communities makes them part of the solution rather than just spectators to the counterinsurgency struggle. At its heart, COIN warfare is a contest for the support of the people, and the volunteer movement seemed to provide the opportunity to make significant headway in that struggle.



U.S. Army, SPC Jeffery Sandstrum

An Iraqi security volunteer guards his street in the Adhamiya district of Baghdad, Iraq, 17 November 2007.

Finally, the squadron’s initial planning indicated that the volunteer movement might provide a venue for political mobilization of those who felt disconnected from their government and powerless to effect change. The Iraqi security volunteer structure and organization provided networks for passing information and coordinating political activity. The new sense of involvement bled over to the political process as local citizens became more demanding of the Nahia and Qada governments. It allowed the government to connect to the people

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and publicize progress in restoring essential services and economic development. In short, the volunteer movement seemed to be a textbook application of COIN principles. The arrival of the Awakening in the Jisr Diyala Nahia in late July 2007 presented the squadron with an opportunity to put theoretical planning into practice.

Humble Beginnings and Near Disaster: Arafia

Even after several weeks of planning, using Iraqi security volunteers was still a continuous learning process. The squadron began a deliberate process of establishing the first group of local security contractors—now variously called Iraqi Police Volunteers, Concerned Citizens, Concerned Local Citizens, or Sons of Iraq—based around well-established local contacts. From the beginning, the squadron was careful to look at the security contractors from a military perspective, considering what checkpoints and staffing were required to secure critical infrastructure and local areas. The squadron's leadership referred to this as the "*New York Times* test"; that is, we had to be able to justify the use of American taxpayer dollars with a military necessity that readers would understand if it were to hit the front page of the *New York Times*. With military necessity in mind, the squadron staff developed a matrix to determine manning and equipment authorizations for each proposed security group.

Each group was to be responsible for a certain number of checkpoints as determined by agreement between the Sons of Iraq leader and the ground-owning troop or company commander. We authorized up to 12 personnel to operate each checkpoint, with a quick reaction force of 12 additional personnel authorized for each group of eight checkpoints. Each Sons of Iraq group received an initial stipend for radios, Iraqi flags, and uniforms (initially hats, reflective belts, and T-shirts, but later long-sleeve shirts and trousers). The salary for each Sons of Iraq member was \$300 per month (70 percent of the salary of a local Iraqi police officer) with salaries for checkpoint leaders and the overall Sons of Iraq leader slightly higher. (Sons of Iraq salaries were later reduced to \$240 per person.) We paid the Sons of Iraq groups monthly with money allocated through the Commander's Emergency Relief Fund (CERP), a funding source drawn from congressional supplemental appropriations.

Funding was an obstacle in itself, requiring several legal reviews to determine if the squadron could legally pay locals to secure critical infrastructure in their neighborhoods before work began. We told Sons of Iraq leaders that they could not use the money to buy weapons or ammunition, and because each adult Iraqi male could keep an AK47 and two magazines of ammunition in his house for self-defense, the squadron (in conjunction with the local National Police commander) authorized Sons of Iraq members to carry their personal weapons in their security areas.

Then, the squadron began the test case in a small neighborhood called Arafia, a predominately Sunni village on the northern outskirts of the city of Jisr Diyala. Proceeding deliberately, the squadron located a leader for the Sons of Iraq group. The company commander responsible for the area used his relationship with a local *mukhtar* (mayor) to provide an initial base from which to build the first Sons of Iraq group. After coordinating the scope of the project with the mukhtar, the company began a deliberate process of screening potential candidates. The squadron entered data about each candidate into a biometric database and the squadron S2 section screened the data for adverse information in several CF intelligence databases. (Later, the squadron provided all the names of Sons of Iraq recruits to the local ISF leader so that the Iraqi minister of interior could vet and approve them.) The recruits signed an oath renouncing violence and promising to guard the areas within their checkpoints. The new Sons of Iraq received uniforms; basic instruction on checkpoint operations, search procedures, weapons handling, and rules of engagement; and basic legal instruction. Coalition forces initially facilitated this training, but later the squadron used Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).

Once cleared, equipped, trained, and appropriately badged, the Sons of Iraq began constructing checkpoints and assuming control of areas. Despite logistical challenges—including legal restrictions that prevented using operational funds to purchase material for local national projects—the company created a functional Sons of Iraq group in three weeks.

On 18 August 2007, a suicide bomber attacked the house of the Sons of Iraq leader in Arafia while a CF patrol was inspecting checkpoints. Hussein Allawi, one of the Sons of Iraq members guarding the house,

tackled the terrorist and prevented him from reaching the patrol inside the compound, sacrificing his own life when the suicide bomber detonated his explosives. This tragic event could have destroyed the momentum developed by the squadron; the Son of Iraq killed in the attack was the eldest son of the Sons of Iraq leader. However, through careful consequence management and information operations, the squadron was able to turn the attack into a positive example of a courageous Iraqi citizen who took positive action to restore security for his family and his community. The sacrifice of this one man helped galvanize support among Iraqi citizens for ending the violence and cooperating with coalition forces to defeat the terrorists. Hussein Allawi's actions saved the lives of at least four U.S. Soldiers that day, a fact President Bush noted several days later in a speech. From humble beginnings, the Sons of Iraq program overcame a major hurdle and achieved positive strategic effects within the first month of its existence.

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Expanding South: Tuwaitha

Events in Arafia provided publicity and impetus for the squadron to expand the Sons of Iraq program. Again, the squadron chose the area for expansion based on the presence of an identified leader with whom the ground-owning company commander had a strong relationship and on the need to provide security that neither CF nor ISF could provide. Unlike Arafia, however, the next area for expansion was far more contentious after the squadron's arrival.

In the late summer of 2007, the squadron held a series of meetings that brought together members of the Nahia Council, the ISF, and key tribal leaders. Overwhelmingly frustrated with the continued level of violence in an area just south of Jisr Diyala called Tuwaitha, the leaders agreed to take a leap

of faith and establish a new Sons of Iraq group. Tuwaitha was the scene of nearly continuous fighting between AQI and Iraqi and coalition forces for years. The enemy attacked with IEDs nearly every time patrols moved through the key maneuver corridor of the area. The close contact and strong presence of AQI in Tuwaitha led the squadron to use a slightly different technique to implement the Sons of Iraq program. The resulting operation, Tuwaitha Sunrise, became the model for the entire brigade to use to establish Sons of Iraq groups in unsecured, non-permissive regions. In this three-part model, ISF and CF together cleared extremists from a specific region, Sons of Iraq groups held the area, then CF in conjunction with local government started to build infrastructure and capacity aimed at winning the population.

Operation Tuwaitha Sunrise began with a deliberate area reconnaissance and clearance operation that included Sons of Iraq, ISF, and CF. After identifying a leader and deciding on checkpoint locations via map and unmanned aerial vehicle reconnaissance, the squadron developed a deliberate plan that integrated route clearance teams, unmanned aerial vehicle coverage, close combat aviation support, fixed-wing close-air support, armed reconnaissance, National Police soldiers (Shurta), and CF units equipped with armored gun trucks and tracked combat vehicles. After thorough reconnaissance overflights, CF and ISF coordinated with the new Sons of Iraq leader and many of his chosen security



U.S. Army SSG Cristian Cea, from 3d Infantry Division, talks to a member of an Iraqi concerned citizens group in Tuwaitha, Iraq, 5 September 2007.

personnel at a predetermined point along the major line of communication. The Sons of Iraq then led ISF and CF along the road with route clearance teams to clear it of potential IEDs. During the operation, the squadron maintained constant intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) overhead while also conducting terrain-denial fires against likely insurgent sanctuary areas with 120-mm mortars from a nearby combat outpost as well as with 155-mm artillery and rocket fire from AH64 and OH58 helicopters. Fixed wing aviation assets provided low-level show-of-force demonstrations. All of these terrain denial fires demonstrated the capabilities to bring operational fires to bear to prevent AQI forces from maneuvering against the Sons of Iraq, ISF, and CF involved in the operation.

As the forward elements cleared the area along the route, trailing elements began establishing Sons of Iraq checkpoints to secure the ground gained. Earth-moving equipment, supplied by the Sons of Iraq leader and paid for with a portion of the initial CERP stipend for the security contract, created barriers around each checkpoint. Overwatched by CF, ISF, and aviation assets, the newly established Sons of Iraq checkpoints were critical in retaining ground won during the clearance operation. Strengthened by ISF and CF in a quick reaction force role, the Sons of Iraq were able to fight off several counterattacks by AQI forces over the next several weeks. A second operation conducted several days later extended the security area and established additional checkpoints along key routes.

During Operations Tuwaitha Sunrise I and II, the Sons of Iraq, ISF, and CF cleared more than 20 kilometers of key routes. In doing so, they located and destroyed 10 emplaced IEDs and the materials to make many more; located, cleared, and destroyed four AQI safe houses; killed or captured at least six AQI leaders and fighters (the Sons of Iraq reported far more AQI killed than this but those totals could not be verified); and established 20 Sons of Iraq checkpoints, four ISF checkpoints, and one Facility Protective Services checkpoint to hold the terrain and prevent further AQI incursions.

By the end of September, a sense of normalcy had returned to Tuwaitha, with economic activity and vehicle and pedestrian traffic increasing throughout the fall. These operations also strengthened the ties between the squadron and the newly installed Sons

of Iraq leader, Mahmood Jablowi. Immediately following Tuwaitha Sunrise, the squadron conducted a civil medical engagement and humanitarian aid drop at Jablowi's house, solidifying his ability to provide for the local people of the area and enhancing his stature. With access to the city of Jisr Diyala, Jablowi became the Tuwaitha representative to the Jisr Diyala Nahia Council, a seat that had been vacant for months. He later became a key advocate for the expansion of the Sons of Iraq program south to areas around the city of Salmon Pak. Moreover, he became an important member of the Sheik's Support Council, an improvisation by the Government of Iraq (GoI) to attempt to influence the growth and power of the "Awakening" movement. Operation Tuwaitha Sunrise represented the dawn of a new phase of Sons of Iraq expansion and was a model for implementation of the program in non-permissive areas.

Expanding North: Qarguhliyah

Tied as it was to the Anbar Awakening, the Sons of Iraq movement from its inception was predominately Sunni and predominately anti-AQI. The potential of the program to enhance security was universal; however, the squadron had to carefully examine further expansion into the northern area of its battlespace, the Qarguhliyah area. This area includes Four-Corners and Um Al Bid, which are more mixed in terms of Shi'a and Sunni sects than the rest of the region (57 percent Shi'a and 43 percent Sunni) and have a greater security threat from Shi'a extremists and criminal groups than from AQI. As a result, the squadron modified its approach for standing-up these Sons of Iraq groups.

The squadron developed a strong relationship with two key leaders in Qarguhliyah over a period of several months. The troop commander initially established contacts to provide information on extremist activity in the area. One of these contacts—Abu Amosh, a Sunni businessman with strong tribal connections—observed the expansion of the Sons of Iraq program with interest and began working with the troop commander in the area to bring Sons of Iraq to Qarguhliyah. He began recruiting local volunteers to serve as Sons of Iraq, ensuring that they were representative of the region's demographics, split between Sunni and Shi'a. The troop recruited a Shi'a leader named

Abu Mohammed to assist with leadership of the new Sons of Iraq group. During the initial phases, the troop commander focused his new Sons of Iraq leaders on developing actionable intelligence on extremist groups. Significantly, these were mostly Shi'a extremists, and both the Shi'a and Sunni Sons of Iraq leaders collected extensive information on their activities, allowing the troop to detain several key leaders and disrupt indirect fire and IED-making cells in the area. Because there was less extremist activity in the area than elsewhere, the design of the Sons of Iraq checkpoints focused more on improving the checkpoint facilities and less on clearing areas around the checkpoints. Abu Amosh and Abu Mohammed proved to be very capable organizers, and the checkpoints rapidly became shining examples of security and visible improvements in the region. Abu Amosh also established a central Sons of Iraq headquarters and instituted a weekly meeting to bring together tribal leaders, Sons of Iraq checkpoint leaders, and—most important—the Nahia Council representative from Qarguhliyah. With encouragement from the troop and squadron commanders, this meeting became the basis of the highly organized local community council in Qarguhliyah, the first of its kind in the squadron area of operation.

The council served as an immediate venue for tribal leaders to bring their issues to the attention of ISF, CF, and the lowest official representative of the Government of Iraq. Over the course of several weeks, Abu Amosh organized the council to cover various departments including water, electricity, security, sanitation, and education. This organization allowed the council to address key concerns of the tribal leaders and pressure the Nahia Council for immediate improvement in Qarguhliyah. Aside from the council, Abu Amosh and Abu Mohammed created a widespread intelligence network that provided detailed information to both ISF and CF and allowed them to precisely target Sunni and Shi'a extremist leaders and locate the cache of arms and ammunition that facilitated their operations. The impact of this Sons of Iraq group and associated organizations was immediate and noticeable: intelligence reports of criminal activity associated with extremist groups increased with unprecedented alacrity; kidnapping, car-jacking, and extortion dropped to nearly zero; the local economy boomed from the increased

security and injection of available cash from Sons of Iraq salaries; and the Nahia Council focused on problems with services in Qarguhliyah, resulting in Iraqi government projects to resurface a key road in the area, build a bridge to replace a damaged span across the Diyala River, and repair an irrigation pump station vital to local farmers.

The effect of this success led to the spread of Sons of Iraq groups across the brigade with an increased expectation that with Sons of Iraq would also come security, increased stability, and improvements in services and the local economy. Throughout the remainder of its tour in Iraq, the squadron would continue to strive for progress along all those lines of effort with Sons of Iraq groups, increasingly forming a hub of opportunity, and helping isolate extremists from the populace.

Wildfire Expansion: Maintaining Balance

On the heels of the successes in Tuwaitha and Qarguhliyah, the Sons of Iraq project branched into multiple areas in the squadron battlespace, with troop commanders often establishing several different groups simultaneously. This placed increased burdens on the ability to command, control, and sustain multiple operations. The squadron had implemented a general template for standing up Sons of Iraq groups, but each group had unique requirements and concerns that the squadron had to address. This took time and effort on the part of the troop commanders and the squadron staff—particularly for cells that handled CERP projects and money. However, the process went well, with the key considerations being establishing the right number of checkpoints for each group and picking the right leaders.

With the success of the Sons of Iraq program now apparent across the battlespace, requests to establish Sons of Iraq groups inundated troop commanders in virtually every corner of the battlespace. The squadron commander remained adamant that we would not employ Sons of Iraq where they were not needed. We would only initiate groups in areas where ISF had no presence and where checkpoints were needed. It was incumbent on the troop commanders to validate requirements with prospective groups and attain approval prior to implementation. This created some friction with local leaders, who viewed the Sons of Iraq program as a source of

Troop commanders had full authority to remove local leaders who did not embrace their duties or the program.

income or a method of furthering sectarian agendas. Such leaders were quickly removed from the program. Troop commanders had full authority to remove local leaders who did not embrace their duties or the program. (Later, the ISF conducted this action in conjunction with the squadron.)

Since they primarily fulfilled a security function, the Sons of Iraq had to demonstrate progress in that arena. Troop and squadron commanders routinely reviewed contracts before they renewed them or made payments. The squadron staff kept close track of caches turned in, information each Sons of Iraq group provided, and attacks or reports of attacks in Sons of Iraq areas of operation. The squadron used these metrics and numbers of extremists and criminals detained to evaluate progress for each Sons of Iraq group. The command put great pressure on Sons of Iraq leaders to either continue demonstrating progress or forfeit checkpoints or their positions (and therefore money). Forfeitures led to turnover in leadership; some Sons of Iraq organizers proved more capable than others. Tribal and local citizens pressured their Sons of Iraq leaders to produce intelligence and caches to keep their programs running. Some programs progressed little until the right leader was chosen. The Sons of Iraq program in the Jisr Diyala Nahia quickly became recognized for its non-sectarian, cooperative operations. While the Awakening in general was still associated with Sunni actions against AQI, in the squadron battlespace the Sons of Iraq stood as a bulwark against all extremist and criminal activity and provided equal opportunity employment to Shi'a and Sunni alike.

Constant Engagement: Integrating ISF and Local Government

As the numbers of Sons of Iraq groups and checkpoints grew rapidly throughout the winter of 2007-2008, the squadron commander and staff began to institute other management tools to help organize and control the Sons of Iraq in the squadron battlespace. Bringing the local ISF commander

further into the process was critical to maintaining order and legitimacy with the Nahia Council. The primary vehicle for this integration became the Nahia Security Meeting.

The weekly meeting at the National Police brigade headquarters in Tameem brought together all the Sons of Iraq leaders in the squadron battlespace as well as the squadron and troop commanders, key members of the squadron staff, and the National Police Brigade commander, Colonel Emad, and his staff. At the very first meeting, the squadron commander empowered the police commander, giving him the chair and encouraging him to negotiate solutions to problems Sons of Iraq leaders presented. Initially these meetings focused on Sons of Iraq leader complaints about checkpoint restrictions, uniforms, or money, but Colonel Emad shaped the meetings into a venue for sharing intelligence and ideas on how to improve security. Sons of Iraq leaders began to discuss solutions rather than problems and to cooperate to work out differences or cover dead space between Sons of Iraq groups. The squadron commander began to present the metrics that the staff tracked each week, creating a small sense of competition among Sons of Iraq groups to become more productive.

Empowering the police brigade commander paid huge dividends. He began to get reports and receive intelligence directly from Sons of Iraq group leaders. National Police began responding quickly to incidents in areas controlled by Sons of Iraq groups and conducted investigations and raids based on information the Sons of Iraq provided. Throughout the battlespace, respect for the National Police as a capable fighting force and a non-sectarian arm of the Iraqi government increased.

Each troop commander also instituted council meetings in the areas under Sons of Iraq control. Held at the Sons of Iraq headquarters for each group, these meetings followed the model established in Qarguhliyah, bringing together Sons of Iraq, tribal leaders, Nahia representatives, and ISF leaders to discuss problems and to find solutions to them. The Nahia Council took advantage of these



courtesy of author

Leaders participate in a Jisr Diyala Nahia security meeting at the National Police headquarters in Tameem, Iraq.

local meetings to bring the whole council out of the government building in downtown Jisr Diyala to visit each outlying area. Members of the government began to listen directly to their constituents at these meetings. While this attention might seem a commonsense occurrence to those familiar with representative democracy, it was initially a foreign concept to the Nahia Council members and the tribal leaders.

The Nahia Council was largely unable to meet the nearly overwhelming demand for reconstruction, but, because of their increased contact with the local citizens, they did make progress in directing limited resources more precisely. During a time when CERP money for reconstruction projects was limited, the Nahia Council was able to undertake and complete several projects on its own, using Iraqi funds through the Qada and Provincial Council. The Sons of Iraq program provided a vehicle through which the Nahia Council increased its activity and responsiveness to constituents.

Sons of Iraq groups required constant supervision and engagement. Aside from the weekly Nahia security meeting, troop commanders were running weekly local community council meetings (often two or three per commander), attending security meetings with all of their Sons of Iraq leaders, and conducting daily battlefield circulation. Maintain-

ing uniform standards at Sons of Iraq checkpoints was essential. It allowed CF or ISF units transiting the area via ground or air to recognize the Sons of Iraq as friendly—something not to be taken for granted in a complex urban battlefield. Complying with uniform standards and keeping checkpoints neat and sanitary was a struggle that required daily inspections and supervision. Platoon leaders enforced standards and made corrections while on patrol in their areas. It was evident that their constant supervision and pressure paid off, because many groups maintained better-policed checkpoints and higher uniform standards than the National Police—a fact that helped Colonel Emad motivate his battalion commanders in several meetings to bring their standards up as well.

The squadron established a joint security station from which to integrate security information and responses across the Nahia. National Police, Iraqi Police, Facility Protective Services, local emergency services, and a 24-hour CF presence staffed the station. As Sons of Iraq groups spread across the Nahia, the squadron hired additional Sons of Iraq to serve as liaisons inside the security station. These liaisons received reports from checkpoints and Sons of Iraq leaders and disseminated information that came in to the station. Ultimately, the purpose of the joint security station was to coordinate security responses

throughout the Nahia. While the station never fully realized this lofty goal during the squadron's tour of duty, it made significant progress—particularly in integrating Sons of Iraq and establishing a tip line. While sometimes unable to contact ground-owning commanders directly, Sons of Iraq could always reach the security station to report information on extremist or criminal activity. As the National Police became more competent, the Sons of Iraq developed a reasonable expectation that the police would act quickly on the information they provided.

Constant engagement and proactive leadership on the part of the squadron with tribal, civic, and ISF leaders gave the Sons of Iraq program strength. The program itself became a ground for contest between legitimate authority and extremist influence. AQI often directly challenged Sunni groups, but many Shi'a groups faced a more insidious problem when extremist or criminal groups attempted to infiltrate or co-opt the Sons of Iraq for their own purposes. Constant CF supervision gave them the moral strength to stand up to those incursions, but on occasion, they needed physical backing to face such intimidation.

The most poignant example of this came in late March 2008, when the Iraqi government forces began offensive operations against Shi'a extremists in the southern Iraqi city of Basra. Once operations commenced, widespread violence by Shi'a extremist groups ensued throughout the country. Shi'a Sons of Iraq leaders across the squadron battlespace were intimidated, threatened, and attacked. In Saharoon and Sheshan, two of the most contentious areas surrounding Jisr Diyala, some Sons of Iraq fled their checkpoints in fear. With the assistance of the National Police, the company commander responsible for those areas was able to rapidly reinforce them and convince the Sons of Iraq to return to work. Coalition forces and ISF actions, as well as

the long history of constant engagement, allowed Sons of Iraq groups to bend but not break under tremendous pressure from extremists and criminals.

The constant engagement with and empowerment of ISF and local government leaders was significant and led to progress across all of the squadron's lines of operation. Not only did the security situation improve, but the ISF grew stronger and more capable, the government was better connected to its constituents and capable of improving services, and the local economy was booming. These developments were the result of the Sons of Iraq program. Continued success was far from certain, however.

Transition Plan: Envisioning the Future

From the beginning, it was clear that this program would not last forever in its current form. As more local areas began jumping on the Sons of Iraq bandwagon, the spread and development of the program got ahead of strategic considerations. At the national level, the Iraqi government refused to recognize the Sons of Iraq and appeared hesitant to assume control of the program, especially at the funding levels required to sustain it throughout Iraq. Multi-National Corps-Iraq set the tentative end date for the program as October 2008; at that time, all Sons of Iraq had to be in the ISF or working in civilian industries.

This presented a complex problem for the squadron. The purpose of Sons of Iraq was to enhance security in areas where the CF and ISF could not because of limited force availability. Unfortunately, it seemed that regardless of the support from ISF leaders and the esteem local successes provided, the Sons of Iraq lacked the legitimacy necessary to be the Iraqi government's arm of security. Many Iraqis believed that the presence of a large, well-organized body of armed Sunnis threatened the national government. The only viable option seemed to be to transition them quickly into local Iraqi police forces, but it would not do for a Sons of Iraq group to stand down or join the Iraqi Police at some distant police station. This option was not appealing to men who had taken up arms to protect their own neighborhoods. It also did not fit the bill for providing local security when the Sons of Iraq were gone.

In the future, some of the Sons of Iraq must transition to ISF, preferably Iraqi Police, and each

AQI often directly challenged Sunni groups, but many Shi'a groups faced a more insidious problem when extremist or criminal groups attempted to infiltrate or co-opt the Sons of Iraq for their own purposes.

Sons of Iraq headquarters must become an Iraqi Police substation. The Sons of Iraq wearing tan uniforms at the checkpoints one day will wear blue Iraqi Police uniforms at the same checkpoints the next day. The police would be better trained, more capable, and require fewer men to secure the same area, and therefore only need about one-third of the Sons of Iraq to become Iraqi Police. The remaining two-thirds would transition to some other form of employment or to an Iraqi civil conservation force to perform public works functions such as trash removal and municipal improvement projects under the direction of the councils, thus ensuring economic and security benefits. The conservation force would also provide a readily available local labor supply to assist with projects, potentially reducing the cost of infrastructure improvement and reconstruction. The squadron staff envisioned the program as a potential vocational technical education system in which former Sons of Iraq would learn a marketable skill or trade.

Funding was the key to transition planning for the program. Clearly, the national government was unwilling to fund the Sons of Iraq as currently constituted. However, they might be convinced to pay for additional police for the security function and possibly pay for the civil conservation force if that program's worth could be adequately demonstrated. Unable to influence the strategic level discussion required for such a decision, the squadron had to plan for what it could affect. Therefore, the staff began pursuing other funding options for the vocational technical education model in order to extend the program's shelf life and buy time for others to convince the government to move forward.

After many false starts, the squadron created a model vocational technical education project that had potential to qualify for Department of State funds for reconstruction and reeducation. Because the approval process continued for many weeks, the squadron commander ordered the troops to transition one-third of their Sons of Iraq to a civil conservation force immediately to jump-start the process. Under the direction of the Sons of Iraq leader and the local community council, and still paid through the CERP, the conservation forces went to work making visible improvements in the Sons of Iraq's area of responsibility by removing

trash, rebuilding schools and parks, and cleaning canals. The squadron thus reduced the number of Sons of Iraq dedicated to the security function and gained momentum for further transitions in the near future. Although not a perfect solution, the combination of CERP contracts and potential State Department funding at least provided an extended window for negotiations with the government of Iraq over the future of the public works units.

The transition of Sons of Iraq to ISF would prove more frustrating. The Iraqi government continued to resist hiring Sons of Iraq as Iraqi Police. Although the squadron held several hiring drives and put together hiring packets for more than 500 Sons of Iraq, the ministry of interior continuously delayed issuing hiring orders. Although they did not openly say so, many Sunni Sons of Iraq believed that the Shi'a-dominated ministry of interior was deliberately delaying the issuance of hiring orders for Iraqi Police in the Mada'in Qada primarily because many new Sons of Iraq applicants were Sunni rather than Shi'a. As the squadron prepared for a relief in place with an incoming coalition unit in May 2008, the government had yet to hire one member Sons of Iraq as a police officer. The goal of transition was clear, but it would remain up to the incoming unit to see the Sons of Iraq through the process. Fortunately, the progress achieved through the Sons of Iraq program in empowering the ISF, developing the local



courtesy of author

Iraqi civil conservation force workers repair desks for a local school in Village 10.



courtesy of author

Iraqi civil conservation force workers prepare to work on a park at 4-Corners.

community councils, and connecting the Nahia Council to their constituents was well established. It would likely survive even if the Sons of Iraq program withered. These gains would not have been possible, however, without the Sons of Iraq. Many local leaders recognized both the true value of the program and its limited life expectancy if the Iraqi government did not support transition efforts. To that end, by the end of April some tribal leaders in the Qarguhliyah area began to discuss ways to fund the program privately if the government failed to do so. The fact that leaders from a relatively poor area were considering dipping into their own pockets to fund the program demonstrates the importance of the program to the local population.

Effects: Results and Trends

Over the course of nine months, the Sons of Iraq program had a noticeable effect on the battlespace. The Sons of Iraq were responsible for finding, collecting, or reporting locations of literally hundreds of munitions caches which CF and ISF were able to recover or reduce. They seized hundreds of weapons, thousands of rounds of ammunition, and tons of explosives and IED-making material. They also discovered extremist propaganda and training infor-

mation in these caches. They provided information leading to the capture of at least five high-value-target personnel and 100 suspected members of insurgent, extremist, or criminal groups. More importantly, the Sons of Iraq program provided key links to the local population, enhancing the squadron's ability to collect information and human intelligence that was vitally important to COIN operations. During a community council meeting in mid-April, a Sons of Iraq informant passed along a tip about a cache to the council leader, who immediately informed the ground-owning troop commander. Less than an hour later, the National Police, CF, and Sons of Iraq were using a bucket loader to uncover an enormous cache of explosives bound for Baghdad.

In just over five months, the Sons of Iraq in the squadron's portion of the Mada'in Qada had turned in 58 caches and 32 IEDs and had provided over 600 tips or sworn statements about insurgents. Across the entire battlespace, attacks against CF, ISF, and local nationals dwindled from nearly 35 in July 2007 to less than 10 in January and March of 2008. The Sons of Iraq program provided real security, saved the lives of countless CF and ISF Soldiers, and prevented destruction of large amounts of CF and ISF equipment.

Qualitatively, the program was also a resounding success. The Sons of Iraq helped the squadron make enormous progress along multiple lines of operation. The ISF functioned at a higher level and enjoyed enhanced prestige. The Nahia government was empowered, active, and better connected to its constituents through the local community councils. The local economy received a boost from the stabilized security situation and the injection of cash at the consumer level when Sons of Iraq members spent their salaries to support their families. The civil conservation force made immediate and visible improvements across the battlespace. The Sons of Iraq, when used to thicken the lines of coalition forces, proved decisive during a critical juncture in U.S. operations in Iraq. **MR**



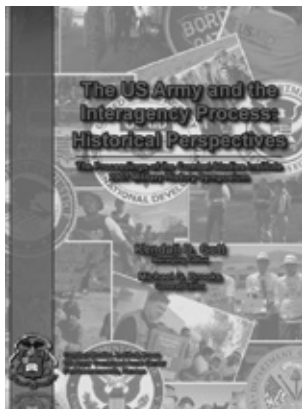
Sons of Iraq assist coalition forces recover a cache that included 773 explosive rounds.



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