



Soldiers of Company I, 3rd Squadron, 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment walk by a house that was used as a prison and torture chamber by al-Qaida in Iraq in Himbus, Iraq, March 8. Coalition forces destroyed the house earlier this year during Operation Raider Harvest. Now within 100 meters of the rubble, there is an Iraqi army facility, an Iraqi police checkpoint and two Concerned Local Citizen checkpoints. (SSgt. Russell Bassett, 4-2 SBCT)

**December 2007 – May 2008**

## **Expanding Security in Diyala**

by **ERIC HAMILTON**

### *Summary*

*The security dynamics in Diyala Province demonstrate the continued need for Coalition forces to clear, control, retain, and rebuild the provinces to defend against al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). U.S. and Iraqi forces launched their counter-offensive against al Qaeda in Iraq in June of 2007, driving the organization from its safe havens around Baghdad. Working together they cleared Baqubah, once a major AQI stronghold, in June and July of 2007. Consequently, AQI leaders and fighters fled north up the Tigris River Valley and northeast up the Diyala River Valley to cities and villages that they had previously used as bases for their terror campaign.*

*By December 2007, AQI held terrain and had freedom of movement in the remote Hamrin Ridge where the organization attempted to re-infiltrate Diyala. Friendly forces had retained control of Baqubah throughout the second half of 2007, forcing AQI to focus its violence on Muqadiyah, the Diyala province's second city, and on the rural, tribal areas west of the Diyala River. AQI thereby tried to regain a toehold from which to launch spectacular attacks, rearm, undermine the tribes' rejection of al Qaeda, and re-establish safe havens in Diyala.*

*Coalition operations from December 2007 to May 2008 prevented AQI from achieving its objectives and forced many of the remnants further north toward Tikrit, Bayji, and Mosul. AQI in Diyala retained only tenuous connections with its command and control elements in the Tigris River Valley and Ninewah provinces. Deprived of large sanctuaries and substantial resources, the organization adapted its tactics. AQI launched a new suicide-bombing campaign in Diyala, aimed not only at the urban population but also at the Sons of Iraq (SoI) responsible for preserving local security.*

*U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces responded with targeted raids and strikes while working actively to bring economic assistance to the province and extend Iraqi government control over remote rural areas. Despite these efforts, AQI partially reconstituted in southern areas of Diyala, such as Balad Ruz and Turki Village, where there was a relative shortage of military forces. Iraqi Security Forces have recently launched operations in these towns and villages to clear them of AQI, eighteen months after Coalition forces cleared them.*

## INTRODUCTION

Several factors account for the dramatic reduction of violence in Iraq in 2007 and the push of al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and other Sunni insurgents to the north of the country. The most important factors were the ‘surge’ in U.S. forces, combined with a change in counterinsurgency strategy under three corps-level offensives, as well as a rise in the number of Awakening Councils in Anbar province and the subsequent development of the Sons of Iraq (SoI) program. As U.S. and Iraqi forces cleared AQI from its sanctuaries in Baghdad and the surrounding Baghdad belts, they methodically pushed enemy groups outside of the capital and into the strategic Diyala Province. In the second half of 2007, Coalition forces continued to clear AQI from Baghdad and Diyala.

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Between June and October, the cities of Baqubah and Muqadiyah became the focus of Diyala operations under the 3<sup>rd</sup> Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (3-1 HBCT). In late November 2007, the 4<sup>th</sup> Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division (4-2 SBCT) assumed responsibility for Diyala, and prepared a new push to expand security in the province.

Between December 2007 and May 2008, the 4-2 SBCT operated throughout Diyala, securing new areas while holding and retaining gains made during 2007. The majority of operations were conducted along the Diyala River Valley, from Khan Bani Sa’ad northeast of Baghdad to the area north of Muqadiyah, known as the Breadbasket. These operations pursued AQI into rural safe havens where enemy fighters sought new sanctuaries. The enemy used these remote sanctuaries to regroup, reconstitute, and re-penetrate areas of interest. In response to the changed security situation in central Iraq, AQI insurgents also shifted their tactics, targeting SoI groups that had turned against them and relying more on suicide bombings to conduct spectacular attacks. The 4-2 SBCT cleared and secured these new sanctuaries with the aims of protecting the population and denying terrain to the enemy for use as support zones for attacks elsewhere.

The 4-2 SBCT conducted ten large-scale offensive operations and many smaller operations and support missions across Diyala province to achieve those aims. During these efforts, 220 high-value targets (HVT<sup>1</sup>) were detained or killed, 1,700 lower level insurgents were detained, and another 500 were killed. 550 weapons caches were found, 2,100 IEDs were cleared, and 25,000 miles of roads and highways were cleared, 3,000 of which were repaired and reopened after months and years of being closed.<sup>2</sup> These operations cleared the Breadbasket and many of Baqubah's surrounding villages; reopened the corridor connecting Baghdad and Baqubah; and disrupted the suicide bombing network in Baqubah and southern Diyala.

Kinetic operations in Diyala also underpinned ongoing efforts to promote sustainable security and progress. Securing new areas had the indirect effects of developing Iraq Security Force capabilities, establishing new SoI groups, promoting reconciliation, and accelerating the extension of governance and economic development to new areas in the province. By the time the 4-2 SBCT left Iraq at the end of May, the 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division was more capable of conducting operations with Coalition forces in a support role; 25 support councils were established to help institutionalize reconciliation at both the local and provincial levels; and the provincial government planned and executed its budget while making efforts to incorporate newly secured areas.

Although definitive progress was made in Diyala Province, several challenges remain. Suicide bombings continue to target Baqubah occasionally, though they have become more common further north. These attacks are supported by enemy fighters that regrouped east of Baqubah in the Balad Ruz district, north Khalis, and above Lake Hamrin and Hamrin



Ridge. The reconciliation process remains fragile and many individuals are still displaced across Diyala. Iraqi Security Forces are not yet fully capable of independently maintaining security in the province, and governance and economic reconstruction still lags behind security gains. In July 2008, the Government of Iraq (GoI) began to address these lingering issues with the Iraqi led Operation Bashaer al-Kheir (Omens of Prosperity).

## DIYALA OPERATIONS IN 2007

In 2006, AQI established a sanctuary in Diyala province and proclaimed it as the capital of the

group's Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). The enemy network in Diyala served as a supply line and support zone for AQI attacks in the capital, given its proximity to Baghdad and its links with AQI's main lines of communication in Northern Iraq. By the end of 2006, AQI controlled or exerted influence across much of Diyala. During the first half of 2007, the rise of the Awakening Council movement in Anbar province combined with Coalition operations in Baghdad and the Baghdad belts, pushed AQI north and east of those areas into Diyala province. This further increased the Diyala's importance to AQI, making it their last hub of activity in central Iraq. By the spring of 2007, AQI had fortified the provincial capital of Baqubah and entrenched itself across the southern portion of the province.

In the first few months of 2007, Coalition forces conducted shaping operations in southern Diyala in the areas of Turki village, Khan Bani Sa'ad, and Balad Ruz to prepare for a larger summer offensive. In April, Coalition forces moved up the Diyala River Valley into the Buhriz district southeast of the provincial capital of Baqubah. In June, Multi-National Division – North (MND-N) began a series of large-scale operations in Diyala designed to defeat AQI. The main Coalition effort in Diyala was the clearing of Baqubah, under the division-level offensive Operation Arrowhead Ripper. Building on operations begun at the end of April, Coalition forces cleared Baqubah's neighborhoods from mid-June to mid-August in some of the toughest fighting in the Iraq War. At the same time, blocking operations were conducted to prevent the network from escaping and reestablishing safe havens west of the city in the Khalis Corridor and to the south in Khan Bani Sa'ad. As Baqubah was cleared, Coalition forces reconnoitered northeast of the city to pursue enemy fighters – many of whom had escaped Baqubah – and destroyed enemy positions to the north of the city. In mid-August, during Operation Lightning Hammer I – the follow-on division-level operation in MND-N – Coalition forces spread out from the urban centers in Diyala, clearing approximately 50 villages and established security up to Muqdadiyah. Operation Lightning Hammer

II in September and October attempted to clear the city of Muqdadiyah and prevent the reestablishment of AQI in the lower Diyala River Valley. These operations continued in November under Operation Iron Hammer.

Coalition forces supported these successive military offensives with reconciliation efforts among Diyala's tribes and diverse ethno-sectarian groups, development and reconstruction projects, and humanitarian initiatives. In particular, Coalition forces focused heavily on fostering reconciliation and establishing Sons of Iraq (SoI)<sup>3</sup> groups in order to hold terrain that had been cleared by military operations. A full accounting of Diyala Operations in 2007 can be found in Iraq Reports I, IV, and VII.

## THE ENEMY IN DIYALA

**B**y December 2007, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces cleared AQI's urban sanctuaries in Baqubah and Muqdadiyah, as well as many villages in the lower Diyala River Valley. Overall levels of violence decreased in Diyala through the second half of the year, yet AQI maintained the ability to conduct attacks throughout the province. Some insurgent safe houses survived operations in Baqubah and Muqdadiyah, but most of the Diyala terrorist network operated in villages and rural areas outside these cities. In villages that lacked a Coalition, Iraqi, or SoI presence, AQI intimidation remained strong. Civilians were terrorized with strict laws enforced by an extrajudicial terrorist legal system and brutal punishments for even minor infractions were arbitrarily meted out in a string of detention, torture and execution facilities.<sup>4</sup> Civilians were also targeted by mortar and small arms fire, assassinations, and kidnappings. AQI attempted to prevent security forces from entering rural areas with improvised explosive devices (IED) placed alongside roads and houses rigged as house-borne IEDs (HBIED) in villages where security forces might conduct raids.

In addition to terrorizing local populations, AQI used Diyala's villages and rural areas to



A suicide vest taken from a suspected terror cell during an early morning raid May 9 in north central Baghdad. (Photo: U.S. Army)

project force back into Baqubah and Muqadiyah, as well as other areas of Diyala and Baghdad. The group used operating bases and safe houses to plan and prepare attacks and to supply fighters through weapons caches and IED/vehicle-borne IED (VBIED) factories. In December, AQI was able to maintain a steady pace of significant attacks across Diyala as demonstrated by the following string of coordinated attacks that occurred over two weeks in the middle of the month. On December 7<sup>th</sup>, a female suicide bomber attacked a popular committee headquarters in Muqadiyah, while further north a suicide VBIED targeted an army checkpoint in Mansuriyah.<sup>5</sup> On December 18<sup>th</sup>, a VBIED was detonated near the Quick Reaction Forces (QRF) headquarters of the Baqubah police, while further east a suicide bomber detonated his vest at a popular café in al-Abbarah village.<sup>6</sup> On December 20<sup>th</sup>, a suicide bomber attacked a popular committee volunteer center in Mandali.<sup>7</sup>

This series of five attacks in December indicated that AQI was able to reconstitute in Diyala's villages and rural areas after being cleared from its urban sanctuaries earlier in the

year. The network was able to then use these areas to continue their attacks in Baqubah and Muqadiyah. Indeed, throughout 2007, AQI moved to the periphery of cleared areas in order to regroup and remain operationally effective. In Diyala during the month of December, these areas included the villages surrounding Baqubah, the triangle between Baqubah, Khan Bani Sa'ad, and Balad Ruz, and north of Muqadiyah all the way up to and including the Hamrin Lake and Ridge areas.

## OPERATIONAL CONCEPT

Operations in Diyala are based on a coordinated 'concentric rings' approach to establishing and maintaining security. Baqubah is the decisive point of operations serving as the center of gravity in the province. The secondary areas emanate from Baqubah in the shape of a 'Y' with the main corridors pushing south through Khan Bani Sa'ad along the lower Diyala River Valley to Baghdad, northeast through Muqadiyah along the upper



Diyala River Valley to the Lake Hamrin area, and northwest through Khalis up to the Tigris and Udaym Rivers.<sup>8</sup> Tertiary areas include rural locations on the periphery of this 'Y', Eastern Diyala, and above Lake Hamrin and the Hamrin Ridge. Coalition forces have focused on Baqubah as the central ring and then attempted to build security outward from there. This approach has aimed to avoid the 'whack-a-mole' phenomenon where enemy fighters simply jump from one place to the next in the face of peripatetic military operations.

Operations between December 2007 and May 2008 continued the concentric rings approach by holding Baqubah and continuing to clear the rural and village locations in the secondary and tertiary areas. The two overarching aims of these operations were to protect local populations in villages and rural areas from being terrorized by AQI, and to prevent those areas from being

used to conduct VBIED, suicide bombing, and other attacks in more populated areas. To achieve these two objectives, the 4-2 SBCT's operational concept remained offensive. It focused on pursuing AQI into areas where enemy fighters tried to regroup, while preventing AQI from reconstituting in areas that were previously cleared. Because of the pattern of enemy activity – where fighters flee in the face of operations and regroup nearby – operations were simultaneous and successive. The key was to deny terrain to the enemy and thereby limit its ability to intimidate civilians and/or prepare and launch attacks.

Military operations in Diyala continued the efforts begun under the revamped counterinsurgency doctrine in 2007 to clear, hold, and retain areas.<sup>9</sup> Operations were accordingly designed to clear AQI out of an area with security operations, holding that terrain until it could be retained

by Iraqi Security Forces and SoI members supported by Coalition forces. Other essential aspects of retaining areas included building and promoting governance by connecting local areas to city and provincial levels of government. Three overarching concepts – disintegrate, erode, separate – underpinned the 4-2 SBCT's efforts to clear, hold, and retain territory. In clearing operations, they worked to *disintegrate* enemy capabilities by targeting insurgent leaders and other HVTs, and *erode* enemy resources by capturing weapons caches and other materials like money and vehicles used to facilitate and perpetrate attacks. Building on security operations, non-lethal approaches in the humanitarian, reconstruction and governance spheres served to *separate* the enemy from the population allowing areas to be held and retained.<sup>10</sup>

## OPERATION RAIDER REAPER – DECEMBER 2007

Upon taking full responsibility for Diyala province in late November 2007, the 4-2 SBCT continued the efforts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division (3-1 HBCT). At this time, MND-N launched the division level offensive Operation Iron Reaper, which continued to pursue AQI and other Sunni insurgent groups in Northern Iraq as part of the corps-level offensive, Operation Phantom Strike. Under Iron Reaper, the 4-2 SBCT launched the brigade-level Operation Raider Reaper to continue to dismantle AQI networks in Diyala province. Operations focused on two main areas near Baqubah and Muqdadiyah where AQI remained influential and enemy fighters were thought to have regrouped: the Iron Triangle northwest of Baqubah, and the Brigade's main effort - the Breadbasket north of Muqdadiyah.

### IRON TRIANGLE OPERATIONS

During continuing efforts to prevent AQI from regrouping in villages near Baqubah, Coalition forces targeted the area northwest of the city between Khalis, Hibhib, and Al Hudayd known as the Iron or Golden Triangle.<sup>11</sup> In 2006 Abu Musab al-Zarqawi located his headquarters in Hibhib, a long-known insurgent sanctuary and corridor that accesses lines of communication from northern Iraq down into both Baqubah and Baghdad. Several targeted operations were conducted in Hibhib earlier in the year and blocking operations were conducted there in June and July as part of Arrowhead Ripper. The purpose of the Raider Reaper operations in the Iron Triangle, however, was to clear the area of AQI and hold the terrain with Iraqi Police and SoI members.<sup>12</sup> Several sub-operations were conducted in this area during Raider Reaper to achieve those objectives. Elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron, 1<sup>st</sup> Stryker Cavalry Regiment (2-1 Cav.), the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 38<sup>th</sup> Stryker Infantry Regiment (1-38

Inf.), U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF), and three companies from the Iraqi 5<sup>th</sup> Army Division participated in these operations.

The first main sub-operation was Operation Blackhawk Reaper; an air assault mission conducted by the 2-1 Cav and Iraqi Army soldiers that targeted the Hibhib village area. Blackhawk Reaper cleared Hibhib and the surrounding area, and set the conditions for future security. 60 suspected insurgents were detained, 22 of which were detained by Iraqi Army forces. Several weapons caches were found containing mortars and mortar tubes, suicide vests, anti-tank mines, and other bomb-making materials. Three possible VBIEDs and several IEDs were also found and safely destroyed. In order to establish a presence and maintain control in the area, the 2-1 Cav, along with Iraqi Army soldiers, constructed six checkpoints. To assist Iraqi Security Forces, 91 local Iraqis were registered and processed to become SoI members. As part of humanitarian efforts associated with Blackhawk Reaper, soldiers delivered 10,000 pounds of rice, 10,000 pounds of flour, and 1880 liters of cooking oil to local residents.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time that soldiers from the 2-1 Cav. conducted Blackhawk Reaper, soldiers from Company B, 1-38 Inf. conducted Operation Rock Reaper in the nearby village of Hadid. Similar to efforts in Hibhib, Rock Reaper aimed to clear Hadid and the surrounding palm groves, to establish local security, and to prevent enemy fighters from returning. Over several days, the 1-38 Inf. detained thirteen suspected insurgents and found a local AQI training camp. Weapons caches containing large-caliber mortars, suicide vests, and other explosives were found and cleared. Five possible VBIEDs were destroyed. Coalition forces also helped the Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army set up checkpoints to secure Hadid.<sup>14</sup> In addition to Blackhawk Reaper and Rock Reaper, several other operations and targeted raids were conducted in and around the villages in the Iron Triangle in order to clear the area of insurgents and help establish more lasting security.

On December 27<sup>th</sup>, operations under Raider Reaper in the Iron Triangle closed with a large reconciliation meeting between tribal leaders from

the Hibhib and Khalis areas at the Governance Center in Baqubah. The tribal leaders in attendance signed a written agreement to work together and deny the use of land in the area to insurgents.<sup>15</sup> These operations and reconciliation efforts in the Iron Triangle set the conditions for continued operations in the area in January and established tribal relationships that have since formed into a more permanent support council in Khalis.

## PREPARATORY OPERATIONS IN THE BREADBASKET

**T**he area north of Muqdadiah, known as the Breadbasket, was identified as a problem area by MND-N commander Major General Mark Hertling back in November 2007.<sup>16</sup> Intelligence reports indicated that AQI had operated relatively freely in the Breadbasket for more than a year and that enemy fighters had fled to the area after operations in Baqubah and Muqdadiah. The Breadbasket is a fertile, largely agricultural area bounded by the Diyala River to the northwest, Hamrin Ridge to the northeast, and Muqdadiah to the south. It is an area of isolated villages dotted among dense citrus orchards and date palm groves, crisscrossed by a maze of canals and footpaths.<sup>17</sup> This terrain has made the Breadbasket an ideal location for AQI to operate and a difficult place for the few Coalition forces that were previously in the area to clear and hold.

For more than a year AQI ruled the Breadbasket by force and psychological intimidation of the local population. When Coalition forces arrived in January, “residents confirmed

that carloads of armed and masked men operated freely.”<sup>18</sup> Residents in Sinsil village, for example, said, “There is no security. We are afraid to go out, and we expect to be killed at any moment.”<sup>19</sup> In Sinsil, residents lived for more than a year under an Islamic State in Iraq (ISI)<sup>20</sup> Sharia court that handed out death sentences for even minor offenses. AQI prohibited smoking and drinking and required women to remain covered at all times. They kidnapped individuals from the village randomly and many of them never returned.<sup>21</sup> Mass graves were eventually found throughout the Breadbasket. In many of the villages, AQI also imposed curfews. In one village, for example, they imposed a curfew between 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. every day and attempted to force local residents to work for them.<sup>22</sup>

Residents were warned in extreme ways not to oppose AQI’s rule. The local imam in Sinsil said that before Coalition forces arrived, “masked





gunmen had paraded through the village with a severed head and warned the people that they could meet the same fate if they tried to organize their own security force.”<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere, a leaflet found in one of the villages showed a picture of an attack on an Iraqi security checkpoint and threatened to, “kill anyone working with the Iraqi Army, the police and the American forces.” The leaflet also threatened residents not to become SoI members.<sup>24</sup> Residents acknowledged that these tactics worked. When Coalition forces discovered a detention and torture complex in December, local villagers said that they knew about the torture site, but were previously too intimidated by extremists to go to the authorities.<sup>25</sup>

One of the primary mechanisms for maintaining AQI rule was a series of complexes that served as operating bases as well as detention, torture, and execution facilities. In December, Coalition forces discovered one of these complexes in an operation targeting AQI in the area. This complex contained three detention buildings, one of which doubled as both a headquarters and torture facility. Inside the torture facility soldiers discovered, “chains on the walls and ceilings, a bed still hooked up to an electrical system and several blood-stained items.”<sup>26</sup> Graffiti written on a wall of one of the buildings said, “Long Live the Islamic State” – a clear reference to the caliphate sought by AQI and associated extremist groups.<sup>27</sup> And in the area around the complex Coalition forces found an execution site and a mass grave with 26 human remains.<sup>28</sup> A similar AQI prison and torture facility was discovered elsewhere during the course of operations in January.<sup>29</sup> AQI also had a number of safe houses scattered throughout the villages, which were used to maintain a presence in villages and transit through the area. There were numerous weapons and explosives caches distributed around the Breadbasket to supply enemy fighters and there was also at least one VBIED making factory that was discovered during operations in December.<sup>30</sup>

These discoveries showed that the AQI

**‘Residents in Sinsil village said, “There is no security. We are afraid to go out, and we expect to be killed at any moment.’**

network in Diyala had several fairly sophisticated complexes, in addition to safe houses, weapons caches, and a car bomb making factory, which the organization used to plan, prepare and conduct operations. According to Coalition forces, AQI also had a sophisticated force structure in Diyala, “organized into companies, squadrons and possibly a brigade.”<sup>31</sup> Based on an organized command and control structure and a string of operating bases with large weapons caches, AQI used the Breadbasket as a major support zone for attacks back down the Diyala River Valley.

Throughout December, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces conducted preparatory operations in the Breadbasket to set the conditions for a future offensive.

“Commanders do this by deploying their forces to the theater, establishing bases, supplying them, organizing command structures, reconnoitering the terrain, developing intelligence about the enemy, and creating maneuver corridors. These tasks often involve units in combat. Forces moving into areas that the enemy had controlled must often fight to establish their new bases. When units reconnoiter the new areas, they make contact with the enemy and fight skirmishes. In each case, the purpose of ‘preparatory operations’ is not to fight and eliminate the enemy from an area, but rather to create the preconditions for successful ‘decisive operations’ in the future that will destroy the enemy.”<sup>32</sup>

In the first week of December, Coalition forces moved from Muqdadiah out into the Breadbasket, establishing a security presence and reconnoitering enemy positions in various villages and rural areas. Between December 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, U.S. troops operated in the Breadbasket, discovering the complex with the torture facility described above, and fighting several engagements with insurgents in the area.<sup>33</sup> The firefights with armed groups indicated that the enemy was present and intended to defend its positions in the face of preparatory operations. During these



In Diyala province, citizen tips again led to the discovery of a cache containing large stockpiles of home-made explosives, rocket propelled grenades, grenade launchers, pipe bombs, weapons, ammunition, a mass grave and torture chambers, Dec. 9. (MND-North)

four days, Coalition forces also discovered nine significant weapons caches.<sup>34</sup> Upon returning to the area on December 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, they were again engaged by armed gunmen.<sup>35</sup> Based on tips from local Iraqis, Coalition forces found the detention and torture complex, the mass grave, the weapons caches, and the large presence of armed individuals engaging Coalition forces, helping to confirm the area to be, “an al-Qaeda operations area used for training and facilitation activities.”<sup>36</sup>

Coalition forces continued preparatory operations through the middle and end of December. During operations between December 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, Coalition forces focused on the area north and northeast of Muqdadiah, targeting groups of armed men involved in the recent firefights, which included an AQI leader in the Diyala River Valley network and his associates,

and a cell leader operating in the village of Shirween. During all four days of operations, Coalition forces were attacked with small arms fire and on one occasion engaged two individuals armed with suicide vests. Thirteen insurgents were killed and five other suspects were detained. Two safe houses were discovered and a vehicle packed with explosives was also destroyed.<sup>37</sup>

On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, Coalition forces launched a four-day operation to continue to disrupt the AQI network in the Breadbasket. Their actions were based on intelligence gathered during the previous operations and intelligence provided by local Iraqi citizens, which began to increase with the presence of security forces. During the course of the operation, Coalition forces were again involved in multiple engagements with groups of armed men, during which twelve terrorists were killed and 37 suspects detained.<sup>38</sup>

On December 22<sup>nd</sup>, the first day of the operation, a local Iraqi citizen led Coalition forces to a compound, “assessed to be a terrorist medical facility, complete with surgical equipment, numerous medical supplies and medication.”<sup>39</sup> Ammunition, maps of the area, and instructions for making improvised explosive devices (IED) were also discovered in the compound. The following day Coalition forces discovered a building used as an AQIVBIED factory. Inside the building they found numerous car bomb construction materials in addition to a hostage locked inside a room. Over the next three days, two buildings rigged with explosives, five additional buildings, a sniper position, and eight weapons caches were destroyed. A number of hidden sites used to conduct IED and small arms attacks were also discovered and destroyed. One of these sites had wires running through a hole that looked out on a nearby intersection and was assessed to be, “a firing point for IED attacks.”<sup>40</sup>

Following-up on this operation, Coalition forces continued to target the AQI network operating in the Breadbasket. On December 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, they targeted a group of individuals associated with those involved in the recent firefights. Armed individuals fled when Coalition forces arrived at their target areas. Eight insurgents were killed and six others were detained in these operations. One building and a number of small arms materials were also destroyed to prevent their further use.<sup>41</sup> On the 30<sup>th</sup>, Coalition forces swept the area north of Muqdadiyah, again targeting alleged associates of the individuals killed on the 29<sup>th</sup>. They were met by enemy fire and killed two terrorists in the ensuing engagement. Upon clearing the area, seven suspected individuals were detained and two weapons caches were destroyed.<sup>42</sup>

Coalition forces continued to target AQI north of Muqdadiyah in the beginning of 2008. On January 2<sup>nd</sup>, four individuals associated with the network north of Muqdadiyah were detained.<sup>43</sup> The next day, Coalition forces targeted an AQI safe house in Muqdadiyah in the morning and then engaged another terrorist group operating in the region in the afternoon. In these two operations, seven terrorists were killed.<sup>44</sup> Days

later, Coalition forces conducted two coordinated operations north of Muqdadiyah targeting individuals associated with a, “leader allegedly responsible for directing a large terrorist group that conducts executions in the region.”<sup>45</sup> Intelligence reports indicated that this group had executed two individuals in the previous few days and was the same group involved in firefights with Coalition forces in the preceding weeks. In the two separate operations, Coalition forces killed two terrorists, detained two others, and destroyed an AQI safe house.<sup>46</sup>

The preparatory operations in the Breadbasket confirmed AQI’s entrenched presence in the area. The network had a detention and torture complex to intimidate and control the local population; safe houses and a VBIED factory to conduct operations; and numerous weapons and explosives caches distributed around the area to supply enemy fighters. The repeated engagements over the course of the entire month indicated the widespread activity of the network in the area and their willingness to defend it at high costs. Throughout the December operations in Muqdadiyah, Coalition forces set the conditions for Operation Raider Harvest in January.

## OPERATIONS IN THE BREADBASKET

In the first week of January 2008, Lieutenant General Raymond T. Odierno, then the commander of Multi-National Corps – Iraq (MNC-I), announced a new corps-level offensive, Operation Phantom Phoenix, to follow on the successes of the 2007 corps-level offensives – Operation Imposing the Law, Operation Phantom Thunder, and Operation Phantom Strike. Phantom Phoenix sought to protect the nine major cities in Iraq, especially Baghdad, while at the same time pursuing AQI and other extremists as they fled previous sanctuaries and attempted to regroup in smaller areas throughout Iraq. Phantom Phoenix included several joint Iraqi and Coalition division and brigade-level operations throughout northern Iraq as well as in the southern belts of Baghdad. The first MND-

N component of Phantom Phoenix was the division-level offensive Operation Iron Harvest. The offensive aimed to pursue AQI and other extremist elements that migrated north after Coalition operations elsewhere. The central thrust of Iron Harvest – and also Phantom Phoenix – was the brigade-level offensive Operation Raider Harvest in Diyala.<sup>47</sup>

The preparatory operations in the Breadbasket in December allowed Coalition forces to collect intelligence, determine how AQI functioned in the area, and set forces for Operation Raider Harvest.<sup>48</sup> Raider Harvest targeted about 50-60 senior AQI leaders and about 200 lower level fighters.<sup>49</sup> The purpose of Raider Harvest was to clear AQI out of the Breadbasket and deny enemy safe havens in the area. It also aimed to disrupt AQI funding sources, the increasingly lethal suicide bombing network, and the remnants of the VBIED network in Diyala. Most importantly, it aimed to establish lasting security in the area.<sup>50</sup> By achieving these aims, Raider Harvest operationalized the 4-2 SBCT's strategic goals of protecting the population and preventing sanctuary areas from being used to launch attacks elsewhere.

Raider Harvest differed from previous operations in the Breadbasket because of the large number of Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces involved and their intention to hold the terrain once it was cleared. General Petraeus explained, "We'd actually been in and out of there a number of times in recent months, conducting very substantial raids and other operations. But this is one...to really clear it from one end to the other, and then to hold it."<sup>51</sup> "Deny, hold, and build," was the mission Colonel Lehr stressed. "We must deny safe haven to al-Qaeda and other insurgents throughout our area of responsibility wherever they hope to find it. We must set the conditions for Iraqi Security Forces to hold these hard fought areas so they don't slip back into the enemy's hands. And we must assist the Government of

Iraq to build the economic, governance, and essential services infrastructures in these areas."<sup>52</sup>

Almost 5,000 U.S. forces took part in Operation Raider Harvest, in addition to the Iraqi Security Forces. The U.S. effort was spearheaded by the 4-2 SBCT and headquartered at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Warhorse north of Baqubah. The 4<sup>th</sup> SBCT was reinforced by the 3-2 Stryker Cavalry Regiment (3-2 SCR), the 2-3 Armored Cavalry Regiment (2-3 ACR), and the 1-32 Cavalry Regiment (1-32 Cav.), a Reconnaissance, Surveillance and Target

Acquisition unit.<sup>53</sup> U.S. Special Operations Forces also took part in the operation, in addition to aviation personnel and assets like the MQ-1 Predator Armed Reconnaissance Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV).<sup>54</sup> Iraqi forces included the 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division headquartered at the Kirkush Military Base east of Baqubah.<sup>55</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division was also reinforced by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Iraqi Army Division from Anbar province.<sup>56</sup>

The operational headquarters was at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Normandy outside of Muqdadiyah. In addition to the forces active in December's

preparatory operations, Coalition forces moved additional U.S. forces, Iraqi units, scores of armored vehicles, equipment and ammunition, interpreters and other support workers into place in the days preceding the operation. The movement of these troops was staggered and done mostly at night, so as to prevent the enemy from knowing. Helicopters were used to transport troops to FOB Normandy, while the rest moved into place along the main highways and roads running through Diyala.<sup>57</sup>

The operation began in the middle of the night on January 8<sup>th</sup> with Coalition forces simultaneously rolling into villages across the Breadbasket. The main effort consisted of the 2-3 ACR and 2-23 Inf. moving into blocking positions around the Breadbasket and securing

**'... Coalition Forces conducted two coordinated operations north of Muqdadiyah targeting individuals associated with a "leader allegedly responsible for directing a large terrorist group that conducts executions in the region.'**



tempo of operations likely caused some insurgents to leave.<sup>61</sup> Second, the increased helicopter traffic in and out of FOB Normandy in the week preceding Raider Harvest indicated that Coalition forces were being built up in the area in preparation for a large operation.<sup>62</sup> Third, General Hertling speculated that there may have been an operational security breach by Iraqi officers who knew about the operation in advance and warned the insurgents.<sup>63</sup> As a result, Coalition forces fanned out into the Breadbasket and were able to clear the area without having to engage in heavy fighting. Coalition forces did, however, focus on tracking where both the leaders and fighters that escaped the Breadbasket headed.<sup>64</sup> These tracking operations proved important for understanding where insurgents moved to and regrouped. Many of them likely headed over the Hamrin Ridge or trickled back down into the villages of Diyala River Valley.

a route for the 3-2 SCR to push through the area from northeast to southwest clearing areas village to village, and house to house.<sup>58</sup> Other units in Diyala stepped up operations in Baqubah, Khan Bani Sa'ad, and elsewhere, to coincide with the main effort in the Breadbasket. In the first few days of the offensive, a number of Coalition vehicles in the Breadbasket were hit by IEDs and Coalition forces were attacked with small arms fire and RPG's.<sup>59</sup> On the whole, however, Coalition forces faced very little initial resistance. According to Brigadier General James Boozer, intelligence reports indicated that some AQI leaders fled the area in the days preceding the operation, but that many of the lower-level fighters remained.<sup>60</sup>

Some AQI leaders probably did flee for a number of reasons. First, Coalition operations in December were hard fought and continued over a period of a month. The insurgents took many casualties and many were detained. The presence of Coalition forces in the area and the increased

Some of the lower-level insurgents who stayed attempted to engage Coalition forces. Coalition forces faced some small arms fire and sniper fire on the first evening of the operation.<sup>65</sup> Coalition forces also found many freshly planted IED's during the course of operations and on one occasion engaged a group of individuals fleeing from an IED site to a nearby house.<sup>66</sup> During the clearing phase of Raider Harvest, which lasted roughly two weeks, Coalition forces killed and wounded eight enemy fighters in engagements and detained 70 other suspected insurgents. 36 weapons caches, 30 IEDs, eight VBIEDs, and seven HBIEDs were found and cleared, with the help of information from local Iraqis.<sup>67</sup>

At the start of operations, many insurgents simply attempted to melt into the population. Residents of villages, including the mayor of Sinsil, warned that insurgents still lurked among the population.<sup>68</sup> Many of these individuals were local Iraqis who were recruited and intimidated by AQI. Rooting them out took months of sustained



Lt. Col. Mark Landes, commander of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division from Fort Lewis Wash., speaks with Muqadiyah Mayor Najem Abdulah Ahmed at the Muqadiyah Government Center, Iraq, Jan. 15. One major objective of Operation Raider Harvest is to ensure that the people of the Breadbasket are tied into the Muqadiyah and provincial government. (Spc. John Crosby, 4-2 SBCT)

effort. The 3-2 SCR remained in the Breadbasket through the end of its deployment working with the Iraqi Security Forces, government officials, and local residents to establish lasting security and provide better governance. The 3-2 SCR also remained active, conducting operations to target those insurgents that remained. They continued to capture and detain approximately ten suspected individuals and clear several weapons caches each week.<sup>69</sup> Operation Raider Harvest officially ended on April 1, but the 3-2 SCR remained in the Breadbasket continuing its work through the end of its deployment in late May.<sup>70</sup> Through the end of its deployment at the end of May, 300 enemy fighters that had remained in the Breadbasket were killed in engagements, more

than 120 suspected AQI fighters were detained and 27 weapons caches were found and cleared.<sup>71</sup>

### **ESTABLISHING LASTING SECURITY IN THE BREADBASKET**

After the initial clearing phase, which ended in mid-January of 2008, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces continued to pursue those insurgents that remained in the area as described above, but were able to shift focus to holding and re-building the Breadbasket. At the beginning of Raider Harvest, General Hertling said, “While we will continue to pursue extremists, we know we won’t measure the success of this operation by the

kinetic effects over the next few weeks. Instead success will be found in the weeks and months after this operation is completed, as citizens see improved security and economic advancements.”

<sup>72</sup> Immediately after the clearing phase of Raider Harvest ended, Coalition forces began working on establishing the conditions necessary to create lasting security. The plan included flooding the area with Iraqi Security Forces, establishing Joint Security Stations and a Joint Combat Outpost, investing in rebuilding Muqdadiyah and the Breadbasket’s essential services, infrastructure, and economy, and connecting the Breadbasket to the Muqdadiyah and provincial governments.

Prior to Raider Harvest, there was seldom an Iraqi Army presence in the Breadbasket, almost no police, and no SoI program. The primary effort throughout the clearing phase of Raider Harvest, and immediately thereafter, was to establish a sustained security presence in the area. Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces immediately set about constructing Joint Security Stations and Combat Outposts, and a police station that began operating by the end of January.<sup>73</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division devoted an entire battalion to remain in the Breadbasket, and a company-sized unit of Iraqi Police was eventually dispersed in police stations in several villages.<sup>74</sup> These security forces were reinforced by newly-formed SoI groups.

After the operation that cleared Muqdadiyah in October, more than 1,000 Sunni and Shi’a SoIs were recruited to help man checkpoints and local offices across the city.<sup>75</sup> These groups were expanded out into the Breadbasket, in addition to the formation of new groups. During Raider Harvest, Coalition forces handed out pamphlets as they entered villages in an effort to urge residents to form volunteer groups and help defend their villages against AQI.<sup>76</sup> They also encountered local militias that expressed interest in becoming SoI’s, but had previously been too scared.<sup>77</sup> Coalition forces began by identifying local leaders to work with and establishing the necessary relationships to form SoI groups.<sup>78</sup> Within two months, more than 250 SoIs were operating in the Breadbasket with the expectation that 800 would be active

once all the programs were up and running.<sup>79</sup>

By the end of March, the village of Himbus, one of the larger villages in the Breadbasket and a former AQI command post, had an Iraqi Army compound, an Iraqi Police checkpoint, and two SoI checkpoints within 100 meters of the village center.<sup>80</sup> In June, a Joint Security Station opened in Himbus housing 40 police officers.<sup>81</sup> As the security situation improved in the Breadbasket and local residents became more confident in future security, they became more forthcoming in identifying enemy fighters and weapon caches that remained in the area. The newfound security also laid the foundation for progress in reconstruction and governance.

Some areas in Muqdadiyah and the Breadbasket were completely destroyed by years of fighting and being cutoff from other levels of government. Essential services were non-existent, roads were destroyed, and buildings were crumbling or demolished. Shops and local businesses were closed and the Breadbasket’s primary economy was ruined. The Breadbasket is a largely agricultural area, home to large date palm groves and known as the orange capital of the Middle East. Many of the fields were fallow and had become overgrown in the year before Raider Harvest because residents had either fled or were too intimidated to work them.<sup>82</sup> These problems were further compounded this year by the significant drought occurring not only in Diyala, but across Iraq and the region.<sup>83</sup>

The newfound security was the greatest boon to the Breadbasket. But in the short-run, Coalition forces also provided humanitarian aid and micro-grants to meet the immediate needs of local Iraqis and jump start the local economy. In the first week of Raider Harvest, food drops of rice and flour were conducted; kerosene deliveries were made – in some areas, like Mansuriyah, for the first time in a year; and medical aid missions were conducted.<sup>84</sup> Local farmers were provided with micro-grants to help buy the necessary seed and equipment to replant fields; business owners were likewise provided with micro-grants to reopen shops; local residents were given temporary jobs like the 400 who were hired to



Assistant Deputy to Diyala Government Council Sheik Zary Al-Fayaz, left, discusses the needs of individual qa'das of the Northern Diyala River province during a meeting of the Diyala provincial government and district generals of Muqdadiyah and surrounding areas. Provincial Governor Ra'ad Rasheed Hameed Al Mullah, right, was also present. Operation Raider Harvest has provided extra security in the area making this meeting possible. (Spc. John Crosby, 4-2 SBCT)

help dredge the canals in the Breadbasket; and others were put to work as SoI members.<sup>85</sup> These efforts were supported in the following months by the Diyala Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT).<sup>86</sup>

In the long-run, however, the most important part of establishing lasting security in northern Diyala will come from the effort to tie together different levels of government. According to Lieutenant Colonel James Brown, executive officer of the 4-2 SBCT, "The big part of [the lasting security] is that now the area will be tied to Muqdadiyah, its closest and largest urban center, and Muqdadiyah will be tied to the province, so the chain of communication between local villages and the Iraqi government will be established. That chain was not there before, so the local people were ripe for AQI to fill that need for them. Now that the link has been established,

the government will be able to provide what the people need, which will end AQI's foothold in the area."<sup>87</sup> The provincial government provided much of the immediate aid that came in the wake of Raider Harvest, in an effort to make higher levels of government more responsive to local needs.

On January 14<sup>th</sup>, Diyala Provincial Governor Ra'ad Rasheed Hameed Al Mullah went with the heads of essential services in Diyala Province for water, electricity, health, education, municipalities and oil, to Muqdadiyah to meet with their counterparts at the qa'da (county) level and begin this important process. The purpose of the meeting was to begin a working relationship between the provincial and qa'da governments in order to restore essential services in the area as quickly as possible and tie the qa'da level services into the provincial government. The provincial



heads of essential services explained to their local counterparts what needed to be done in order to effectively integrate the qa'da into the province and allow investment and services to begin flowing. Major Nicholas Difiore, the 4-2 SBCT's Reconciliations Engagement Officer, said of the meeting, "This is one of those places where there is a break in the basic government, the linkage between qa'da and province, due to the security situation. Now after we have done many of these decisive operations like Raider Harvest, the security situation is improving. The technocrats feel much more comfortable traveling these roads and now we can see the linkage between province and qa'da strengthening."<sup>88</sup>

Much work remains in the Breadbasket in terms of economic stimulus, reconstruction, local capacity building, and fostering a better link between local needs and higher levels of government. These problems are not specific to the Breadbasket or Diyala. Since the beginning of January, however, residents in the Breadbasket began receiving regular food and fuel rations from the government. Moreover, a line of communication has been opened between local leaders who now travel regularly to Muqdadiyah to meet with their counterparts to discuss local needs.

## AQI'S CHANGING TACTICS

**A**QI in Diyala not only reconstituted in fringe areas like the Iron Triangle and the Breadbasket by the end of 2007, but the network as a whole also instituted a new set of tactics in response to the changed security situation in central Iraq. Suicide bombing became more frequent as the VBIED network was dismantled and SoI groups were targeted in an attempt to eliminate nascent anti-AQI movements.

The execution of "spectacular" attacks has been a hallmark of AQI's strategy in Iraq. Spectacular attacks aim to gain media attention by killing a large number of people or striking symbolic individuals or targets in important cities. AQI largely achieved these aims by

using its signature weapons – car bombs and suicide bombers – in and around Baghdad. Car bombs, or VBIEDs, have been so successful for AQI because they are essentially large, mobile weapons that can be emplaced in specific locations to achieve maximum effect. Suicide bombings have less explosive power, but can be just as lethal because of the ability for suicide bombers to detonate their devices in the middle of large crowds of people.

In 2007, AQI's VBIED network in central Iraq was all but destroyed by Coalition operations that cleared AQI from Baghdad, the Baghdad belts, and the lower Diyala River Valley. In Baghdad, a barrier system was constructed around areas prone to car bomb attacks – including neighborhoods, marketplaces, and the areas surrounding mosques – making them off-limits to cars. These efforts disrupted AQI's movement of VBIEDs across the city and reduced attractive VBIED targets. At the same time, Coalition forces cleared contested neighborhoods, dismantled multiple VBIED cells – particularly in the Karkh security district of western Baghdad – and cut off the remnants of other cells from lines of communication in the belts. Outside Baghdad, Coalition forces cleared AQI's support areas and sanctuaries – such as Karma, Tarmiyah, and Arab Jabour – pushing the network increasingly further away from the capital. Based on decreasing violence in Baghdad, these efforts were replicated in cities like Baqubah and Muqdadiyah in Diyala.

As a result of the Coalition's successes against AQI's VBIED network, AQI came to rely increasingly on suicide bombings in central Iraq beginning in late 2007 and early 2008.<sup>89</sup> According to Major General Jeffrey Hammond, "Al Qaeda has discovered that because a great job has been done, they just cannot drive their VBIEDs like they used to...we see an adjustment that is the suicide vest attack."<sup>90</sup> Suicide bombings have become the preferred method both tactically, to evade the security adjustments that made VBIEDs so difficult to employ, and strategically, to attract widespread media attention. Compared to VBIED production, which requires more infrastructure

(factories) and resources (cars and explosives), assembling suicide bombs is fairly simple. They require a small amount of explosives combined with ball bearings or some other type of projectile packed inside a vest or belt and wired to a switch. These materials can be acquired easily and assembled quickly almost anywhere. Suicide vests/belts are so common, many AQI leaders and fighters routinely wear them for use in case they are surprised by security forces.

The most important component of suicide bombs are the actual people who carry out the bombings. AQI has relied mostly on foreigners to conduct suicide attacks in Iraq. Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNF-I) estimates that 90 percent of suicide attacks in Iraq are believed to be carried out by foreigners (though many of the female bombers appear to be Iraqi).<sup>91</sup> In order to facilitate foreign bombers to central Iraq, AQI relies on lines of communication that run from northern Iraq. Since the formation of the Anbar Awakening Council in late 2006, AQI has relied primarily on networks that run from the Syrian border through Mosul, down the Tigris River Valley, and along the Hamrin Ridge.<sup>92</sup> Both of these lines merge in Diyala province.

Tactical adjustments were also made in how suicide bombings are conducted. Women have become a popular choice for conducting attacks because they are less likely to be searched and can more easily hide explosives under bulky garb. In total, during the first six months of 2008, 22 female suicide bombers conducted attacks in central Iraq, almost three times as many as all of 2007.<sup>93</sup> Nine of these female suicide bombings were conducted in Diyala.<sup>94</sup> AQI has even gone as far as using children, mentally disabled individuals, and handicapped individuals confined to wheelchairs.<sup>95</sup> These individuals are also less likely to be searched and may not even be aware that they are carrying explosives.

The increased emphasis on suicide bombings in late 2007 coincided with AQI's shift to targeting SoI groups. In particular, suicide bombs have been used to target SoI offices and leaders. Attacks against SoIs

increased from 26 per month in October to 100 in January and February.<sup>96</sup> Many of these attacks were conducted by suicide bombers, who sometimes managed to get close to these individuals and detonate their explosives. On January 7<sup>th</sup>, a suicide bomber killed Colonel Riyadh al-Samarrai, a founder of the Adhamiyah Awakening Council, as he exited the offices of the Sunni Endowment in Baghdad.<sup>97</sup> On January 20<sup>th</sup>, a young teenage boy walked into a tent in Albo Issa, a village near Fallujah, and detonated his explosive vest at a tribal gathering of Awakening Council members killing four including Hadi Hussein al-Issawi, a mid-level leader in the Awakening movement in Anbar. The boy's intended target was Sheik Aeifan, the leader of the Issawi tribe and an early adversary of AQI, who had not arrived yet.<sup>98</sup> In Diyala, Sheik Thair al-Kharki, an influential local leader and head the Kanaan SoI, was killed along with several others outside of his home by a female suicide bomber on March 10<sup>th</sup>.<sup>99</sup>

Suicide bombings also became important for conducting spectacular attacks because VBIEDs were now more difficult to employ in central locations. The first few weeks of February provide evidence for this trend. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, a Friday when markets are usually packed, two female suicide bombers detonated their explosives at two popular markets in Eastern Baghdad. At the walled-off Ghazil pet bazaar in the central market area of Shorja, 46 people were killed and 100 wounded. Fifteen minutes later at the New Baghdad bird market four miles away 27 people were killed and 67 were wounded.<sup>100</sup> On February 24<sup>th</sup> a suicide bomber detonated his explosive vest in a refreshment tent for pilgrims traveling to Karbala to celebrate Arbaeen. 40 people were killed and 60 were wounded.<sup>101</sup> In total, a steady flow of suicide bombings have targeted SoI offices and leaders, security checkpoints, markets, and mosques across central Iraq in the last six months even as overall levels of attacks and violence have declined significantly.



Iraqi security forces lead the way on a clearing mission during coalition forces Operation Rock Thrasher in Windiyah, in the Diyala province, Iraq, Feb. 8. (PO1 Sean Mulligan, Joint Combat Camera Center)

## OPERATIONS FURTHER SOUTH IN DIYALA

**A**t the same time that AQI's sanctuary in the Breadbasket was cleared, Coalition forces continued to conduct operations in Baqubah, Baqubah's villages, and further south in the triangle formed by Baqubah, Khan Bani Sa'ad, and Balad Ruz. In Baqubah and several support areas outside the city, Coalition forces began to unravel the Diyala suicide bombing network. In addition to operations during Iron Raider that cleared villages northwest of Baqubah in December, several other operations and targeted raids were conducted in surrounding villages. The 2-1 Cav. also conducted reconnaissance-in-force in the corridor between Baqubah and Khan Bani Sa'ad. During this time, they targeted an active AQI cell associated with

several AQI leaders throughout Diyala.<sup>102</sup> Like the Breadbasket, local residents in these areas were terrorized by insurgents. It became clear over the course of operations that these areas were also being used as important sanctuaries and routes for the suicide bombing network.

## CLEARING THE CORRIDOR SOUTH OF BAQUBAH

**T**hough Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces cleared a number of towns and villages in southern Diyala in 2007, many still lacked security. Moreover, the main route from Baghdad to Baqubah remained closed for security reasons. Some follow-up operations were necessary to hold previously cleared areas, as

well as clear new ones. In January, Coalition and Iraqi forces focused on clearing insurgents out of several villages in the Buhriz district southeast of Baqubah and also conducted a large, month-long operation to clear the road and surrounding villages between Baqubah and Khan Bani Sa'ad.

The first operation, Operation Viking Harvest II, was led by joint Iraqi Security Forces (army, police and local SoI) and U.S. soldiers from the 2-12 Field Artillery Battalion (2-12 FA). Viking Harvest II targeted the al-Abarra and Imam Ways villages of the Buhriz district south of Baqubah. This operation ran from January 14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> with Iraqi Security Forces taking the lead by clearing the villages. The 2-12 FA provided support with blocking positions around the villages to prevent enemy fighters from escaping. One enemy fighter was killed and 53 suspects were detained. 30 IEDs, five HBIEDs, and two weapons caches were cleared. As part of Viking Harvest II, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces helped 375 displaced individuals return to their homes in the area after they had been forced to leave several months earlier. Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces also organized a SoI program, set up SoI checkpoints, and established a permanent Iraqi Army checkpoint to make sure that insurgents who fled the area could not return.<sup>103</sup>

The second and larger operation was the Iraqi brigade-level offensive Operation Blackhawk Harvest. Importantly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division designed and led Blackhawk Harvest.<sup>104</sup> Along with this Iraqi Army brigade, the 2-1 Cav. helped conduct operations from Khan Bani Sa'ad to the southern stretches of Baqubah, while elements of the 4-9 Inf. helped conduct operations in Baqubah.<sup>105</sup> Blackhawk Harvest began in early January and was conducted over the course of the month as part of Raider Harvest. The operation centered on the main road between Baqubah and Khan Bani Sa'ad known as Sabbah Nissan. Sabbah Nissan is a key road linking Baqubah to Baghdad that was closed for the previous sixteen months because of the heavy presence of IEDs along the road and the crater damage from previous attacks.<sup>106</sup> Iraqi and Coalition Forces focused on reopening Sabbah Nissan by clearing more than 30 IEDs

and repairing craters that prevented cars from passing. At the same time that Sabbah Nissan was cleared, Iraqi Security Forces took the lead in clearing many of the surrounding villages. 48 enemy fighters were killed and another eight were detained during Blackhawk Harvest. In addition to the more than 30 IEDs that were cleared, twelve HBIEDs, eleven VBIEDs, and six weapons caches were also cleared.<sup>107</sup>

These operations between Khan Bani Sa'ad and Baqubah not only helped clear the area of insurgents, but opened the important corridor along Sabbah Nissan that had long been closed. During operations in Baqubah in January, one of the main roads connecting north and south Baqubah, Kharesan Street was also reopened.<sup>108</sup> These efforts made driving in Baqubah and traveling to Baghdad much easier.

## THE BAQUBAH SUICIDE BOMBING NETWORK

By December, a significant suicide bombing network operated out of Diyala targeting SoI leaders and offices throughout the province and attempting spectacular attacks in Baqubah, Muqdadiyah, and possibly down into Baghdad. Even though Baqubah had been cleared in Operation Arrowhead Ripper in 2007, a central cell for the suicide bombing network still remained in the city. During January, this cell was targeted by Coalition forces as they began to dismantle the suicide bombing network in southern Diyala.

In January, operations focused on a number of AQI cells operating in Old Baqubah that were connected to the suicide bombing network that spanned from Mosul through Diyala to Baghdad. "This suicide cell has links to other cells throughout the northern part of the country and taking out this cell in Baqubah will disrupt Al-Qaeda-backed suicide operations in Diyala and other parts of the country," said 2-12 FA Intelligence Officer Capt. Andrew Padden.<sup>109</sup> On January 16<sup>th</sup>, Coalition forces detained a suspected IED and suicide bombing cell leader

during a targeted raid in Baquba. This individual was tied to a number of attacks in Diyala and was directly linked to a Syria-based suicide bombing facilitator. Intelligence reports indicated that he had recently requested suicide bombers from Mosul.<sup>110</sup> Three days later Coalition forces captured three more individuals, one of whom had direct ties to AQI leaders in Baghdad and the Baghdad car bombing network.<sup>111</sup> On January 22<sup>nd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, Coalition forces again targeted individuals in Baqubah associated with the AQI suicide bombing network in Diyala Province.<sup>112</sup>

At the same time that Coalition forces worked Baqubah, they also targeted what was assessed to be a local AQI command and control headquarters and operating area north of the city. This headquarters was connected to the suicide bombing network in the province and was tied directly to the cells operating in Baqubah. On January 22<sup>nd</sup>, three individuals responsible for the facilitation of IEDs and suicide vests in the province and connected to several senior AQI leaders were targeted in the area north of Baqubah. The following day, Coalition forces targeted members of the same group in the same location. In these two days of operations, Coalition forces killed fifteen enemy fighters and cleared multiple weapons caches, which included among other items, suicide vest materials.<sup>113</sup> On January 29<sup>th</sup> Coalition forces targeted this same area detaining another six individuals linked to the suicide bombing network.<sup>114</sup>

In February, Coalition forces continued to target the suicide bombing network in Baqubah. On February 8<sup>th</sup>, U.S. troops pursued an associate of the AQI leadership responsible for the suicide network operating in Diyala and connected to the suicide network throughout Iraq. While engaging this individual, four other enemy fighters were killed and the targeted individual killed himself by triggering his suicide vest inside the building.<sup>115</sup> On February 11<sup>th</sup>, an Iraqi Special Operations Forces contingent detained an individual in

**‘... the leader of the suicide bombing cell operating in Ghailibiyah. ... was responsible for recruiting women to carry out suicide bombing attacks and was in the process of employing his wife and another woman to carry out attacks in the near future.’**

Baqubah suspected of supplying explosive vests for use in suicide bombing attacks and working as part of a cell involved in smuggling explosives.<sup>116</sup> And on February 16<sup>th</sup>, another group of individuals associated with the suicide bombing network was detained in Baqubah.<sup>117</sup>

From March forward, Coalition forces continued to target the remnants of the suicide bombing network in Baqubah.<sup>118</sup> By the end of February, the network in Baqubah was clearly disrupted with many of the associated individuals detained or fleeing the city. As described below,

Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces also disrupted support cells in Baqubah’s villages and the associated network south and east of Baqubah that served as the link to Baghdad. Much of the remaining suicide bombing network, thereafter, was pushed either out to the Balad Ruz area or up above Lake Hamrin.

## BAQUBAH VILLAGE OPERATIONS

**A**t the same time that Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces targeted the suicide bombing network in Baqubah, they also continued to disrupt the sanctuaries that supported this network in the villages around the city. These operations targeted the secondary and tertiary concentric rings around Baqubah and continued on a smaller scale the larger practice of conducting successive and simultaneous operations to disrupt enemy movements and prevent them from regrouping in nearby areas. Several operations in mid-February highlight the types of operations that continued to clear the Baqubah area villages in this fashion.

On February 8<sup>th</sup>, Operation Rock Thrasher was conducted by the 1-38 Inf. working alongside Iraqi Security Forces. Operation Rock Thrasher cleared the villages of Windiyah and Sayyid north of Baqubah. Seven individuals were detained, several weapons were recovered, and security



An Iraqi policeman zeros his AK-47 assault rifle during training at the coalition academy on Forward Operating Base Gabe, near Baqubah, Iraq, March 15. The Iraqi army soldiers and IPs that attended the course learn skills like buddy movement, rifle marksmanship and ways to tactically respond to different situations. (Spc. Kirky Rider, 4-2 SBCT)

forces were able to talk to local people to gather information about the enemy situation in the area.<sup>119</sup>

On February 10<sup>th</sup>, Operation Viking Rodeo was conducted by elements of the 2-12 FA along with SoI members in the villages of Duwebb and Abu Jamil south of Baqubah. The villages in this area were terrorized by AQI in the previous year and Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces were routinely attacked by IEDs and small arms fire upon entering. Operation Viking Rodeo cleared the villages, and removed several emplaced IEDs and weapons caches. Local Iraqis informed the soldiers that the insurgents retreated prior to the beginning of the operation. The following day, Coalition forces returned to the villages to provide food and medical supplies and interact with the SoI members and local citizens in order to learn more about the enemy in the area and the needs of the people.<sup>120</sup>

Between February 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, Coalition

and Iraqi Security Forces conducted Operations Lions Attack and Bandog Rodeo. The 19<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Battalions, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division took the lead in these operations and the 2-1 Cav. offered support. These operations cleared the villages of Arab Jabar and Hussein al Hamadi south of Baqubah. One enemy fighter was killed, two more were wounded, and sixteen others were detained. Seven weapons caches, 35 IEDs, ten VBIEDs, and four HBIEDs were found and cleared.<sup>121</sup>

The 4-2 SBCT routinely conducted operations similar to these during its time in Diyala. They provided valuable support to operations in Baqubah and nearby areas, and also allowed the associated 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division units to benefit from first-hand combat experience. SoI programs were either established or strengthened by efforts to establish security. Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces gained valuable information about enemy

fighters, weapons caches, and importantly, the needs of the people in the area. Clearing the areas removed the individuals who were previously intimidating and terrorizing local Iraqis and also prevented these areas from being used as safe havens for supporting the suicide bombing network. By clearing these areas and removing IEDs, security operations opened up lines of communication for more regular interaction between security forces and local civilians, and provided for interaction between local leaders and the city and provincial governments in Baqubah.

## THE SOUTHERN SUICIDE-BOMBING NETWORK

Around the time that the Baqubah suicide bombing network was dismantled, operations began near Khan Bani Sa'ad targeting another group associated with the same network. These operations were decisive in breaking the back of the suicide bombing network in southern Diyala.

Khan Bani Sa'ad is the main city between Baqubah and Baghdad and this area was assessed to be another place where leaders associated with the Baqubah network had fled. The area west of the city connects to the Tigris River Valley and the facilitation network from Mosul. The area to the east of the city connects to north-south roads like the Kan'an-Nahrwan highway and the Turki village area, which have been problematic areas in the past.<sup>122</sup> This eastern area funnels into eastern Baghdad and AQI has used it as a sanctuary from which to project VBIEDs and suicide bombers into the capital. These areas near Khan Bani Sa'ad were primary targets during Diyala operations in February.

On February 17<sup>th</sup>, Coalition forces killed Arkan Khalaf Khudayyir, also known as Abu Karrar, near Khan Bani Sa'ad. Abu Karrar was a senior intelligence leader for AQI in Baqubah and was a terrorist facilitator for the suicide bombing network in Diyala. Coalition forces also identified Karrar and the Diyala suicide bombing network as responsible for suicide bombs in Baghdad including those by female bombers.<sup>123</sup> On February 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, Coalition forces

continued to pursue this network with operations targeting associates of Abu Karrar, who were likewise members of the suicide bombing network in Diyala.<sup>124</sup> While targeting this same group on the 25<sup>th</sup>, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces were ambushed upon maneuvering toward a suspected AQI building. Seven enemy fighters were killed during the engagement and two were detained, including the targeted individual.<sup>125</sup> Days later, Coalition and Iraqi forces again conducted an operation against the Baqubah IED and suicide bombing network east of Khan Bani Sa'ad and once more were attacked upon maneuvering toward a suspected AQI building. Five enemy fighters were killed and eight were detained in this operation.<sup>126</sup>

At the same time, Coalition forces also targeted the areas north and west of Khan Bani Sa'ad associated with the same network. In one of these operations on February 28<sup>th</sup>, Coalition forces captured the leader of the suicide bombing cell operating in Ghailibiyah. This individual was responsible for recruiting women to carry out suicide bombing attacks and was in the process of employing his wife and another woman to carry out attacks in the near future.<sup>127</sup> Between Abu Karrar's death and this individual's capture, Coalition forces began to expand on the successes against the suicide bombing network in Baqubah by breaking the links of the network in southern Diyala.

In early March, the area east of Khan Bani Sa'ad was again targeted with a larger Iraqi-led operation based on the intelligence developed in the previous two weeks. A joint Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police force launched Operation Fox Hunting east of Khan Bani Sa'ad, along north-south roads on both banks of the Diyala River. The main target was the Kan'an-Nahrwan road. The Kan'an-Nahrwan road is a critical route that cuts through an area where AQI has found safe haven in the past and is an important alternate to the Sabbah Nissan route for connecting AQI's operations in Baqubah to eastern Baghdad. It also runs through an area that connects Diyala province to the southern belt network through Salman Pak further south.

Operation Fox Hunting began on February



Sheiks and other influential leaders from throughout Diyala province gathered in Sa'ad Muhammed, Iraq, March 20, to establish how the newly-formed tribal support councils will operate in the province. Last month, the central government established the councils to give a voice to tribes in the government. (SSgt. Russell Bassett, 4-2 SBCT)

28<sup>th</sup> and in the first week Iraqi Army units took the lead in clearing 25 villages along the road. Ten suspected AQI gunmen were engaged and killed and another twelve were detained. Iraqi forces also seized 37 IEDs and a large amount of arms and ammunition during the raids. The 38<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company of the 4-2 SBCT assisted by conducting route clearance and discovering an additional 75 IEDs. The commander of Diyala operations, Major General Abdul-Kareem al-Rubaie, indicated that this was one of the most important battles fought by Iraqi forces in Diyala and that clearing AQI from this area would go a long way toward ending enemy operations in the southern portion of the province.<sup>128</sup>

Coalition forces detained an individual on March 2<sup>nd</sup> just east of Baghdad, who was involved in the facilitation network supplying explosive materials to the leader of one of the AQI networks in central Baghdad. This individual

was the brother of the leader of the network operating east of Khan Bani Sa'ad. The network was identified at the time as the Bizayz terrorist network. In addition to this individual, nine others were detained on site.<sup>129</sup> Two days later intelligence reports led Coalition forces to the actual leader of the Bizayz terrorist network. He was described as being responsible for the large terrorist group operating east of Khan Bani Sa'ad and was connected to his brother and other AQI facilitators along the Diyala-Baghdad line of communication. Coalition forces attempted to capture this individual, but when his vehicle did not stop he was killed along with two other individuals.<sup>130</sup>

With the deaths of Abu Karrar and the Bizayz network leader in February and March, the suicide bombing network in southern Diyala was severely disrupted. Coalition forces continued to target this area, however, in March and into



May to prevent the network link from being reestablished. For example, beginning March 23<sup>rd</sup>, Coalition forces conducted a five-day operation near Khan Bani Sa'ad targeting safe haven areas previously used by bomb-making cells in the area. They killed three targeted individuals, cleared two dozen weapons caches, and discovered anti-aircraft weapons, twelve HBIEDs, and two VBIEDs in the area indicating that enemy fighters were still active in the area.<sup>131</sup> In early May, Coalition forces conducted operations further east pursuing enemy fighters as they attempted to move toward the Turki village area.<sup>132</sup>

### OPERATIONS IN DIYALA AFTER RAIDER HARVEST

**O**peration Raider Harvest officially ended on April 1, 2008.<sup>133</sup> This three month brigade-level operation cleared the Breadbasket and many of Baqubah's villages, continuing the effort to protect the population and expand areas of security from Diyala's two main cities. Raider Harvest also disrupted the suicide bombing network in Baqubah and southern Diyala, simultaneously reducing the threat of suicide bombings in central Iraq and clearing and reopening the corridor connecting Baghdad and Baqubah. During the months of April and May, the 4-2 SBCT continued the trajectory of operations

| Diyala Operations: December 2007 – May 2008                |   |   |  |  |   |
|--|---|---|--|--|---|
|  | KBS–Baqubah Corridor & East   | Baqubah   | Baqubah Villages   | Khalis Corridor  | The Breadbasket   |
| Operation Raider Reaper launched on November 27, 2007      |   |   |  |  |   |
| December   | Recon. in force conducted along the KBS–Baqubah corridor  | Sporadic IED, VBIED, and suicide bombing attacks continued  | Operations and targeted raids conducted in several villages near Baqubah   | Operation targeted areas in the Iron Triangle near Khalis, Hibhib, and al-Hudayd   | Preparatory operations began and Coalition Forces established a presence in several Breadbasket villages  |
| January  | Operation Raider Harvest launched on January 9, 2008  |   |  |  |   |
| February   | Blackhawk Harvest cleared Sabbah Nissan reopening the Baghdad–Baqubah highway   | The suicide bombing network was targeted. An important cell was eliminated, while several facilitators and associates were detained | Operations and targeted raids continued. Several dismantled cells associated with the Baqubah suicide bombing network. | Operations continued in the Iron Triangle. Enemy fighters and operations increasingly pushed north and east of Khalis  | The Breadbasket cleared   |
| March  | Coalition Forces targeted the southern Diyala suicide bombing network detaining and killing several leaders and associated individuals      | Targeted raids continued against the suicide bombing network  | On March 20th a reconciliation meeting including 1,000 leaders from across Diyala was held in Sa'ad Muhammed           | Operations in the Breadbasket moved to the holding phase. Targeted raids continued. But focus shifted to establishing lasting security, and promoting governance, and reconstruction |   |
| Operation Raider Harvest officially ended on April 1, 2008 |   |   |  |  |   |
| April  | With the Bagdad–Baqubah corridor secured, operations increasingly pushed to the Bani Zaid region and further east to the Turki village area | Holding operations  | Operations and targeted raids continued to disrupt enemy support zones outside Buqubah                                 | One of 25 support council in Diyala established to connect local tribes to the provincial and central governments  | The 3–2 SCR remained in the Breadbasket continuing efforts begin under Raider Harvest. Joint Security Stations opened. Efforts made to tie the area into Muqadiyah, and jumpstart the local economy |
| May  | 4–2 SBCT Redeploys at the end of May – TOA to the 2nd SCR   |   |  |  |   |

begun under Raider Harvest by consolidating the gains made in the previous four months. At the same time, Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces conducted operations in Buhriz and the Bani Zaid

tribal region southeast of Baqubah, the Balad Ruz district, north of Khalis toward al Uzaym, and in Saydiyah – areas where enemy fighters remained and regrouped after Raider Harvest. At the end of May the 4-2 SBCT redeployed from Diyala and transferred authority to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stryker Cavalry Regiment (SCR).<sup>134</sup>

## SUSTAINABLE SECURITY AND PROGRESS IN DIYALA

**O**perations in Diyala have reduced violence in the province by 70 percent between June 2007 and May 2008.<sup>135</sup> Demonstrating the synergy that can occur between kinetic and non-kinetic operations in counterinsurgency, these operations have not only secured and provide stability in Diyala, but laid the foundation for more sustainable security and progress. From December through May, the 4-2 SBCT worked with the Diyala PRT to support programs that can lead to lasting success. These areas include training and transitioning to an Iraqi-led security structure, developing SoI programs and reconciliation, and encouraging better governance and economic development.

## TRANSITIONING

**A**s the second to last “surge” brigade to leave Iraq, the 4-2 SBCT focused heavily on training the Iraqi Security Forces that will eventually be responsible for security in Diyala province. The Iraqi Security Forces in Diyala include Iraqi Army, Iraqi Police, Diyala Border Enforcement, and more specialized units like the Baqubah Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit. These forces are coordinated by the Diyala Operations Command (DOC) headquartered in Baqubah. The majority of the security forces are composed of the 11,000 soldiers in the 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division headquartered at Kirkush military base and the 17,300 Iraqi Police spread out in 64 police stations and twelve district headquarters across the province.<sup>136</sup> The forces inherited by the 4-2

SBCT in December 2007 differed in capability, with the Iraqi Army as a more professional force and the Iraqi Police still requiring some basic skills.<sup>137</sup> Based on these different capability levels, the 4-2 SBCT worked along two mutually reinforcing lines to train Iraqi Security Forces in Diyala – one focused on on-base training programs for Iraqi Police and new Iraqi Army recruits to provide basic skills, while the second focused on Coalition Forces actively working with Iraqi Army units in the field to make Diyala’s fighting units operationally independent.

Starting in November, the 4-2 SBCT began a regular 10-day “basic-warriors-skills” course at Forward Operating Base (FOB) Gabe in Baqubah. This course began by teaching new policeman and soldiers leadership duties and basic responsibilities, and then moved on to weapons instruction before more advanced skills like reacting to indirect fire, squad movement, detainee operations, first aid, building entry, room clearing, and weapons marksmanship. The course ended with a comprehensive final practice exercise to determine whether or not students graduate the program.<sup>138</sup> In addition to this basic course, 6,000 of Diyala’s police were sent to a more extended eight-week training program at the Sulaymaniyah Police Academy in northern Iraq or received on the job training as part of the Theatre Integrated Police Program.<sup>139</sup> The ten-day course did not replace the more extended police academy training, but was used as a temporary fix until a longer term solution could be found.

In early 2008, Colonel Lehr stressed there was still a problem with the “professionalization” of the Iraqi Police force because of a lack of training.<sup>140</sup> At this time a concerted effort was made to establish a police academy in Diyala and provide more training. In April, the 4-2 SBCT opened a temporary academy at FOB Grizzly near Ashraf called the North Regional Training Center. On April 14<sup>th</sup>, Iraqi Police began a four-week intensive program with instruction in military training and police duties. Importantly, the training program also included courses on Iraqi law, Iraq’s police code of ethics, and proper detainee procedures.<sup>141</sup> On May 1<sup>st</sup>,



Iraqi army soldier Ausam Abdal-Ameer gives kerosene to a resident of Thaiha, Diyala province, Iraq, Jan. 21. Due to al-Qaida in Iraq's hold on the area, the provincial government before this month had been unable to provide the locals with their basic needs. During the ongoing Operation Heroes Harvest, the IA is clearing the area of AQL, making it safe enough for the government to provide basic services. (SSgt. Russell Bassett, 4-2 SBCT)

the program permanently moved to the newly finished Iraqi Police Regional Training Center in Muradiyah commemorating Diyala's own professional police academy. On May 15<sup>th</sup>, the first 500 policemen graduated.<sup>142</sup> Now fully operational, the academy will graduate another 500 policemen every four weeks, or 6,000 each year.

During 2007, the 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division made significant progress benefiting from training programs and working alongside Coalition forces. Importantly, in the second half of 2007 and early 2008 most of the training was conducted in the field during actual operations. The 4-2 SBCT used an internally resourced

Military Transition Team (MiTT) that worked directly with Iraqi Army units to coordinate Iraqi units during Coalition-led operations.<sup>143</sup> By early 2008, the 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division had made vast improvements and was capable of conducting some unilateral operations, with assistance from Coalition forces in the form of enablers like artillery, attack aviation, and close air support.<sup>144</sup>

Units from the 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division participated in some capacity in almost all of the operations throughout Diyala between December and May – often as Coalition partners, but increasingly taking the lead in both planning and execution. This increasing capability was particularly evident in several of the operations described above. In Operation Viking Harvest II, Iraqi Army units took the lead clearing the two targeted villages, while the 2-12 FA assisted with blocking operations. Operation Blackhawk Harvest was an Iraqi planned and executed operation in which the 2-1 Cav. assisted. In that operation Iraqi forces took the lead in clearing villages and reopening Sabah Nissan. According to the 4-2 SBCT MiTT, their efforts came to fruition with Operation Lions Attack, which Iraqi units planned and executed on their own. Critically, Troop B, 2-1 Cav. served as a quick reaction force if needed, and played a major support role, resourcing artillery, attack aviation, and close air support as needed.<sup>145</sup>

Between December 2007 and May 2008, Iraqi Security Forces in Diyala continued to grow and develop into a more competent, capable force demonstrating more of the qualities that will be necessary to eventually take over security responsibilities in the province. The establishment of the police academy should lead to a more professional police force and will allow the number of Iraqi Police in Diyala to increase over time. The 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division's operational capabilities increased significantly with a large amount of hands-on training. Because of the continued success of the 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division, the 4-2 SBCT was able to shift to “a tactical over watch mode of operation” only offering support as needed.<sup>146</sup> The Division's responsibilities have already grown with the

redeployment of the 4-2 SBCT. Forthcoming operations in Diyala will provide an important test for determining just how far the division has come.

## SONS OF IRAQ AND RECONCILIATION

**T**he 4-2 SBCT also continued efforts to engage and reconcile Diyala's diverse population that were begun in 2007.<sup>147</sup> The primary mechanism for reaching out to new Sunni tribal groups in Diyala continued to be through security operations, with Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces identifying local leaders. In the wake such operations, the establishment of new SoI groups institutionalized these relationships. Between December and May, SoI membership in Diyala grew to almost 10,000.<sup>148</sup> The SoI program has a three-fold effect: it drives AQI from former sanctuaries, frees up combat power to pursue enemy fighters, and offers short-term employment to jump-start local economies.<sup>149</sup> The overall impact of the program is to promote reconciliation by separating insurgents from their base of support and creating linkages between local areas, the Iraqi Security Forces, and the Government of Iraq.

Beyond the establishment of SoI groups, operations in Diyala also prompted some individuals displaced by violence in 2007 to return home. In some cases, residents were able to return because of improved security conditions. At various times during Raider Harvest, residents were able to return to their homes in Khan Bani Sa'ad, the Breadbasket, and various other areas including many of the villages near Baqubah.<sup>150</sup> In other cases, operations were conducted with the intended purpose of facilitating the return of individuals to areas. Operation Fierce Thrasher, for example, was conducted in February in the town of Durah. Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces secured the city, established a SoI program,

and helped return displaced residents. 39 families returned immediately and another 100 pledged to return shortly.<sup>151</sup> During Viking Harvest II described above, 375 displaced families returned home.

A series of meetings were also held to facilitate reconciliation. In December, Operation Raider Reaper concluded with a reconciliation meeting between tribal leaders from Khalis and Hibhib. The meeting was held at the Governance Center in Baqubah and was also attended by Diyala's governor, the 5<sup>th</sup> Iraqi Army Division commander, the DOC commander, and the Provincial Security Advisor. The meeting focused on maintaining the peace established during Raider Reaper, ending sectarian violence, and helping displaced families return home. Local leaders used the meeting as a forum to highlight issues particular to each tribe thus beginning a dialogue of reconciliation in the area. Each sheik took an oath and signed an agreement to:

- Work together to stop attacks against Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces
- Deny use of land for insurgents
- Follow the government's laws
- Resolve tribal conflict through sheiks
- Guarantee equal rights regardless of sect
- Allow the displaced families of Diyala to return to their homes regardless of sect

The meeting served the dual purpose of promoting tribal engagement and reconciliation, and also established an open forum for communication between local area leaders and the provincial government in Baqubah.<sup>152</sup>

In February, the Government of Iraq approved the creation of provincial tribal support councils to provide Iraq's tribes with, "a voice in government to help with reconciliation and stability". The government provided 50 million dinar for each province to help get them started. On March 20<sup>th</sup>, a meeting was held to establish tribal support councils throughout

Diyala province. The meeting in Diyala was held in Sa'ad Muhammed at the home of Sheik Dura Fayyahd al-Amiri, one of the most influential sheiks in province. The meeting was attended by more than 1,000 people from across Diyala including important local tribal sheiks, representatives of the central government, Diyala's governor, deputy governors, and provincial council, and Iraqi Army and Police commanders in the province. Dr. Fa'al Niamah Alayawi, a member of the Government of Iraq's Implementation and Follow-on Committee for National Reconciliation, opened the meeting by outlining the role of tribal support councils. He stressed that the councils would:

- Work for reconciliation between tribes and religious sects
- Help displaced families return to their homes
- Advise the provincial government on reconstruction projects
- Help Sons of Iraq receive jobs in the Iraqi Security Forces
- Create social programs in the area.

During the meeting, it was agreed that 25 support councils would be established – one for each of Diyala's urban areas. The sheiks agreed to meet next in Baqubah to continue the dialogue and reconciliation efforts begun in Sa'ad Muhammed.<sup>153</sup>

## GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In 2007, security progress in Diyala led to greater governance and economic development as stability allowed the provincial government to focus on budget execution and essential services. The provincial council allocated money from both the unspent 2006 budget and the 2007 budget to reconstruction projects and the extension of essential services. The Iraqi subsidized food program became functional across the province;

water facilities and the electric network were improved; hospitals and clinics benefited from investment and began providing service to new areas; schools were supported by the Ministry of Education in Baghdad; fuel shipments became more regular; the canal and irrigation system was cleaned out in many areas; and, in general, shops and businesses began reopening as areas became more secure.<sup>154</sup> The greatest gains were made in Baqubah where operations and support from the government were most intensive.

Between December and May, the provincial government continued to work on those areas listed above, both strengthening existing initiatives and extending them into new areas, like the Breadbasket and the Baqubah villages, once they were cleared. When the 4-2 SBCT redeployed in May, Colonel Lehr highlighted several province-wide accomplishments in the previous six months including the provincial government planning and executing its budget; a 25 percent increase in electricity production in western Diyala; a 125 percent increase in fuel capacity in the province; and the opening of Diyala's first private bank with ATM and electronic funds transfer capability.<sup>155</sup>

Local developments also occurred as clearing operations moved into the holding phase in Diyala. In the Breadbasket, medical aid, regular food rations and some fuel shipments began reaching local populations; displaced families returned home and shops reopened; canals were cleaned up and the local water treatment plant was improved; and a line of communication was opened between local leaders who now travel regularly to Muqdadiyah to meet with their counterparts to discuss local needs. Much work remains to be done in the Breadbasket, but according to Hamid Ameen Saleim, the *mukhtar* (mayor) of Himbus, "All the families here can relax and get back to work. The economy is picking up because people are getting back to work."<sup>156</sup> Similar developments occurred further south in many of the villages around Baqubah and along the corridor between Khan Bani Sa'ad and Baqubah. The opening of Sabah Nissan should also lead to more commercial activity and interaction between the provincial government and the Government of Iraq as it becomes easier

to travel between Baghdad and Baqubah.

Governance and economic development have easily been the most lagging measures of success in Diyala. The provincial government in Diyala still lacks capacity and must develop more effective relationships between the provincial ministries and the provincial council. Moreover, relationships are still in need of development between local areas, the provincial government, and the central government. The provincial government, however, functions rather well. According to Colonel Lehr, it would continue to function effectively even if Coalition forces and the Diyala PRT simply walked away.<sup>157</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The campaign to expand security in Diyala under the 4-2 SBCT succeeded by following the path set by the 3-1 HBCT in 2007.<sup>158</sup> The 4-2 SBCT continued to focus on capturing and

controlling terrain. The decisive cities of Baqubah and Muqdadiyah were held and retained before Coalition forces moved in force to clear the AQI support zones outside of those cities. By focusing on retaining and thus denying terrain to enemy groups, the enemy was not simply chased from one area to the next. Instead, the enemy was methodically pushed out of strategic locations and into increasingly less important areas by successive and simultaneous operations that prevented them from regrouping. This approach was replicated in clearing Diyala's highways like Sabbah Nissan and the Kan'an-Nahrwan road with security zones being pushed out from those important corridors. In the weeks and months after clearing operations in Raider Harvest, the 4-2 SBCT focused on consolidating the gains in new areas by continuing to target enemy fighters, while simultaneously shifting to holding and retaining operations. In this manner, Coalition forces secured Diyala's secondary and tertiary areas, and set the conditions for Iraqi Security Force Transition, reconciliation, governance and economic development.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 A high-value target is defined as a “A target the enemy commander requires for the successful completion of the mission. The loss of high-value targets would be expected to seriously degrade important enemy functions throughout the friendly commander’s area of interest.” Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, Joint Publication 1-02, Amended through May 30, 2008.
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