

### **The Insurgency in Iraq**

***Evaluate the strategy of the insurgents in Iraq. Has it been effective?***

*“Rebellions can be made by two percent active in a striking force, and 98 percent passively sympathetic.”*

T.E. Lawrence (“of Arabia”)

### **Introduction**

When the US launched the campaign “the war on terror” to fight terrorism, the first stage was a pre-emptive strike on Afghanistan in 2001 and to be followed by Iraq in 2003. The next stage is to gain the support of the congress to deny sponsorship, support, and sanctuary to Terrorists by laws is also the following stage. The fear of American people of a second Vietnam War also had to be overcome. At first, when “the Iraqi Freedom” started in March 2003, it seemed that this war was made the new face of the modern theory ‘Shock and awe’. The major battle was over on May 1, 2003. However, a few weeks later, the US and coalition forces were faced with the same situations as “the Vietnam War” with the shadow fighters surrounding their theatre of war.

These shadow fighters are the insurgents of Iraq. There is no official list that how many insurgents involved in Iraq. Their strategy is simple by conducting violence in order to maintain action against the US and the foreign forces. It has been effective as the insurgents have achieved their strategic goals.

This essay will deal with who the three main insurgency groups are, what are their goals and means, and how effective their strategy has been in achieving their aim.

### **The general information**

CIA—the world fact book gives information that more than 26 million people are estimated to live in Iraq - most of them in cities in the eastern half of the country. Most Iraqis are Muslim and are divided along religious lines (between Shiite/Shias and Sunnis) and ethnic lines (between Arabs and Kurds). There are no precise figures, but the mainly-Arab Shias are thought to form a 60% majority and expect to dominate political life after the January election. Under Saddam Hussein, Sunni Arabs (about

20% of the population) dominated political and economic life. The Kurds, who are also Sunnis and represent about 17% of the population, mainly live in the north. It is clear that the different between Iraqi itself have led to conflicts in Iraq.

According to Donald Rumsfeld, the US. Secretary of Defence, it is very hard to pin down the numbers of insurgents. Also there are many groups that have grown rapidly since the end of major battle, and some of them are overlapped. However, they can be categorized that there are three main insurgency groups as follows;

Firstly, Sunni Muslims group, almost all of whom are Iraqis and former Iraqi Army, probably make up the largest percentage of the forces and are composed of Iraqi nationalist fighters. Conservative Iraqis who want to install an Islamic theocracy by expressing a simple nationalist reaction to against the foreigners are included in this group. In addition, many Iraqis who have had relatives killed by coalition soldiers may also be involved in this nationalist insurgency.

The second is a growing faction of hardcore fighters aligned with terrorist groups, mainly that led by Jordanian Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. According to U.S. intelligence analysis, they believe Zarqawi's group consists of a hard core of only 200 or 300 fighters, and another 1,000 or 2,000 tacit supporters.

Lastly, a combination of criminal and unemployed Iraqi conduct any violence incident for a payment from others. It is likely that many young unemployed males who see no future or opportunities in Iraq and only want to show their feeling and frustration without coherent political purposes.(CENTCOM's intelligence summary,2004)

### **The strategy of the insurgents**

It is generally accepted that the strategy of the insurgents in Iraq cannot be identified clearly (Metz, 2004,p.28), and it is not necessary for them to be united or to make unify discussion. The insurgents are united only in the sense of having violent as opposition to U.S. presence. (Beckett,2005,p.10) To a certain extent, it is unlikely that the insurgents' strategic purpose is to defeat the US military directly. Many people believe that a rising of the U.S. death toll may lead the withdrawal because of

the domestic pressure. General John Abizade, CENTCOM's commander, also observed that the first objective of the insurgents and terrorists is to break the will of the American forces, thereby bringing about a U.S. withdrawal from Iraq.(CNN,2004). In fact, there are a lot of evidence to support that the United States has clear objectives and they will never move their troop back until they succeed in this war.

The simple primary strategic objectives of the insurgency in Iraq are only to maintain violence in order to damage the US in a costly and bloody operation and to continue these worse situations of Iraqi against the US and foreign forces following the old Russian revolutionary slogan "the worse, the better" by taking any action that creates instability, chaos, conflict, and fear. As a result, the US may not be able to win this war completely, even though they had the transition plan already.

To begin with, the Sunni Muslims group is to aim to restore the Sunni minority dominance of Iraq as the ruler element in the historical Iraqi. A primary goal of the Sunni group was to prevent the national assembly elections on January,31 because the number of population of Sunni is only 20%. It was impossible that it would be elected by majority, so the violence against the election was to achieve a primary goal.

At the same time, the Zarqawi's group has a clear and common goal that is to undermine control and the legitimacy of The US by using all of their means to damage both the military personnel and properties. Interestingly, "they are dependent on their Iraqi hosts and Iraqi insurgents have been responsible for the vast majority of the daily attacks on US forces. In this context, the rise of local Islamist militant groups presents a more worrying longer-term development for Iraq than the activities of a comparatively small number of foreigners."(Jane's defense,2005) Also, these insurgents have shown themselves able to attack anywhere and anytime.

There have been reports that former regime figures have paid cash rewards to anyone that conducted a successful attack. Thus it encouraged Iraq's many criminals and unemployed Iraqi to participate in the insurgency. (Hoffman,2004,p.20)

### **Tactical means and objectives**

The number of incidents increased by 25% at the beginning of 2004, and the attacks reached a peak by January, 2005, then it has declined by 30% in next two months. (<http://icasualties.org>) Targets were originally on U.S. forces, but now extended to others, Iraqi security forces and Iraqi civilians working for U.S. authorities, foreign contractors. These targets were very often killed with terrific violence.

The methods of insurgents are very different from the regular armed forces. In order to fight against powerful regular forces, insurgents seemed to believe that they have the right to use any means. This war is the national liberation against a foreign occupation with the concept and practice of guerilla warfare. Also the tactical means and objective of attacks are various. It was obvious that the US were the first priority attack followed by the coalition forces. They faced sophisticated and complex attacks. The insurgents have used small arms, rocket launchers, mortars, suicide bombs and improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

There are many tactical objectives to achieve the strategic goals in each main group. In order to restore the power of the Sunni groups, the Sunni insurgents conducted attacks in 'the Sunni Triangle', located north and northwest of Baghdad, where approximately 80 % of incidents happened before the elections began. The insurgents did these to prevent and discredit this important plan of the US.

To maintain violence and continue the bad situations, four objectives were set. Firstly, by the beginning of the resistance, there had been bombs at international organizations operating in Iraq such as the United Nations and the International Red Cross. These attacks led many non-governmental organizations to withdraw from Iraq. These led to destabilizing from international organization. Secondly, the other target is the targeting and killing of Iraqi people to make them feel insecure under the US. Attacking on the military targets as much as possible is the third objective. Finally, it seemed that taking a number of foreign civilian hostages method, particularly horrific beheading tactic, was successful to broadcast violence to the world by using information technology-(the Internet and television). Most of these incidents were focused on both military personnel and civilians of the US and allied countries in order to force their government to withdraw their troops.

To prevent support from Iraqi people, the insurgents have also targeted Iraqis who are co-operating with the government and the US. Some insurgents focused on assassinating Iraqi officials, politicians and government; for instance, on January 5, 2005, insurgents assassinated the governor of Baghdad province. They desired to isolate cooperational Iraqis and the US to make them more fearful, and to show the high risk of cooperating or working with the U.S. Another insurgent tactical objective that has been used increasingly is to assault and raid on Iraqi security forces in order to increase their control over the population and to discredit the Iraqi security forces. This psychological operation shows that the Iraqi security forces are not able to protect themselves either.

There have also been attacks on Iraq's infrastructure in order to disrupt oil pipelines as well as electrical power stations and power lines. These targets are used to disrupt the restoration of power supplies to the Iraqi people. The insurgents may need to disrupt restoration projects as well. All incidents were to prevent reconstruction plans from the Iraqi government.

### **Simplicity –the key to effectiveness**

The simple insurgency strategy is the key to success. Daily incidents have shown that the insurgents have achieved their objectives. Although the US attacked and arrested many insurgents, the violence still existed. Military experts implied that "The insurgent objective seems to be to draw the United States into a very bloody, costly fight," (CNN, 2005). Significantly, the insurgents were able to choose the opportunities targets easily. This was because they did not need a complicated operation order as in the conventional war. The participants of insurgency only chose to random targets and conducted any incidents, and then fled nearby. Moreover, this was because the movements of the insurgents are not easy to identify as it is the US to get cooperate with local people.

Perhaps more significantly, the aggressive actions of the US were increased tension between Iraqis and the occupiers. Having provoked the US to use the military against the civilians, it allowed people to deny cooperation with them.

The most successful outcome of kidnappings and beheadings was shown in the Philippines case. The Philippine Government decided move their troops back as the insurgent requested. After the Philippines personnel - 51 medics, engineers and soldiers were withdrawn and on July 14, the hostage was released.

Interestingly, the tactical goals had indirectly effectiveness in several cases. Some countries provided their exist strategy to leave Iraq by informing their withdrawal plan and was based on the domestic factors. It was likely that those Governments prevented more casualty or death toll from the insurgency attacks such as Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua in July 2004, Hungary(December 2004) , Thailand, New Zealand, and Norway in September 2004, Netherlands (April 2005) ,Italy(February 2005) and Ukraine(October 2005). It is interesting to note that “Spain appeared to have been coerced into withdrawing its forces from Iraq in large part as a consequence of a terrorist train bombing in Madrid. The point was that Spanish troops were not evicted from Iraq by insurgent forces Indeed, they were withdrawn because the Spanish electorate, in the Madrid bombings, voted in a government committed to ending Spain’s participation in the conflict.” (Washington Post, 2004)

According to Krepinevich (2005, p.4), “This war is marked by a severe asymmetry. The centers of gravity in this war are the Iraqi people, the American public, and the American soldier—all three must be secured to achieve our objective. The enemy, however, need only secure **one of these three to emerge victorious.** (emphasized added)”. It can be inferred that two of Krepinevich’s objective - the Iraqi people and the American soldier- have less secure so that the insurgents have achieved their goals.

Nevertheless, there were some signals from Iraqi people that they did not support any violence particularly on innocent people. Some of them showed their reaction by shooting against the insurgents in some areas. According to theory of counterinsurgency and Mao Tse-tung noted, “The people are like water and the army is like fish.” , the population is the center of Gravity in order to eventually control the country, the insurgent must be close to the people.(Krepinevich,2004,p.4) The insurgents have conducted many violence which have killed many innocent Iraqi people. As a result, it is very clear that many Iraqi will never support the insurgents’ violence.

Beheading was another tactic which did not work as the insurgents intended. It might take message to the world that the violence would still continue; people around the world presented the objections strongly. Moreover, many Islamic people criticized them instead of admiring.

Accordingly, the number of voter also showed the effort of the Sunni objective to stop people from voting to be unsuccessful when millions Iraqis went to the polls. It seemed that future attacks would no longer be viewed as against the US occupation, but against Iraqis themselves. Similarly, Prime Minister Iyad Allawi said that “Iraqis defied the threats and voted, turning the political tide against the insurgents. The number of voter was the answer to insurgents that many Iraqi resisted the violence as well as statistic of voters send a much more important message to insurgents”

### **Conclusion**

It is assumed that the strategy of the insurgency in Iraq is not to defeat the US directly. The main goals are to interferer the pace of reconstruction, to prevent Iraqis from working with the occupation authorities and to encourage U.S. forces to undertake excessive counter-insurgency operation that disrupt the Iraqis regular’s life. They also raised the costs of the U.S. to response its determination in Iraq. In other words, anything that prevents the invaders from stabilizing Iraq and improving the lives of Iraqis is the simply way to against them. Therefore, the insurgents will continue conduct their violence as much as they can in order to remain the terrific incidents.

It is interesting to note that it is not a war of national resistance against a foreign occupation, so it is highly improbable that the insurgents can build a conventional army capable of undertaking large scale military operations in a third phase of the guerilla war.

To sum up, they have been unsuccessful in some of their aims; the strategy of Iraqi insurgents has been effective in some extend to achieve their outcomes because of the simple strategic objective. This will encourage the willingness of the insurgents to fight against the occupations by maintaining violence as much as they can , whenever they want and wherever they need so that the history of the war cannot say that the US won the insurgency war on Iraq soil.

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