

IRAQ REPORT

U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Ray Odierno, commander of Multi-National Corps - Iraq, reviews a map with Capt. Eric Lawless, of the 1st Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, at Forward Operating Base Iskandariyah in Iraq on Dec. 25, 2006. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Curt Cashour)

February 14 – June 15, 2007

The Real Surge: Preparing for Operation Phantom Thunder

by **KIMBERLY KAGAN**

Summary

On June 15, 2007, Generals David Petraeus and Ray Odierno launched the largest coordinated military operation in Iraq since the initial U.S. invasion. The campaign, called Operation Phantom Thunder, aims to expel al Qaeda from its sanctuaries just outside of Baghdad. Denying al Qaeda the ability to fabricate car bombs and transport fighters through the rural terrain around Baghdad is a necessary prerequisite for securing the capital city, the overarching military goal for Iraq in 2007.

Phantom Thunder consists of simultaneous offensives by U.S. forces throughout central Iraq. The Division north of Baghdad cleared the long-festering city of Baqubah and its outlying areas. The Division east and southeast of Baghdad is clearing the critical al Qaeda stronghold in Arab Jabour, immediately south of the capital. It is also destroying al Qaeda's ability to transport weapons along the Tigris River and to send reinforcements from the Euphrates to the Tigris. The Division west of Baghdad is clearing al Qaeda's sanctuaries between Fallujah and Baghdad, all the way to the shores of Lake Tharthar northwest of the capital. Meanwhile, the Division in Baghdad continues to clear important areas of the city and areas to its immediate north and west.

Phantom Thunder is not a new strategy or a new plan. U.S. commanders have been preparing Phantom Thunder since the effort to secure Baghdad began in February. General Odierno, who commands Coalition combat forces in Iraq, has been carefully positioning the additional brigades that the President sent to Iraq. General Odierno has, brigade by brigade, encircled Baghdad. U.S. troops have not, literally, cordoned off the city. Rather, General Odierno has stationed Coalition forces on every major supply line, river, or road in a circle around Baghdad. Much of the fighting outside of Baghdad between February 15 and June 15 has aimed at positioning U.S. troops in these areas and reconnoitering them. Many of these areas received little or no attention from U.S. combat forces in 2006.

Coalition and Iraqi forces have also been securing Baghdad's vital and unstable neighborhoods before and during Phantom Thunder. General Odierno's careful disposition of forces inside of Baghdad from February to June has restricted insurgent movement within the city, and has squeezed the enemy into ever smaller operating areas within the capital. As the offensive outside the city continues, it is increasingly difficult for the enemy inside the city to receive supplies or reinforcements.

MISSION: SECURING THE POPULATION OF BAGHDAD

In January 2007, President Bush changed the mission of U.S. forces in Iraq to securing the population of Baghdad from sectarian violence. He reinforced American troops in Iraq and appointed General David Petraeus to command them. According to Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, who works directly for General Petraeus, the primary goal of military operations in Iraq is: “to create stability and security to protect the Iraqi people, first and foremost in Baghdad. The population and the government of Iraq are the center of gravity.¹ Creating a stable environment in Baghdad should provide time and space for the Iraqi government to continue to mature as a government and continue to build its capacity.”² Establishing security in Baghdad is the primary military objective for military operations in 2007.

THE OPERATIONAL CONCEPT: THE CITY AND ITS BELTS

In order to execute this mission, Generals Petraeus and Odierno had to determine the best way to use military forces to secure Baghdad. The new counterinsurgency doctrine, written under the direction of General Petraeus in his previous role as commander of the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, emphasizes the need to establish and maintain the security of the

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■ As General Odierno explained: “The areas surrounding Baghdad, which we refer to as the ‘Baghdad belts,’ are also key to its security.” Establishing security inside of Baghdad, therefore, also depends on preventing enemies from infiltrating into the city.

population. General Petraeus has interpreted this doctrine in Iraq to mean stationing U.S. troops in Baghdad’s neighborhoods in order to protect the population constantly. But car bombs, weapons, and fighters often originate outside of Baghdad, rather than in the city itself. General Odierno, the commander of Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I), therefore considered two methods of securing Baghdad with military forces: “do we cut [the enemy] off outside of Baghdad, or do we provide more security inside?”³ In other words, should U.S. forces attempt to establish security by clearing and patrolling the city’s neighborhoods? Or should they secure the capital by eliminating the enemy from safe havens just outside Baghdad? Providing security within Baghdad directly supports the mission of

protecting its population from sectarian violence, but as General Odierno explained: “The areas surrounding Baghdad, which we refer to as the ‘Baghdad belts,’ are also key to its security.”⁴ Establishing security inside of Baghdad, therefore, also depends on preventing enemies from infiltrating into the city.

The Baghdad belts are residential, agricultural, and industrial areas that encircle the city, and networks of roadways, rivers, and other lines of communication that lie within a twenty or thirty mile radius of Baghdad. The enemy, both al Qaeda and rogue Shia militias, controlled locations in the Baghdad belts between 2004 and 2006. U.S. forces did not contest the enemy’s occupation of the belts in 2006, as General George Casey, then the overall commander of Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I), prioritized training the Iraqi Security Forces, rather than using U.S. forces to establish security. As a result of this approach, the enemies of the Coalition and the Iraqi government were able to use the terrain around Baghdad to project forces and funnel supplies into the capital, and to move freely around the city into the provinces. As General

Odierno explained, “Attacks occurring in Baghdad often originate in these outerlying regions. Sectarian lines begin to blur in these belts, creating a flashpoint for extremists looking to assert their control over Baghdad. Al Qaeda in Iraq and Shi’a extremists want to control these areas.”⁵ The Iraq Report has already documented the movement of fighters, weapons, and car bombs through the southern and northern belts.⁶

doctrine, maintaining a constant presence in the neighborhoods to provide security for the people living there. General Odierno established Joint Security Stations and Combat Outposts in Baghdad to improve security within the city’s borders. “This continuous presence is making the Iraqi people feel safer and has greatly increased the amount of information provided to the Iraqi army, police and coalition forces by the public.”⁸

In addition, General Odierno deployed brigades throughout the Baghdad belts in order to interdict the flow of fighters into the capital.

By the beginning of June, General Odierno had encircled Baghdad with Coalition Forces—not literally, with an unbroken chain of forces, but rather by placing brigades on every main road to and from the city. On June 15, 2007, General Odierno launched multiple, simultaneous, offensive operations around Baghdad in order to disrupt enemies surrounding the city. This Corps offensive is called Operation Phantom Thunder.

SETTING THE CONDITIONS FOR A CORPS OFFENSIVE

The Corps (Multi-National Corps-Iraq) is the largest military unit that fights in Iraq, and General Odierno commands it. The Corps consists of multiple divisions of U.S. and allied forces. The Corps offensive comprises a set of coordinated military operations by all the forces that fight in Iraq. These different operations are

conducted throughout Iraq, but they all aim at the same overarching goal—in the current case, eliminating the enemy from the belts surrounding Baghdad and preventing them from re-establishing themselves in or near the city. A Corps offensive requires months of planning and preparations because so many troops are involved, the mission is complex, and different Divisions must coordinate their plans and op-



General Odierno therefore developed a plan to improve Baghdad’s security in both the belts and in the city using all of the forces available to him as the Corps commander.⁷ Inside Baghdad, U.S. forces flowed from their Forward Operating Bases into the neighborhoods, where they occupied Joint Security Stations and Combat Outposts, creating a net of small units in the city. They followed the new counterinsurgency

erations. Planning and preparations for General Odierno's June 15 Corps offensive began in January, when President Bush announced the "surge" of troops into Iraq.

Positioning New Troops

President Bush committed five more U.S. Army brigades and two additional Marine battalions to Iraq in January 2007. The brigades arrived at the rate of one each month from February to June. In addition, a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) arrived in June.

As new forces arrived in Iraq during the first half of this year, General Odierno carefully prepared for "the battle for the belts." He incorporated each new brigade and the MEU into operations as it arrived. He deployed two of the new brigades to Baghdad and three to the belts around the city. During this deployment, General Odierno began preliminary operations to encircle Baghdad and to establish U.S. forces within the city. These operations set the conditions for the Corps offensive that began on June 15—the coherent operation using all of the resources at General Odierno's command.

Commanders "set the conditions" for decisive operations by deploying their forces to the theater, establishing bases for the forces, supplying them, organizing command structures, reconnoitering the terrain, developing intelligence about the enemy, and creating maneuver corridors, for example. 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 scouts reconnoiter the new areas, they make contact with the enemy and fight skirmishes. In each case, the purpose of operations is not to fight and eliminate the enemy from an area, but rather to create the preconditions for successful, decisive operations

to follow. These preliminary operations aim to reconnoiter terrain, map enemy behavior, prepare our forces, seize key positions, establish basic trust relationships with the population, and weaken the enemy where possible.

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Baghdad belts or securing the population of the capital). The flow of troops into Baghdad in February and March; the fight for Diyala province, the southern belt, and eastern Anbar; and the continued clearing operations in Baghdad in April and May have been preliminary operations to set the conditions for one or more major Corps offensives. As the Iraq Report has noted in the past, major clearing operations did not begin throughout Baghdad in February, even though brigades inside Baghdad cleared some neighborhoods. Rather, many operations between mid-February and mid-May set the condi-

tions for subsequent clearing operations in and around Iraq's capital.

General Petraeus described this process as he discussed the beginning of the Corps offensive on June 16: "We have been doing what we might call shaping operations in a lot of these different areas. We've been feeling their edges, if you will, doing intelligence gathering, putting in some special operators, going in but then coming out. And now for the first time we're really going into a couple of the really key areas in the belt from which, again, al Qaeda has sallied forth with car bombs, additional fighters and so forth. ... [S]o we think we can build on what has been done — if you will, the foundation of intelligence and base structure and all the rest that has been put in place over the last several months."⁹

OVERVIEW OF PREPARATORY OPERATIONS

From January to June 2007, General Odierno used military forces to set the conditions for decisive operations in Baghdad and the belts.

Before Operation Enforcing the Law began in February, General Odierno used American troops to disrupt al Qaeda strongholds in and around Baghdad. U.S. forces fought to enter violent terrain that the enemy had firmly controlled in 2006, such as Haifa Street (Baghdad), Balad Ruz (Diyala), and Yusifiyah (southwest of Baghdad). Iraq Report I described these initial operations.

General Odierno and his Iraqi counterparts then began Operation Enforcing the Law. He moved U.S. forces from their Forward Operating Bases near the capital to more dispersed Joint Security Stations in Baghdad. As the new brigades arrived, he sent some to Baghdad. He sent the first “surge” brigade, the 2nd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division, rapidly toward Sadr City. (Iraq Report II described these operations.) U.S. forces within Baghdad reconnoitered their areas from their Joint Security Stations and cleared the enemy from key positions that U.S. units needed to occupy or transverse in order to continue their counterinsurgency operations. They laid the groundwork for conducting future counterinsurgency operations by patrolling neighborhoods regularly.

From February through June, U.S. brigades continued to fight within the city to expand their territorial control. General Odierno re-concentrated and re-positioned troops in western and southern Baghdad in April to counter the enemy and to prepare for further clearing operations. Extensive clearing operations in southern Baghdad, where al Qaeda established strong defensive positions in 2006, began in mid-May.

While operations in Baghdad continued, General Odierno deployed additional troops into the belts around Baghdad. He reinforced Diyala Province, northeast of Baghdad, in March and in May. (Iraq Report IV describes these operations.) In April, he deployed a new surge brigade in Besmaya, east of Sadr City, and these new U.S. forces began to maneuver in the eastern and southeastern belts of the capital in May. Addi-

tional troops reinforced the southwestern belt that runs from Sadr al-Yusifiyah to Mahmudiyah. The new Marine Expeditionary Unit began operating northeast of Fallujah and northwest of Baghdad, along the southern shore of Lake Tharthar. Finally, General Odierno re-positioned U.S. forces north and west of Baghdad so that they operated as seamlessly as possible through that terrain.

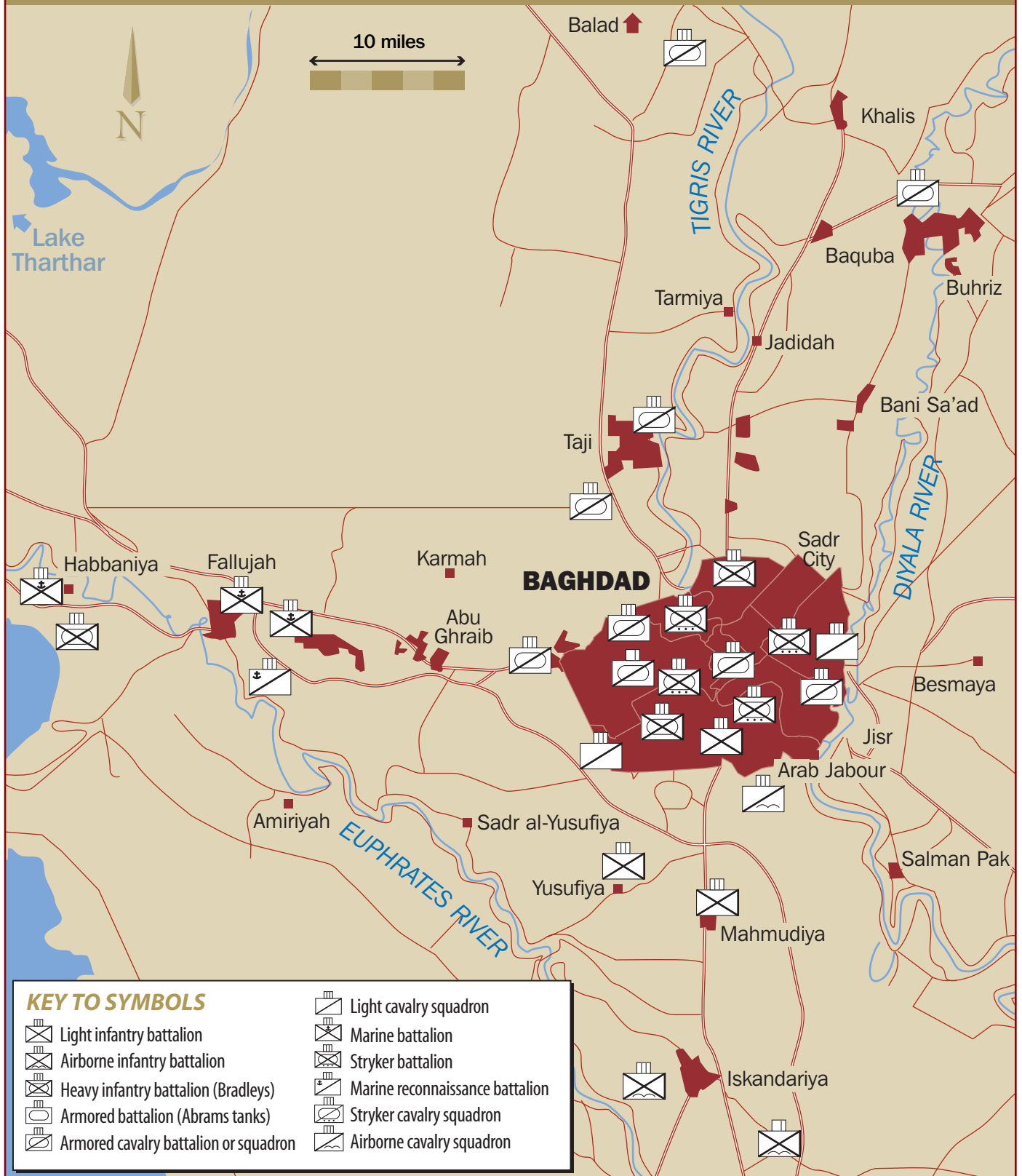
General Odierno’s placement of the additional brigades secured the particular area in which each was located. More importantly, General Odierno deployed each brigade with an eye to securing Baghdad as a whole. If we zoom out and examine where General Odierno placed all the brigades from February to June, a distinct pattern emerges.

General Odierno concentrated U.S. forces in two rings around Baghdad, one fifteen to thirty miles outside the city, and the other along the city’s circumference. The outer ring runs from Taji (north of Baghdad between the 11 or 12 o’clock position), clockwise to Tarmiyah (one), Buhriz (two), Besmaya (three), Salman Pak (five), Mahmudiyah (six), Sadr alYusifiyah (eight), Fallujah (nine) and Karmah (ten). An inner ring took shape along the circumference of Baghdad itself, as troops moved off the FOBs that surround the city: Adhamiyah (one-two), Rashid (four-seven), western Mansour (nine-eleven). In addition, troops have fanned out into the central areas of Baghdad, particularly into Karkh. Finally, they have operated on the southeastern fringes of the city, such as Kamiliyah.

General Odierno’s deployment constitutes a deep encirclement of Baghdad that aims to prevent the enemy from moving freely around Iraq or from sector to sector around the city during the offensive. General Odierno’s disposition of forces also concentrated troops in volatile areas. Many of these areas, inside and outside of Baghdad, lie along sectarian fault lines where al Qaeda and rogue Jaysh al Mahdi have fought one another and terrorized local populations.

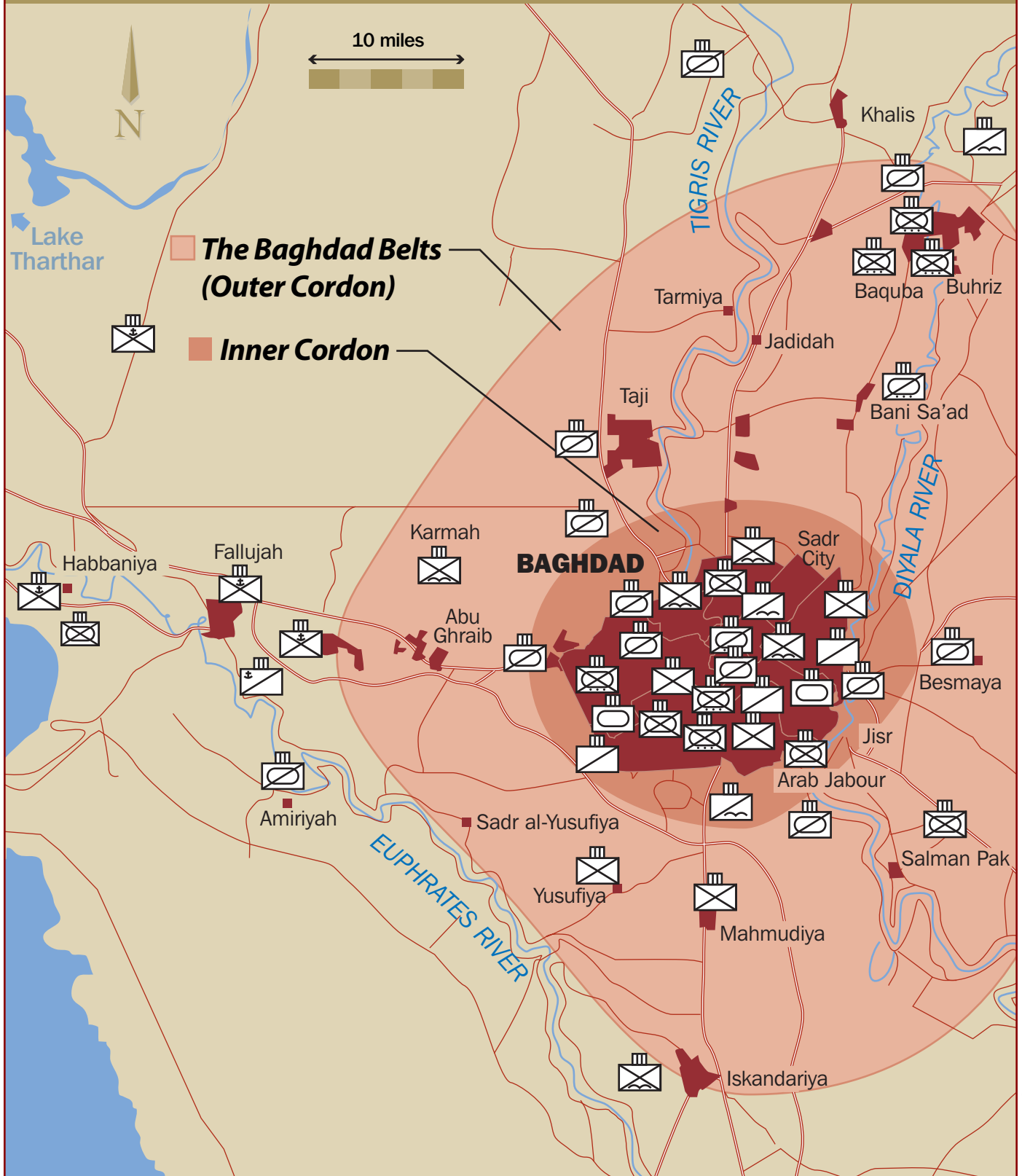
In addition to encircling the city, Generals Petraeus and Odierno made other preparations for the Corps offensive, Phantom Thunder. For example, U.S. forces captured and killed al Qaeda leaders and operatives, especially in Baghdad’s belts, Karmah, Balad, and the northern city of

January, 2007: THE DISPOSITION OF U.S. FORCES IN IRAQ BEFORE THE SURGE



THE WEEKLY STANDARD

June, 2007: THE CURRENT DISPOSITION OF U.S. FORCES IN IRAQ



THE WEEKLY STANDARD

Mosul. They likewise killed and captured rogue militia leaders and arms smugglers in Baghdad and in southern Iraq. The Iraqi Security Forces planned and conducted a counterinsurgency campaign to quell militia violence in the southern city of Diwaniyah. All of these military operations occurred between January and June. U.S. forces also assisted in the growth of provincial government and the Iraqi Security Forces during this same period.

This encirclement of the city by U.S. forces is the most complex and significant military development of the past six months. This edition of the Iraq Report, therefore, will examine how the encirclement of the city occurred, so that its full significance can be understood.

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PREPARING THE INNER CORDON AND NET

Reinforcing Baghdad during the Deployment of Surge Brigades

General Odierno added two new, “surge” brigades (twelve battalions and two brigade headquarters) to increase the troop density in Baghdad to protect the population.¹⁰ He also generated combat forces for Baghdad by changing the deployment and tasks of the U.S. forces that had been situated on Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) since fall 2006. He dispersed the pre-surge troops from Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) to Joint Security Stations (JSSs) and Combat Outposts (COPs) in Baghdad’s neighborhoods.

For example, the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division (the Dagger Brigade) assumed command of its area of operations in western Baghdad in November 2006. At that time, Dagger’s headquarters took command of several units already stationed in that area.¹¹ The reconstituted brigade prepared to move off of its FOB in January 2007. To do so, one of its units began constructing and operating from combat outposts in Ghazaliya, a neighborhood in the Mansour

district of western Baghdad. Then, the Dagger Brigade constructed additional JSSs and COPs in the west.

To improve Dagger Brigade’s capacity, General Odierno reinforced the Dagger Brigade with battalions from the “surge” brigades (before March 15).¹² As the JSSs and COPs were ready, Dagger’s subordinate battalions then formally assumed responsibility for areas within the brigade’s sector.¹³ Dagger Brigade moved from west to east, disrupting al Qaeda’s movement along Route Irish, the highway connecting Baghdad International Airport with the city center. (This highway also leads from the al Qaeda stronghold of Fallujah to Baghdad, via Abu Ghraib, and is a major conduit for vehicle bombs.) Dagger Brigade cleared Ghazaliyah, just north of Route Irish. The brigade then moved from the residential neighborhoods north and east of those places toward the Shi’a neighborhood of Khadimiyah and the mixed neighborhood of Amiriyah.

The 2nd Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division was the first fresh brigade to enter Baghdad as part of the troop increase. Iraq Report II documented that brigade’s movements into northeastern Baghdad in February, when the 82nd entered the capital’s Adhamiyah district. There, it patrolled the Sha’ab, Ur, and Bayda neighborhoods on the northwestern borders of Sadr City. By the first week of March, 2/82 ABN had established a Joint Security Station just inside Sadr City.¹⁴

The 4th Brigade Combat Team, First Infantry Division, arrived next. The 4th BCT/1st ID began operations in Iraq on March 1, 2007.¹⁵ General Odierno and Major General Joseph Fil, commander of Multi-National Division-Baghdad, assigned the brigade to Baghdad’s West and East Rashid Security Districts. Rashid has a population of about 700,000 and occupies an area the size of San Francisco. It contains Sunni neighborhoods, Shia neighborhoods, and a small neighborhood of Christians; the area was a focal point of the sectarian conflict in fall 2006.¹⁶

General Odierno effectively doubled the

number of troops in Rashid between March and May. The 4/1 ID incorporated elements of seven different battalions, some of which were already stationed in Baghdad when it arrived. Together, these forces comprise a brigade-sized formation of roughly 4,000 soldiers, and they called themselves “Task Force Dragon.”¹⁸

The five brigades in Baghdad proper increased their ability to maneuver in the first four months of Operation Enforcing the Law. They established combat outposts, reconnoitered routes, tracked the enemy, and destroyed weapons caches. Discrete operations to secure neighborhoods accompanied the ink-like spread of troops into Baghdad. From February through June, the five brigades in the capital hardened markets, protected residential areas, and established safe neighborhoods as models. This edition of the Iraq Report cannot review brigade operations in Baghdad in March, April, and May. Rather, these operations will be addressed in future reports or supplements.

Spreading the Net, Tightening the Inner Cordon, and Preparing the Belts

Phantom Thunder, the current campaign to control the belts, began after U.S. forces within Baghdad achieved a certain level of security in parts of the capital and disrupted the enemy’s movements in the city. General Odierno gave a general disposition of troops and situation report on Baghdad as Operation Phantom Thunder began: “In Multinational Division-Baghdad, we have five brigade combat teams operating inside Baghdad proper, and a sixth brigade combat team operating in Taji north of the city. Some parts of Baghdad are doing well and seeing progress while others still have high levels of violence. Our current focus is clearing and controlling the security districts of Adhamiya in northeast, Rashid in the south, and portions of Mansour in the northwest.

■ General Fil stated at the end of June that all surge forces that would reinforce Baghdad had arrived. As a result, he was “now able to really touch all parts of the city with coalition forces.” It is thus possible to speak, metaphorically, of a net of U.S. and Iraqi forces within Baghdad’s inner cordon.

These are the areas where we’re seeing the majority of violence inside of Baghdad. These are areas where sectarian fault lines exist, [a] convergence of AQI and Shi’a extremists.”¹⁹ U.S. forces deliberately attacked some of the largest concentrations of al Qaeda in the city, particularly in Ghazaliya and Rashid, before and during Operation Phantom Thunder.

Task Force Dragon began clearing Rashid in early May. During the clearing operations, “Operation Dragon Fire,” the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, reinforced the 4/1 ID, creating extra troop density.²⁰ In the first three weeks of Operation Dragon Fire, Colonel Gibbs and the 4/1 ID cleared 45 mahallas, or small neighborhoods (like postal ZIP Code areas in U.S. cities), in Rashid. In that time, his units discovered enough

explosives to make 3,000 IEDs and detained two hundred insurgent leaders.²¹

The brigades in western Baghdad moved toward one another during reinforcing and clearing operations, creating a cordon in Baghdad’s interior sometime in May. The clearing in Ghazaliyah drove fighters from that area—perhaps to southern Baghdad—while preventing enemy reinforcements from arriving from the west. The clearing in Rashid killed, captured, and pushed fighters into a tighter area in Doura, a collection of mahallas in that southern district.

The operations in Rashid laid the groundwork for the clearing of the southern belt by limiting the movement of al Qaeda into and out of the southern section of the capital. As U.S. troops squeezed al Qaeda in Ghazaliya, southern Karkh, and western Rashid, the fighters in Doura could not easily move north or west. As importantly, the preparation and beginning of the campaign in the belts prevented al Qaeda from escaping from Doura to Arab Jabour, or from reinforcing Doura from the south.

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rived. As a result, he was “now able to really touch all parts of the city with coalition forces.”²² It is thus possible to speak, metaphorically, of a net of U.S. and Iraqi forces within Baghdad’s inner cordon.

PREPARING BAGHDAD’S OUTER CORDON

General Odierno placed units in the belts in late December and early January. Those units began reconnoitering the Euphrates River and Arab Jabour in January with the aid of a cavalry squadron (1-40 Cavalry) already in theater. In addition, the 2-10 Mountain operated in Yusi-fiyah and elements of the 4-25 in Iskandariyah. This relatively small force was technically responsible for large swaths of terrain, but they by no means operated throughout the large area that encircled the city.

General Odierno deployed the next three brigades that arrived to the belts around the capital. By placing three fresh brigades around the city of Baghdad, General Odierno prepared to contest the enemy’s occupation of the Baghdad belts.

Operations around Baghdad in February, March, April, and May aimed to “interdict accelerants” into Baghdad. In other words, Coalition forces tried to prevent the flow of weapons and people who were supplying weapons, money, fighters, car or truck bombs, or otherwise making it possible for armed groups to fight one another and terrorize the population of Baghdad.²³

Insurgent Movement in the Belts

Al Qaeda’s capabilities in Iraq, and particularly in Baghdad, depended on its ability to move around the capital, as well as through it. The strong links around the city made it possible for al Qaeda to transport weapons and fighters, finance their activities, run kidnapping rings that terrorized locals and used victims to emplace vehicle bombs, and run vehicle-bomb-making factories; all of which were necessary for the vehicle bomb network to operate. Disrupting al Qaeda’s operations in Baghdad required dis-

rupting the enemy’s freedom to move through the belts around Baghdad, rather than expelling them from any one safe haven.

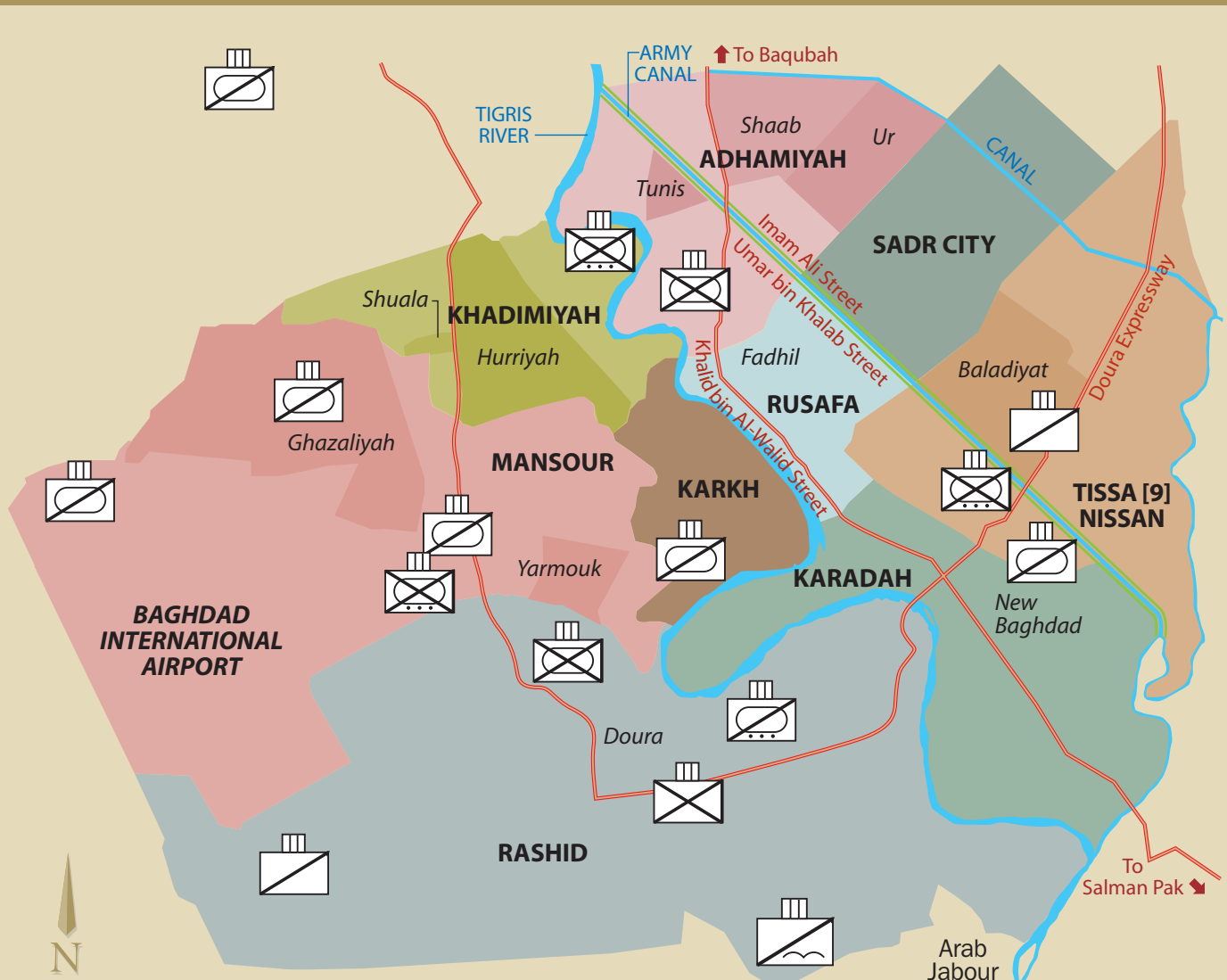
Trapping Insurgents Expelled from Baghdad

As U.S. troops moved into Baghdad in force, some of the enemy predictably tried to take refuge in safe-havens in the belts, as they had in the past. General Petraeus noted in April: “[W]e expected, frankly, that as the pressure was exerted in Baghdad on al Qaeda in particular, but also [on] some of the extremist militia elements, that they would migrate north and south respectively, and that has been the case.”²⁴

General Odierno’s consistent deployment of forces into the Baghdad belts since January, however, prevented insurgents from escaping in large numbers. General Petraeus explained, “We have chased them in some cases. As you may know, we deployed a Stryker battalion from Baghdad to Diyala Province just north of Baghdad—northeast Baqubah, which is a city in the so-called fault line areas between both sects and ethnic groups. We have reinforced with some special operations elements the areas in Mosul and Nineveh Province. So we do believe...that we are keeping the pressure on, in fact, in those areas as those elements, in a sense, squirt or move out of Baghdad, and we are also going after them in the Baghdad belts. In fact, as these additional forces come in, they are not just going to the interior of Baghdad. In some cases they’re going to the so-called belts around Baghdad—so-called throat of Baghdad—that have often been battle zones in which we have generally not dominated in the past but do need to dominate if we’re to provide improved security in Baghdad proper.”²⁵ U.S. forces did not squeeze al Qaeda out of the city into new areas. Some fighters remained in the city, and other fighters fled to the established safe-havens in the belts.²⁶

General Odierno’s troop disposition thus encircled or pinched many insurgents who operated between the belts and Baghdad. In order to disrupt the flow of fighters back into Baghdad, Generals Petraeus and Odierno planned a Corps-level offensive consisting of many operations conducted simultaneously around the ring.

January, 2007: U.S. FORCES IN BAGHDAD BEFORE THE SURGE.

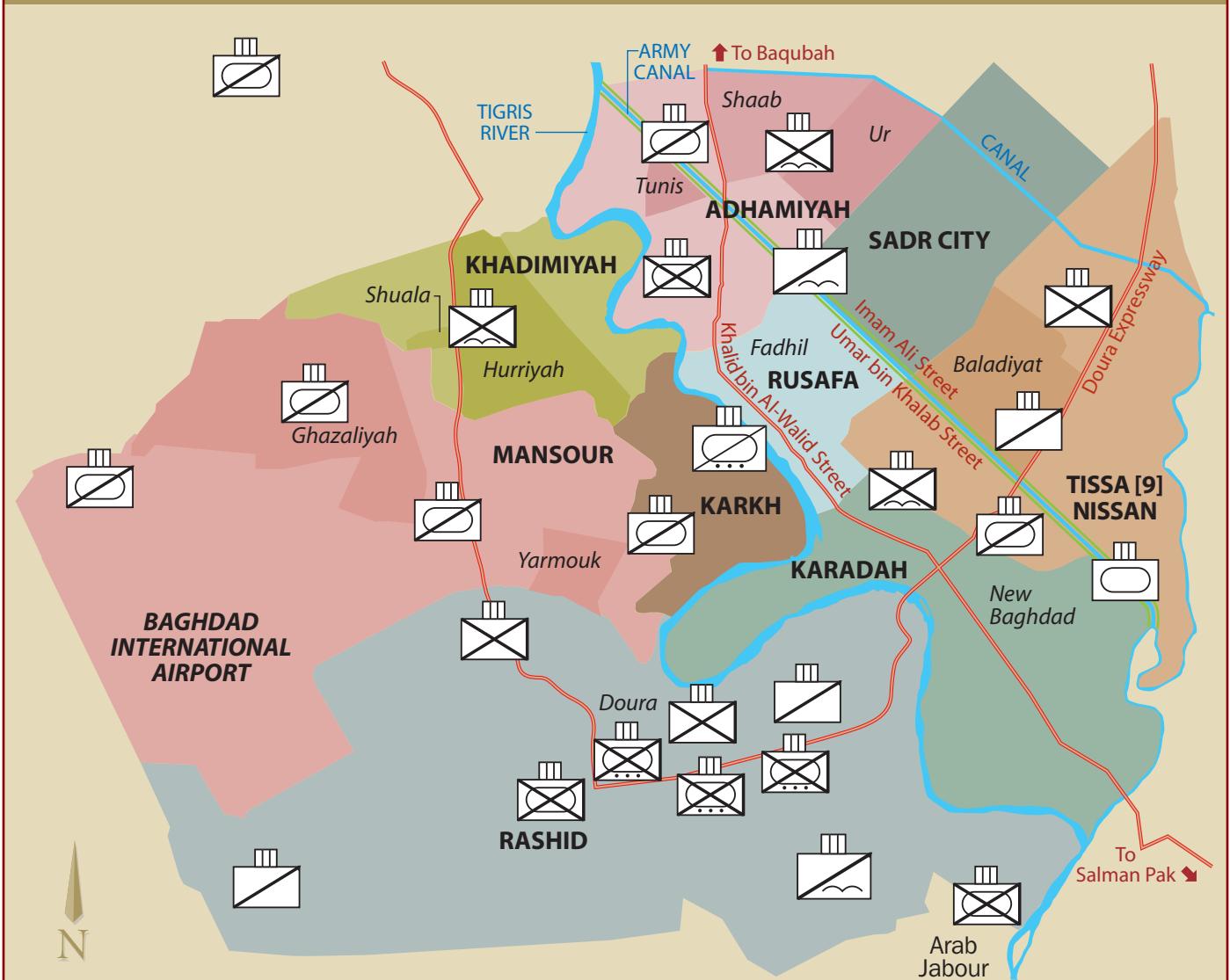


DISTRICTS
 Important Neighborhoods
 Major Roads
 WATERWAYS

KEY TO SYMBOLS	
	Armored cavalry battalion or squadron
	Light infantry battalion
	Airborne infantry battalion
	Heavy infantry battalion (Bradleys)
	Armored battalion (Abrams tanks)
	Light cavalry squadron
	Stryker battalion
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THE WEEKLY STANDARD

June, 2007: CURRENT U.S. FORCES IN BAGHDAD



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THE WEEKLY STANDARD

*A New Division Headquarters:
Development of Multi-National Division-Center*

General Odierno created a new division headquarters in order to conduct the fight in the belts, evidence of the priority and complexity of the operation he foresaw there. Multi-National Division-Baghdad, commanded by General Joseph Fil, controlled eight brigades, stretching from Tarmiyah (20 miles north of Baghdad) through Iskandariyah (25 miles south of Baghdad) until April 1.²⁷ The number of brigades assigned to the division, the complexity of the mission inside Baghdad, and the large terrain the units covered presented a span-of-control challenge for the Baghdad Division commander.²⁸ As Generals Petraeus and Odierno developed the campaign plan for the southern belt and added forces south and east of the city, they requested a new division headquarters to command that sector of the Baghdad belts. Third Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Rick Lynch, oversaw the new Multi-National Division-Center, established on April 1, 2007, and operational soon thereafter.²⁹

Generals Petraeus and Odierno had considered the Baghdad belts a priority—indeed an integral part of the Baghdad Security Plan—since Operation Enforcing the Law began on February 14. General Fil spoke about the plans to add a division headquarters as early as February 16. He indicated at that time that General Odierno would use the division headquarters to manage the fight in the belts. The new division headquarters would oversee an outer cordon, allowing MND-Baghdad to focus exclusively on the capital city.³⁰ Generals Petraeus and Odierno, therefore, had judged in February that the fight for the Baghdad belts would require such extensive reinforcements that they would probably need to add a new division headquarters before operations began.³¹ The development of MND-Center in April

permitted more extensive operations south and east of Baghdad, in terrain that now extends into Babil, Wasit, Baghdad, and Diyala provinces.³²

*Reconnoitering Insurgent Routes
through Baghdad's Belts*

Understanding enemy movements is necessary for understanding the necessity and the course of the Corps offensive. Al Qaeda occupied several strongholds around the city of Baghdad long before Operation Enforcing the Law began: Fallujah (due west of Baghdad) clockwise to Karmah, Tarmiyah, Baqubah, Turki Village (disrupted in January), Salman Pak, Mahmoudiyah, and Sadr al-Yusifiyah (disrupted in January). Al Qaeda used its strongholds in the belts to move from place to place. In the northern belt, U.S. troops conducted skilful combat operations to expel al Qaeda fighters from Turki Village in January. And in the southern belt, they established a combat outpost, later a Joint Security Station, in Sadr al-Yusifiyah. From these positions, U.S. forces reconnoitered al Qaeda's transit routes between January and June. A description of al Qaeda's operating areas allows us to see the scope of that organization's movements.

In January, Al Qaeda operatives and weapons followed the southern belt extensively. They traveled southeast along the Euphrates River, often by boat, from Fallujah to Sadr al-Yusifiyah.³³ Roads link Sadr al-Yusifiyah, Yusifiyah, and Mahmudiyah. From the latter location, al Qaeda could and did launch attacks into mixed sectarian areas of north Babil province. They could also travel from Mahmudiyah to Baghdad (or vice versa).³⁴ Another al Qaeda line of supply ran up the Tigris from Salman Pak (a town southeast of Baghdad on the eastern bank), up the river to Arab Jabour on the western bank, and into southern Baghdad. Arab Jabour is the closest to Baghdad of these

■ General Joseph Fil spoke about the plans to add a division headquarters as early as February 16. He indicated at that time that General Odierno would use the division headquarters to manage the fight in the belts. The new division headquarters would oversee an outer cordon, allowing MND-Baghdad to focus exclusively on the capital city.

southern towns and is a major al Qaeda sanctuary on the west bank of the Tigris. The area lies on Baghdad's southern border, abutting the Rashid District. Neither Iraqi nor U.S. forces were present in Arab Jabour in large numbers before Operation Phantom Thunder began, making it possible for al Qaeda terrorists to establish their organization.³⁵ The dense date-palm groves in Arab Jabour easily concealed weapons caches, fighter routes, safe houses, and training camps. An extensive canal system runs through the area. Consequently, waterways disrupt the terrain and drive both enemy and friendly forces onto specific roads and bridges.³⁶ U.S. forces nevertheless conducted preparatory (or "shaping") operations in Arab Jabour for a month before Phantom Thunder began.³⁷ For example, a 5-day operation in April resulted in the capture of the al Qaeda security emir, or military commander, of Arab Jabour and several other terrorists.³⁸ Because of the location's proximity to Baghdad and its prominence as a sanctuary, clearing Arab Jabour is the primary objective of Operation Marne Torch, an offensive launched by MND-C to support Operation Phantom Thunder.³⁹

The Tigris River flows from Arab Jabour to Salman Pak. Salman Pak, once a resort town on the east bank of the Tigris, has been an important al Qaeda stronghold "where we [the Coalition and the Iraqis] have not had a force in nearly three years."⁴⁰ The terrorist network used that town, 15 miles south of Baghdad, to control and cross the river.

General Odierno called Salman Pak "an area known for producing car and truck bombs that are sent north into Baghdad."⁴¹ U.S. forces targeted car bomb factories there between January and May,⁴² and then the Third Infantry Division conducted reconnaissance operations there when its subordinate units arrived.⁴³ The roads from Salman Pak along the river led to active al Qaeda locations on the east side of Baghdad. A highway runs from Salman Pak to Rusafa, (a Baghdad neighborhood on the southwestern border of Sadr City), a major al Qaeda stronghold at the beginning of Operation Enforcing the Law. U.S. forces worked methodically to destroy a car bomb factory and network in Rusafa be-

tween February and April, when they captured and killed the network's leader.⁴⁴ Perhaps some sort of supply system directly linked al Qaeda in Salman Pak and Rusafa. Another, smaller road network runs from Salman Pak to the disused canal that borders the east side of Sadr City. These routes suggest, but do not prove, that car bombs, operatives, and weapons originated in Salman Pak, and made their way from there to Sadr City, a frequent target of al Qaeda's spectacular attacks.

Mahmudiyah, south of Baghdad, is a third city on the southern belt near which al Qaeda terrorist activities regularly occurred in 2007, though less frequently than in the past. The city itself was cleared over the winter, but al Qaeda continued to target its population. Terrorists were captured north of Mahmudiyah on April 7.⁴⁵ Soldiers of the 2-15 Field Artillery, 10th Mountain Division, discovered a stockpile of new Iranian weapons in Mahmudiyah on April 22.⁴⁶ A few days later, their Iraqi partner-unit discovered a vehicle bomb emplaced on a highway in northern Mahmudiyah.⁴⁷ And on June 9, an al Qaeda vehicle bomb destroyed a portion of a highway overpass just east of Mahmudiyah.⁴⁸ The most spectacular recent al Qaeda attack in Mahmudiyah was the kidnapping of three U.S. soldiers in May.⁴⁹ That event occurred while U.S. forces were reconnoitering and securing the area between Yusifiyah and Mahmudiyah, a process that has continued from January through June.

Al Qaeda operated almost freely in the southern arc from the Euphrates to the Tigris as late as January 2007.⁵⁰ The operations in Baghdad from February to June did not squeeze al Qaeda terrorists into the southern sector. Rather, al Qaeda terrorists were already well established there, and U.S. and Iraqi forces began to whittle the organization away as the surge began.⁵¹

*Iranian Support for al Qaeda:
Weapons Flow along the Tigris to Baghdad*

Iranian arms dealers recently supplied new weapons to al Qaeda in Iraq. A supply of arms flowed from Iran to Salman Pak, and then to Arab

Jabour, presumably from the Iranian border to the south and east. From there, al Qaeda transported the munitions to Baghdad.⁵²

U.S. forces conducted targeted raids on safe houses in Arab Jabour during Marne Torch, discovering caches of new weapons with Iranian markings. The weapons had been imported recently, rather than buried and stockpiled.⁵³ Weapons were being stored in Arab Jabour, indicating that it was a way station of sorts.

From Arab Jabour, al Qaeda smuggled these new Iranian weapons, along with the fighters that would use them, into Baghdad.⁵⁴ The Tigris River was their primary supply route.⁵⁵ General Lynch explained, “[A]s we engage with the local population, they tell us that the only people on the Tigris River are extremists, insurgents. So what we’ve chosen to do is to take out all boats.”⁵⁶ Colonel Wayne Grigsby, Jr., commander of 3rd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, reported that his forces had targeted and destroyed 21 boats during the first ten days of Operation Marne Torch.⁵⁷ Bombing the boats often generated secondary explosions, indicating that the rivercraft were transporting munitions.⁵⁸

Iranian arms became an important part of al Qaeda’s arsenal recently. In addition to the presence of EFPs in al Qaeda lands, al Qaeda promoted an expert with knowledge of how to obtain or use EFPs in May, showing the value that they placed on that technology. U.S. forces killed that individual on May 25.⁵⁹

Evidence suggests that fighters and weapons moved from Arab Jabour into the captial’s Rashid district, in particular. Arab Jabour is an easy commute to al Qaeda-held areas of Rashid, such as Doura, suggesting a connection between them. Colonel Ricky Gibbs, the commander of 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, in Rashid reported in late May that some enemy fighters in his area came into the district from

outside of Baghdad, and indeed, from other areas of Iraq.⁶⁰ More importantly, Colonel Gibbs estimated that fifteen or twenty percent of the IEDs his troops encountered were EFPs. He stated that the EFPs were being used in terrain controlled by al Qaeda, not by Shia militias. It is logical to conclude that the EFPs were flowing into Doura from Arab Jabour and other points south along the Tigris. The Iraq Report will examine the implications of this below.

Al Qaeda West and Northwest of Baghdad

Karmah, a village twelve miles northeast of Fallujah, was likewise already a well-established al Qaeda safe haven when Operation Enforcing the Law began on February 14. On February 20, a U.S. battalion identified a fully established car bomb factory there, which had a welding shop, an area for converting cars into car bombs, car bombs in various states of preparation, and chemicals

such as fertilizer and chlorine.⁶¹

Al Qaeda activities in Karmah were linked to those in Amiriyah, south of Fallujah. A single al Qaeda security emir, or military commander, oversaw military operations in Eastern Anbar province in the first months of 2007. U.S. intelligence indicated that he personally operated in Karmah and Amiriyah. He ran a vehicle bomb network that attempted to enhance its weapons with chlorine, a substance with which al Qaeda experimented in February, March, and April in operations northwest of Baghdad, in Baghdad, and in Anbar Province. U.S. forces killed the emir on April 20, northwest of Baghdad.⁶² U.S. forces exploited this discovery in subsequent operations. They captured foreign fighter facilitators and terrorists involved with making or distributing chlorine VBIEDs north of Karmah on May 2 or May 3.⁶³

In April and May, al Qaeda apparently operated in the terrain north of the Ramadi-Fallujah-

Iranian arms became an important part of al Qaeda’s arsenal recently. In addition to the presence of explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) in al Qaeda lands, al Qaeda promoted an expert with knowledge of how to obtain or use EFPs in May, showing the value that they placed on that technology. U.S. forces killed that individual on May 25.

Karmah roadline. The rural area, hardly criss-crossed by any highways or roads, extends north toward Lake Tharthar and along its eastern shore toward Salah ad Din province. Subsequent operations revealed the extent of al Qaeda activity in that terrain. Marines discovered and destroyed a truck bomb near Karmah on April 26.⁶⁴ U.S. forces captured an anti-aircraft training cell northeast of Karmah on May 8,⁶⁵ they detained suspected foreign fighter facilitators there on May 14,⁶⁶ and they killed financiers and detained their associates on May 15.⁶⁷ Subsequent raids there targeted al Qaeda senior leaders.⁶⁸ U.S. forces discovered hostages in a torture house, and an extensive kidnapping and execution ring, in Karmah just a week later.⁶⁹ These Special Operations raids continued into June.⁷⁰ A few conventional operations supported these special strikes. U.S. troops, for example, established a Joint Security Station fifteen kilometers northeast of Ramadi, in the rural village of Albu Bali on May 2, after noticing an increase in enemy activity there beginning in mid-April.⁷¹

There were also links between Karmah and Taji, Taji and Tarmiyah, and Tarmiyah and Baghdad.⁷² General Odierno identified the terrain between Karmah and Tarmiyah, south of Lake Tharthar, as “a known al Qaeda transit route.”⁷³ Operation Iron Blitz, conducted by 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division in June, rounded up twenty-five insurgents operating in the area northwest of Baghdad, between Taji and Abu Ghraib.⁷⁴

The southern and northern belts were connected. Some of the same al Qaeda operatives or couriers moved in each of the belts and through Baghdad. In Samarra, north of Baghdad, U.S. forces found the identification cards of two of those soldiers kidnapped near Mahmudiyah, in the southern belt.⁷⁵

THE FINAL PIECES OF THE SURGE

On May 31, General Odierno noted: “Units that are part of our surge into the theater began deploying in January, about the middle of January. However, the full impact of that surge is yet to be felt. Shortly the final pieces of the surge will soon

be in place. In the coming weeks, about the next two weeks, 8,000 troops will begin to move into their assigned areas of responsibility. Second Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division; the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, as well as the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, will fill out the combat portion of the surge. And that should occur here as they take up positions in the next couple weeks.”⁷⁶ On June 16, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates remarked, “We began the process of building up our forces some months ago, but the fifth brigade as part of the surge really only entered the fight within the last few days.”⁷⁷

General Petraeus indicated that some of the last units to arrive as part of the force increase were among the most critical. They included the Combat Aviation Brigade for MND-C, which arrived in late May. The aviation brigade added important capabilities, including attack helicopters and Kiowa helicopters (for advanced reconnaissance missions).⁷⁸ The arrival of these air assets allowed paratroopers from MND-C to conduct sophisticated reconnaissance and air assaults (the insertion of infantrymen by helicopter, often in order to move behind enemy positions).⁷⁹

General Odierno positioned the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit northwest of Baghdad to operate south of Lake Tharthar. According to General Odierno, “This is a known al Qaeda transit route and possible training and support area where we have not operated in great strength recently.” He placed other Marines west of Baghdad, to occupy the portion of Anbar province between Fallujah and Abu Ghraib: “Just to the west of Baghdad, elements of the 6th Regimental Combat Team began operations against enemy safe havens near Kharma, while continuing to secure Fallujah. The 6th Regimental Combat Team is well into the process of establishing Iraqi police precincts in Fallujah, where violence has significantly decreased over the past few months.”⁸⁰

In late May and early June, General Petraeus and General Odierno thereby closed the gaps in the belt west and northwest of Baghdad (with the Marines), and east and southeast of Baghdad (with the maneuver elements of the 3rd Infantry Division and its aviation assets). Coalition partners are still providing the last supporting units

this summer: a Georgian brigade will be based in Wasit Province, the capital city of which is al Kut, near the Iranian border and on one of the main highways from that border to Baghdad, Karbala, and Najaf.

General Odierno stated that the troop increase and the new disposition of forces gave him three new capabilities: to conduct “simultaneous and sustained operations and to maintain pressure across the entire theater on extremists. More importantly, it allows us to operate in areas where we have not been in a long time.”⁸¹ General Odierno plugged large holes in the belts around Baghdad and in lines of communication leading to Baghdad. These holes—unprotected spaces in rural areas, unprotected river crossings, and unprotected cities—had previously allowed enemies of the Coalition to transport and distribute weapons and maneuver fighters on roads and rivers without regularly encountering U.S. troops.

THE REAL SURGE BEGINS

In mid-June, brigades from the Multi-National Division-North and (MND-N), Multi-National Division-Center (MND-C), and Multi-National Division-West (MND-W) began simultaneous clearing operations northeast, east, southeast, and west of Baghdad. General Odierno began Operation Phantom Thunder, a coordinated offensive against insurgent strongholds in the belts (the zone between the inner and outer cordon), on June 15, 2007. General Petraeus explained the next day that, “literally in the last 24 hours we have launched a number of different offensive operations, in the Baghdad belts in particular, and we’re continuing a number of operations that have been ongoing in Baghdad itself.” As a result, General Odierno noted, U.S. troops “can maintain security forces inside of Baghdad while we’re simultaneously conducting operations in Baqubah, Arab Jabour, Fallujah. So that allows us to keep pressure on [the enemy].”⁸²

General Odierno explained that

Operation Phantom Thunder is a corps-level offensive operation that began on 15

June to defeat al Qaeda insurgents and extremists, deny enemy safe havens, interdict movement, logistics and communications. It is an open-ended operation that will extend through the summer and will be done in conjunction with civil-military operations to support political and economic efforts.

It consists of carefully synchronized simultaneous operations at division and brigade level to clear al Qaeda, Sunni insurgents and Shi’a extremists in, near and around Baghdad. It also includes aggressive shaping operations by our Special Operations Forces focused on al Qaeda in Iraq and other special groups.

These operations are intended to eliminate accelerants to Baghdad violence from enemy support zones in the belts that ring the city. In some cases this means we’re operating in areas where—(audio break). (In progress following audio break)—earlier this week into an area we have not operated in in a while, local Iraqis asked coalition forces, “Where have you been?” And, “Can our children go back to school now?”

The intent of Phantom Thunder is to protect the Iraqi population and render irreconcilable groups ineffective, while employing political and economic initiatives to buy time and space for the government of Iraq to move towards political accommodation.⁸³

These smaller operations in Phantom Thunder include Arrowhead Ripper (Baqubah) and Marne Torch (Arab Jabour), along with other efforts to support them. Each of these individual operations aims not only to clear of enemy forces the particular area in which U.S. forces are operating, but also to prevent movement around the Baghdad belts.

*The Double Encirclement Pins
an al Qaeda Cell in Doura*

Simultaneous operations in the belts in June stemmed the flow of al Qaeda fighters and weapons to and from Baghdad. U.S. forces cleared most of Rashid in May, and they cleared the

northern sector of Arab Jabour in June. As Operation Phantom Thunder began, U.S. forces pinned an al Qaeda cell in a few mahallas of Doura.⁸⁴ Whereas Al Qaeda had "...previously been...elusive when we actually got into an area and started to clear it," this time, "they are standing and fighting," according to General Fil.⁸⁵

General Fil explained how the operations inside and outside Baghdad achieved the synergistic effects that General Odierno had hoped for. "...[W]e believe that we are into an area here in east Rashid, in the Doura area, where we're seeing a very strong al Qaeda cell. And as we have gone through the city and concentrated in a lot of areas where they had free reign sometime before, those areas are now denied to them. And so their freedom of maneuver inside of the city, their own battle space, has been more and more restricted, and their support zones have been severely restricted, both inside the city and also in the belts around the city. And so they're running out of maneuver space and they are starting to fight very hard...."⁸⁶

Doura is "...now the division's main effort over here inside of Baghdad," and will continue to be for the first two to three weeks of July, according to General Fil. This al Qaeda cell built an impressive defensive position in these mahallas. They buried massive IEDs under roads, for example, that cause enormous, lethal explosions. Because U.S. forces have surrounded this pocket of well-armed and well-prepared al Qaeda fighters, cutting off its supply lines, the combat in Doura is especially intense. In early July, Generals Odierno and Fil reinforced the 2-12 Infantry Battalion with a total of three Stryker battalions. This concentration of combat power surpasses what Major General Mixon used to clear Baqubah during Operation Arrowhead Ripper.⁸⁷ As the battle for Baghdad and the belts isolates other, well-armed enemy groups, U.S. troops may have to clear other, well-defended strongholds. U.S. casualties may increase during such clearing operations. But U.S. forces are likely to improve security in Baghdad dramatically by destroying these violent concentrations of enemy forces.

CONCLUSIONS

Operation Phantom Thunder is the first coordinated, offensive campaign against the insurgency in Iraq. The campaign is hitting insurgent strongholds throughout central Iraq simultaneously. Troops are driving the enemy from the belts while continuing to clear Baghdad itself. The surge of additional troops has allowed Generals Petraeus and Odierno to undertake this large-scale operation without drawing down forces in many other areas of the country or leaving major insurgent strongholds uncovered. Al Qaeda and other insurgent leaders may flee from individual operations, but they will be hard-pressed to find well-established safe havens near Baghdad.

Phantom Thunder has taken the initiative from the enemy at the operational, and strategic, level. Enemy cells may choose their moment to conduct suicide bombings or to plant IEDs, but they are no longer in control of their own actions on a larger level. Coalition forces are deliberately driving them to and trapping them in narrowing areas that can then be cleared. As the enemy is trapped, particularly in areas like the Doura neighborhood in Baghdad that he has held for a long time, the fighting will become very fierce. But Coalition forces are taking their time and proceeding deliberately in these enemy strongholds in order to reduce risks to American soldiers.

Phantom Thunder has been greatly facilitated by the tremendous increase in local support for Coalition operations. Commanders across the theater have been reporting significant growth in the number and utility of tips about the location of enemy fighters, IEDs, and other traps and caches. This increase in local cooperation suggests that many Iraqis believe that current operations are likely to be successful in removing the terrorists and insurgents from their areas and keeping them away, since the terrorists have continued their efforts to intimidate ordinary Iraqis, but to no avail.

Phantom Thunder is unusual in the annals of counter-insurgency for its scale and its combination of multiple, complex movements over a large area, all of which focus on essential tasks of counter-insurgency. Coalition forces moved deliberate-

ly in clearing operations in order to minimize their own casualties as well as collateral damage and the loss of civilian life. They are working actively to engage the population in the counterinsurgency effort. The operation has been designed to avoid the pitfalls of previous approaches, denigrated by some critics as a “whack-a-mole” strategy that allows defeated insurgents to flee to safe havens and reconstitute. The Coalition commanders have accepted some risk in Salah-ad-Din, Kirkuk, and Ninewah provinces, which are lightly held by Coalition forces, in order to focus on Anbar, Baghdad, and the Baghdad belts. The focus of current operations accords with the original intention

of the new strategy, which is, after all, called the Baghdad Security Plan.

A war this large and complex will not end with a single battle or campaign. The art of military command in such conflicts lies in tying multiple, simultaneous, and successive operations together over time. If these operations work properly, they will steadily improve the situation on the ground. The preparations for Operation Phantom Thunder have already done so. The current operation aims to do more. Future Iraq Reports will describe Phantom Thunder in greater detail, as well as the subsequent operations that will surely follow.

Endnotes

- 1 The “center of gravity” is a phrase used to describe the objective in a military operation that will lead to victory. In conventional operations, the “center of gravity” is often the enemy’s army, the destruction of which renders an enemy willing to surrender or unable to fight. In counterinsurgency operations, the “center of gravity” is the population, for whose loyalty the legitimate government and the insurgents compete. When the population supports the government, the insurgents lack the physical support that they need to continue to fight and the sympathy that they need to win the conflict.
- 2 Department of Defense Press Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, May 31, 2007. The mission statement has not changed since the Baghdad Security Plan began. See Department of Defense News Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, February 22, 2007, 12:00 P.M. EST; Department of Defense News Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, April 13, 2007 10:00 A.M. EDT, Department of Defense News Transcript.
- 3 Department of Defense News Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, April 13, 2007 10:00 A.M. EDT.
- 4 Department of Defense Press Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, May 31, 2007.
- 5 Department of Defense Press Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, May 31, 2007.
- 6 See Kimberly Kagan, “From ‘New Way Forward’ to New Commander, January 10 – February 10, 2007” Iraq Report (www.weeklystandard.com), March 1, 2007; Kimberly Kagan, “The Battle for Diyala, February 11 – April 25, 2007” Iraq Report (www.weeklystandard.com), May 7, 2007.
- 7 Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) has command over all Coalition combat forces in the theater with the exception of a small number of troops engaged in training and advising Iraqi military, police, and political bodies (although military advisors embedded with Iraqi military units are under General Odierno’s command). Certain logistics capabilities, likewise, fall under a separate command.
- 8 Department of Defense News Transcript, Presenter: Commander of Multinational Corps-Iraq Lt. Gen. Ray Odierno, April 13, 2007 10:00 AM EDT.
- 9 Joint Press Conference with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker, and Multinational Force-Iraq Commander General David Petraeus, June 16, 2007, 9:30 A.M. EDT.
- 10 Department of Defense Special Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, June 22, 2007. Two brigades would normally include around four-to-six battalions; General Odierno added individual battalions to brigade headquarters already in the city as well.
- 11 The brigade thereby replaced several units that it had sent out to Ramadi and Baghdad. Department of Defense Special News Briefing with Colonel J.B. Barton, March 16, 2007, 9:33 A.M. EDT.
- 12 One battalion from the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, and another battalion from the 4th BCT, 1st ID in March; Department of Defense Special News Briefing with Colonel J.B. Burton, March 16, 2007, 9:33 A.M. EDT.
- 13 Multi-National Corps—Iraq, Release No. 20070319-08, “Fresh troops assume battle space in Baghdad,” Multi-National Division – Baghdad PAO, March 19, 2007.
- 14 See Kimberly Kagan, “Enforcing the Law: The Baghdad Security Plan Begins, February 10 – March 5, 2007” Iraq Report (www.weeklystandard.com), March 15, 2007.
- 15 Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Release No. 20070301-01, “4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division begins mission in Iraq,” Multi-National Corps – Iraq PAO, March 1, 2007.
- 16 DoD News Briefing, Pentagon, Presenter: Commander, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division Col. Ricky Gibbs, May 25, 2007.
- 17 DoD News Briefing, Pentagon, Presenter: Commander, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division Col. Ricky Gibbs, May 25, 2007.
- 18 DoD News Briefing, Pentagon, Presenter: Commander, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division Col. Ricky Gibbs, May 25, 2007.
- 19 Department of Defense Special Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, June 22, 2007.
- 20 DoD News Briefing, Pentagon, Presenter: Commander, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division Col. Ricky Gibbs, May 25, 2007.
- 21 DoD News Briefing, Pentagon, Presenter: Commander, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division Col.

- Ricky Gibbs, May 25, 2007.
- 22 DoD News Briefing, Pentagon, Presenter: Commanding General of Multinational Division Baghdad and 1st Cavalry Division Maj. Gen. Joseph Fil, Jr., June 29, 2007.
 - 23 Department of Defense Special Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, June 22, 2007.
 - 24 “The Jim Lehrer Show,” Interview with General David Petraeus, U.S. Army, Commanding General, Multinational Force-Iraq; Subject: The Situation in Iraq; Interviewer: Jim Lehrer; Wednesday, April 4, 2007.
 - 25 “The Jim Lehrer Show,” Interview with General David Petraeus, U.S. Army, Commanding General, Multinational Force-Iraq; Subject: The Situation in Iraq; Interviewer: Jim Lehrer; Wednesday, April 4, 2007.
 - 26 “The Jim Lehrer Show,” Interview with General David Petraeus, U.S. Army, Commanding General, Multinational Force-Iraq; Subject: The Situation in Iraq; Interviewer: Jim Lehrer; Wednesday, April 4, 2007.
 - 27 Department of Defense News Briefing with Multinational Division-Baghdad Commander Major General Joseph Fil, February 16, 2007, 9:05 A.M. EDT.
 - 28 “Span-of-control” is the term that the military uses to describe the number of subordinates a commander controls, as there is a limit to how many different subordinate units one person can command and his headquarters can control. As a rule of thumb, a good commander cannot effectively control more than five major subordinate units engaged in active operations at a time.
 - 29 Multi-National Corps – Iraq Release No. 20070402-02, “3rd Infantry Division (Headquarters) arrives in Iraq” April 2, 2007.
 - 30 Department of Defense News Briefing with Multinational Division-Baghdad Commander Major General Joseph Fil, February 16, 2007, 9:05 A.M. EDT. Lieutenant General Odierno (not Major General Fil) would have made the request for an additional Division Headquarters of General Petraeus, and he in turn would have asked the Army or the Joint Staff.
 - 31 General Petraeus’ and Lieutenant General Odierno’s initial evaluation of the belts’ importance is implicit in General Fil’s comments. The deployment of the Stryker brigade to reinforce Diyala in March (which General Petraeus said was part of a chase or squirt, “The Jim Lehrer Show,” Interview with General David Petraeus, U.S. Army, Commanding General, Multinational Force-Iraq; Subject: The Situation in Iraq; Interviewer: Jim Lehrer; Wednesday, April 4, 2007) was not the genesis of the battle for the belts.
 - 32 Press briefing by Major General Rick Lynch, Multinational Division-Center, Topic: Operation Marne Torch, Location: The Comined Press Information Center, Baghdad, Iraq, June 24, 2007, 6:00 A.M. EDT.
 - 33 The first edition of the Iraq Report, “From New Way Forward to New Commander,” traced the movement of insurgents around the belts and from the belts into Baghdad in early 2007.
 - 34 It is not clear from open sources whether al Qaeda traveled primarily in a counterclockwise movement, flowing from Anbar to Salman Pak (and from there to Tarmiya), or in a clockwise movement, flowing from Salman Pak to Fallujah (and from there to Tarmiya).
 - 35 Press briefing by Major General Rick Lynch, Multinational Division-Center, Topic: Operation Marne Torch, Location: The Comined Press Information Center, Baghdad, Iraq, June 24, 2007, 6:00 A.M. EDT.
 - 36 Press briefing by Major General Rick Lynch, Multinational Division-Center, Topic: Operation Marne Torch, Location: The Combined Press Information Center, Baghdad, Iraq, June 24, 2007, 6:00 A.M. EDT.
 - 37 Press briefing by Major General Rick Lynch, Multinational Division-Center, Topic: Operation Marne Torch, Location: The Combined Press Information Center, Baghdad, Iraq, June 24, 2007, 6:00 A.M. EDT.
 - 38 Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070411b, “Coalition Forces Capture Al Qaeda in Iraq Security Emir of Arab Jabour,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, April 11, 2007.
 - 39 Press briefing by Major General Rick Lynch, Multinational Division-Center, Topic: Operation Marne Torch, Location: The Comined Press Information Center, Baghdad, Iraq, June 24, 2007, 6:00 A.M. EDT.
 - 40 Department of Defense Special Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, June 22, 2007.
 - 41 Department of Defense Special Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, June 22, 2007. One indication of this connection between Salman Pak and Baghdad may be found in the flow of “extremists” (whether al Qaeda or Shia militia) through a checkpoint on the highway near Salman Pak, though the significance of this particular event is only conjecture. Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Release No. 20070506-07, “Iraqi National Police Coordinates With 1-15 Infantry to Combat Extremists,” Multi-National Corps – Iraq PAO, May 6, 2007.

- 42 Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070403b, “Four-Day Operation Results in Eight Terrorists Killed; Several Weapons, Explosives Caches Destroyed,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, April 3, 2007.
- 43 Such as a reconnaissance into Dura-iyah; Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Release No. 20070517-08, “1-15 Infantry Conducts Operation Beach Yellow,” Multi-National Division – Center PAO, May 17, 2007.
- 44 Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070414a, “Al-Qaeda Military Emir, 16 Other Suspects Detained in Raids,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, April 14, 2007.
- 45 Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Release No. 20070408-04, “Three known insurgents detained,” Multi-National Division – Baghdad PAO, April 8, 2007.
- 46 Multi-National Corps—Iraq, Release No. 20070428-13, “US, Iraqi Raid in Mahmudiyah Nets Iranian-marked Rockets, Mortars,” Multi-National Division – Center PAO, April 28, 2007.
- 47 Multi-National Corps—Iraq, Release No. 20070430-21, “Iraqi Soldiers Find VBIED in Mahmudiyah Area,” Multi-National Division – Center PAO, April 30, 2007.
- 48 Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Release No. 20070611-01, “Coalition Checkpoint Attacked,” Multi-National Division – Center PAO, June 11, 2007.
- 49 Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Release No. 20070515-09, “Search for Missing Soldiers Continues,” Multi-National Division – Center PAO, May 15, 2007.
- 50 Southwest of Baghdad, U.S. forces detained associates of a Libyan foreign fighter facilitator, suggesting that his network operated in that arc. Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070525b, “Coalition Forces Nab 20 Suspected Al-Qaeda Terrorists,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, May 25, 2007. In addition, U.S. forces found an enormous weapons cache (a “supermarket” type that usually feeds smaller, local caches) in a rural area between Iskandariyah and the Euphrates River.
- 51 As demonstrated above and stated in “The Jim Lehrer Show,” Interview with General David Petraeus, U.S. Army, Commanding General, Multinational Force-Iraq; Subject: The Situation in Iraq; Interviewer: Jim Lehrer; Wednesday, April 4, 2007.
- 52 Press briefing by Major General Rick Lynch, Multinational Division-Center, Topic: Operation Marne Torch, Location: The Combined Press Information Center, Baghdad, Iraq, June 24, 2007, 6:00 A.M. EDT.
- 53 Press briefing by Major General Rick Lynch, Multinational Division-Center, Topic: Operation Marne Torch, Location: The Combined Press Information Center, Baghdad, Iraq, June 24, 2007, 6:00 A.M. EDT.
- 54 “2nd Brigade Soldiers have the mission of defeating insurgent activity, denying the enemy sanctuary and preventing terrorist elements from moving accelerants from the Arab Jabour area into Baghdad,” according to Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. 20070618-03, “Marne Torch Commences in Areas South of Baghdad,” Multi-National Division – Center PAO, June 18, 2007. See also: Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070523b, “Four Terrorists Killed; Tied to IED Production,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, May 23, 2007.
- 55 Press briefing by Major General Rick Lynch, Multinational Division-Center, Topic: Operation Marne Torch, Location: The Combined Press Information Center, Baghdad, Iraq, June 24, 2007, 6:00 A.M. EDT.
- 56 Press briefing by Major General Rick Lynch, Multinational Division-Center, Topic: Operation Marne Torch, Location: The Combined Press Information Center, Baghdad, Iraq, June 24, 2007, 6:00 A.M. EDT.
- 57 “U.S. troops destroy boats and target roadside bomb routes south of Baghdad,” Kim Gamel, Associated Press Writer, Jisr Diyala, Iraq, June 26, 2007 Tuesday 8:26 AM GMT.
- 58 “U.S. troops destroy boats and target roadside bomb routes south of Baghdad,” Kim Gamel, Associated Press Writer, Jisr Diyala, Iraq, June 26, 2007 Tuesday 8:26 AM GMT.
- 59 Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070525b, “Coalition Forces Nab 20 Suspected Al-Qaeda Terrorists,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, May 25, 2007.
- 60 DoD News Briefing, Pentagon, Presenter: Commander, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division Col. Ricky Gibbs, May 25, 2007.
- 61 Department of Defense News Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, February 22, 2007, 12:00 P.M. EST.
- 62 The emir was positively identified as Muhammad Abdullah Abbas al-Issawi, also known as Abu Abd al-Sattar and Abu Akram. He also used boys, twelve and thirteen years old, as vehicle bomb drivers. Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070425b, “Al-Qaeda in Iraq Security Emir Killed,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, April 25, 2007.
- 63 Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070503b, “11 Suspected Terrorists Detained,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, May 3, 2007.
- 64 Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Release No. 20070428-12,

- “Marines Destroy Truck Bomb near Karmah,” Multi-National Force – West PAO, April 28, 2007.
- 65 Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070511a, “Coalition Interrupts Terrorist Training, Terrorists Killed,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, May 11, 2007.
- 66 Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070514a, “Coalition Forces Detain 11 Suspects, Destroy Cache,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, May 14, 2007.
- 67 Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070516a, “Four Terrorists Killed, 30 Suspects Detained in Overnight Raids,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, May 16, 2007.
- 68 Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070521c, “3 Suspected Al-Qaeda Cell Leaders, 9 Others Detained,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, May 21, 2007.
- 69 Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070522a, “12 Iraqi Hostages Freed in Follow-on Operation,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, May 22, 2007.
- 70 Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070604b, “Terrorist Leader, Network Members Captured,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, June 4, 2007.
- 71 Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Release No. 20070504-17, “Operation Forsythe Park Update,” Multi-National Force – West PAO, May 4, 2007.
- 72 For Tarmiya-Baghdad, see: Multi-National Force – Iraq, Release No. A070606d, “Coalition Forces Attack VBIED Network: 2 Killed, 10 Detained,” Multi-National Force – Iraq CPIC, June 6, 2007.
- 73 Department of Defense Special Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, June 22, 2007.
- 74 Release No. 20070704-21, “Operation ‘Iron Blitz’ captures 25 insurgents in June,” Maj. Randall Baucom, 1st BCT, 1st Cav. Div. Public Affairs, Multi-National Division – Baghdad PAO July 4, 2007. The operation targeted al Qaeda-linked operatives emplacing IEDs, trying to spark sectarian violence, and using indirect fire weapons against the local population.
- 75 Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Release No. 20070603-14, “Iraqi Army Soldiers Kill Two Insurgents, Capture Another Near Balad,” Multi-National Corps – Iraq PAO, June 3, 2007; Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Release No. 20070616-12, “Raid on Suspected Safe House Near Samarra,” Multi-National Corps – Iraq PAO, June 16, 2007.
- 76 Department of Defense Press Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, May 31, 2007.
- 77 Joint Press Conference with Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker, and Multinational Force-Iraq Commander General David Petraeus, June 16, 2007, 9:30 A.M. EDT.
- 78 Multi-National Corps – Iraq, Release No. 20070528-03, “3rd Combat Aviation Brigade Arrived in Iraq 3rd CAB PAO Release,” Multi-National Division – Center PAO, May 28, 2007.
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- 80 Department of Defense Special Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, June 22, 2007.
- 81 Department of Defense Special Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, June 22, 2007.
- 82 Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, MNC-I, interview with John Roberts, CNN’s “American Morning,” June 20, 2007.
- 83 Department of Defense Special Briefing with Multinational Corps-Iraq Commander Lieutenant General Ray Odierno, June 22, 2007.
- 84 DoD News Briefing, Pentagon, Presenter: Commanding General of Multinational Division Baghdad and 1st Cavalry Division Maj. Gen. Joseph Fil, Jr., June 29, 2007.
- 85 DoD News Briefing, Pentagon, Presenter: Commanding General of Multinational Division Baghdad and 1st Cavalry Division Maj. Gen. Joseph Fil, Jr., June 29, 2007.
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- 87 Wesley Morgan, “Backgrounder #4, Order of Battle,” July 1, 2007, www.understandingwar.org.