

The Break Point: AQIZ Establishes the ISI in Zaganiyah

Captain James M. Few

What we've got here is a failure to communicate. Some men you just can't reach...So, you get what we had here last week, which is the way he wants it! Well, he gets it! An' I don't like it any more than you men.

-Strother Martin, *Cool Hand Luke*, 1967

Look at your young men fighting, Look at your women crying, Look at your young men dying, the way they've always done before. Look at the hate we're breeding. Look at the fear we're feeding. Look at the lives we're leading. The way we've always done before...My hands are tied...I don't need your civil war.

-Axle Rose, *Civil War*, 1991

Upon my arrival in Iraq in August 2006, Zaganiyah appeared to be a potentially shining example of democratization; a relatively peaceful, heterogeneous mixture of Sunnis and Shias, a robust security force consisting of both local police and Iraqi Army (ISF), and an adequate government representation in both the local Nahiya (County) and Diyala Provisional Councils (GOI). Furthermore, population samples indicated thriving economic metrics, moderate religious leaders, and marginal but improving essential services (A/5-73 Recon Operational Summary, August 2006).

Yet, in the shadows of this overtly optimistic US perspective, a storm of epic proportions brewed as tribal and sectarian differences clashed outside of the Coalition Forces' (CF) purview. By March 2007 Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQIZ), through a series of tactical political and military moves, consolidated control of Zaganiyah governing under the auspices of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), a shadow government created as an alternative solution to the US-backed Shia government of Prime Minister Maliki.

AQIZ established its zone of control, effectively killing or displacing 5,000 Shia residents, dissolving the Iraqi Government presence, instituting an Islamic government, and implementing Shar'iah law.

The carnage wrought through the savagery of their occupation was deplorable and almost incredulous. Zaganiyah was a shell of its former self: half the homes were abandoned or

destroyed, the cemetery desecrated of Shia grave markers and shrines, and the girl's school transformed into the AQIZ headquarters. Sunnis stole their Shia neighbors' property, took over their homes, and claimed their farms. Later, evidence uncovered public beheadings, terrorist training camps, and a defensive belt consisting of over 100 deep-buried improved explosive devices (IEDs), houses rigged with explosives, and dug-in entrenchments.

How did AQIZ establish the ISI in Zaganiyah? AQIZ was neither supported nor established in Zaganiyah prior to 2005. Frankly, population samples conducted as late as August 2006 indicated less than 1% of the populace supported AQIZ. Yet, in April 2007, we watched with disgust as a recovered video depicted one of several public trials in the village cemetery. The most disturbing action occurred after the Shia IA soldier's head was severed. The once moderate, semi-religious Sunni populace had gathered in mass cheering, "Takfiri, Takfiri [God is great]" (Ware, 2007). Understanding what happened in this town is paramount in trying to determine how to defeat AQIZ and ultimately secure the populace and stabilize Iraq.

Simply put, instead of focusing on the state, AQIZ focused its efforts on controlling the populace through coercion and intimidation. Their primary objective was population mobilization to reach the government's break point. This break point is "achieved by establishing a local military advantage, displacing (or neutralizing) the residual presence of the old regime, and creating an alternative set of administrative and governing institutions" (McCormick, 1999, pp. 26-27). First, this paper examines the political and geographical environment of Zaganiyah. Then, it explains what AQIZ wanted by outlining the tactical, operational, and strategic objectives. Finally, it describes how AQIZ took over Zaganiyah, using Robert Andrews's outline on the Vietcong strategy in the Dinh Tuong province of Vietnam: essentially that outline involved the development of a clandestine organization, psychological preparation of the people, expansion of control, and consolidation of power. The following is an account of how it happened.¹

POLITICAL AND GEOGRAPHIC TERRAIN

As Mao observed at the time, 'all guerilla units start from nothing and grow.' At the onset of this type of struggle, the standing regime represents a force in being. The guerilla, by contrast, represents a force in development. The latter begins with little more than an idea. The guerilla's one opening under these circumstances, according to the theory of class conflict, is provided by the inherent frailty of the regime's political base and the corresponding weakness of its institutional presence throughout the countryside. Exploiting this opening, Mao argued, will permit a guerilla force to bridge the gap between its grand ends and limited means over the course of the struggle.

-Gordon McCormick, 1999, p.24

Crucial to this analysis is the understanding that prior to May 2003, neither the United States Government nor Al Qaeda existed in the Diyala River Valley. Furthermore, the instability and chaos in Iraq did not begin with the onset of Operation Iraqi Freedom. As Toby Dodge argues, Iraq has been on the brink of a civil war since the early 1920s following its independence from Britain. Iraq is a melting pot of Islamic culture mixing Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds, Turkomans, and Christians in a complex, unstable environment. Dodge contends:

¹ Account is of my eight months in the town of Zaganiyah. It reflects interviews conducted during combat operations. Any inaccuracies in dates and events reflect a failure of memory.

The removal of Saddam Hussein was the beginning, not the culmination, of a long and very uncertain process of reform. It was also the continuation of a failed effort to create a modern liberal state on the part of the world's leading hegemony as part of a new world order. The nature of and reaction of the American presence in Iraq over the next decade will, to a large degree, determine the type of state that emerges in the aftermath of any future war and the role of the United States in the international system for the next generation (Dodge, 2003, p. xix).

Zaganiyah is a central village of 10,000 nestled in the austere farming community of the Diyala River Valley (DRV). "The roads, canals and overgrown footpaths snaking through the territory remain an eerie scene of violence, a jungle world reminiscent of Vietnam" (Kukis, 2007, p.1). Historically, the DRV served as a major transport corridor along the ancient Silk Road extending from Persian to Baqubah. During Saddam's era, magnificent date plantations were granted to Baath Party loyalists.

In the context of this fight, there are six key state and counter-state actors in Zaganiyah: the Government of Iraq, Jaysh Al Mahdi (JAM), BADR CORPS, the Shia Tribes, the Sunni Tribes, and the 1920's Revolutionary Party. Furthermore, there are five key players in Zaganiyah during the establishment of the ISI: Sheik Septar, Major Karim, Moose, and Ali Latif. Sheik Septar the Al-Zuharie tribal leader was a prominent, opportunistic businessman with financial ties to Anbar Province and the Kurdish-held territories. Major Karim Al-Zuharie commanded the Abarra IA Company from 2004 to 2005. Mustafa (Moose) Al-Zuharie served as a favorite interpreter of the US forces at FOB Warhorse. Sheik Rokhan Al-Zuharie a leading religious cleric commanded the 1920's Revolutionary Brigade eventually in charge of the entire Abarra Nahiya and the Buhritz district of Baqubah. Ali Latif Al-Zuharie was the AQIZ cell leader for Zaganiyah.

What did AQIZ want? AQIZ's plan was nested three-fold: tactical, operational, and strategic. Tactically, AQIZ needed to seize Zaganiyah, the key terrain of the DRV. Operationally, the AQIZ leadership needed to establish safe-havens and terrorist training camps to provide resources (people, guns, and money) to the main effort in Baqubah. Strategically, they desired to dismantle the Government of Iraq, establish the ISI, a non-contiguous, non-linear nation-state system, and enslave the Shia rejecters (Fishman, 2007, p.1).

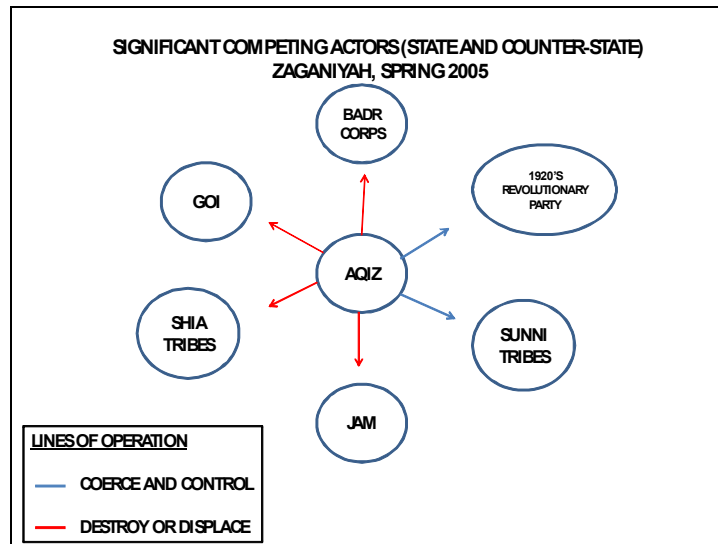


Figure 1. AQIZ Lines of Operation

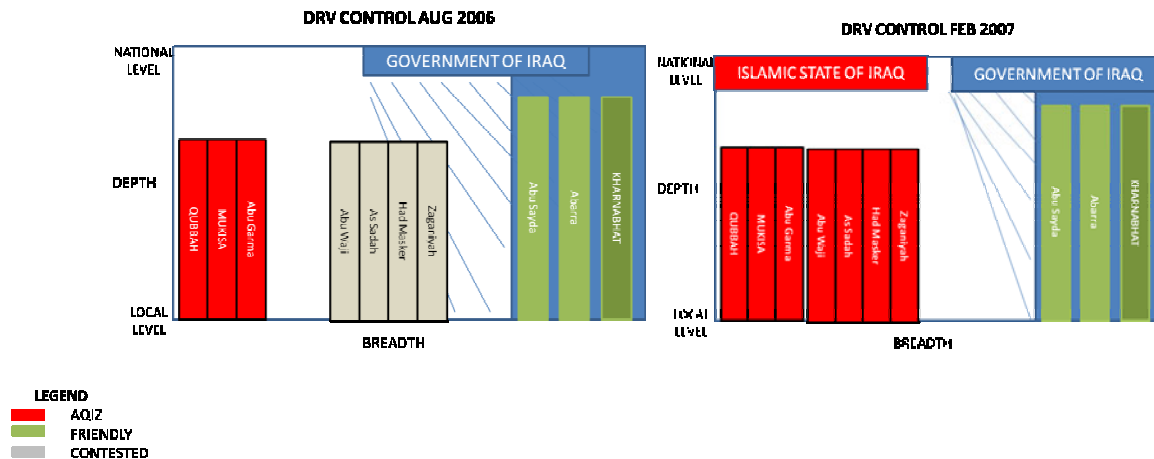


Figure 2. Control of DRV (2006-2007)

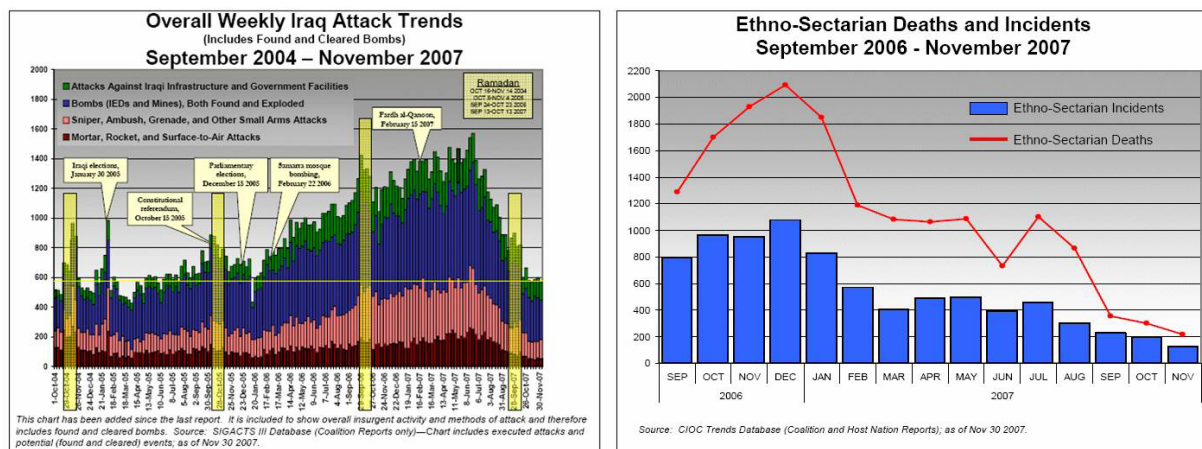


Figure 3. Iraq Trends (2004-2007)

CLANDESTINE ORGANIZATION

The purpose of the clandestine organization phase in the modus operandi of the Dang Lao Dong was to establish Party cells within a village; from these cells would come further developments of the Party, which in turn establish and control the united front, or, in the case of South Vietnam, the National Liberation Front. During this entire process, the village cadre was extremely vulnerable; he had to assume that the world he was about to enter was hostile, that Government agents were everywhere, awaiting his first mistake. Too, he might become the victim of a villager, for Viet-Nam, after decades of internecine strife is a land where many people, irrespective of political coloration, have any number of old scores to settle.

-Robert Andrews, 1973, pp. 42-43

Ironically, the covert infiltration described by Andrews reflects an accurate depiction of AQIZ's penetration into the DRV nearly fifty years later. Initially, AQIZ was a partisan force attempting to breach into the ancient tribal political-social networks. During the initial infiltration, secrecy was paramount. Given the tribal infighting and competing insurgent groups, accidental missteps could prove fatal to AQIZ. Without a firm stronghold in Zaganayah, they were vulnerable to numerous threats. During the spring of 2004, AQIZ began its infiltration. Having already established a safe-haven in the neighboring towns of Qubbah, Mukisa, and Abu Garma under the religious leadership of Sheik Abu Adl al Rahman, AQIZ began conducting initial coordination with the Al-Zuharie Tribe. The Al-Zuharie tribe offered the perfect 'in' for AQIZ. It's amalgam of political, military, religious, and financial ties afforded AQIZ an easy opportunity to execute Mao's essential operational tasks of the Social Mobilization Phase:

- (1) *Penetration*, which speaks to the revolutionary organization's need to "get inside" targeted social groupings as a prelude to 'turning' them to the service of the organization's political and military objectives,
- (2) *Transformation*, which speaks to the insurgency's need to consolidate its control over the targeted group and redirect some of its resources to the organization's goals, and
- (3) *Application*, which refers to the way in which these resources are used to further develop an insurgent infrastructure, undermine the competing infra-structure of the state, and, ultimately, extend the insurgent's zone of control (McCormick, 1999, p.24).

AQIZ sent secret messages to Sheik Septar proposing business contracts and military treaties through couriers consisting of farmers, taxi-drivers, and women. The purpose of these contracts and negotiations was to devise a cooperative agreement under the ever popular "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" status. By accepting the offer, Sheik Septar would agree to partner with AQIZ to overrun the hated CF, GOI, and Shia Militias. Septar would provide soldiers, weapons, and intelligence sharing to AQIZ. In return, AQIZ would provide business contracts to transport weapons and foreign fighters from Syria, and it would allow Septar to send his most promising soldiers to the established training camps in AQIZ held territory for advanced military training.

Eventually, these messages culminated in covert negotiations. According to reports, Sheik Septar initially rejected the offer. In 2004, the Sunni-Rejectionist movement was still mobilizing, monitoring the State activity, and establishing its own counter-state, the New Baath Party. The extreme Salafism principles of AQIZ did not sit well with the moderate Septar who

smoked a pack of cigarettes a day and cherished his alcohol. He perceived AQIZ as an extreme band of thugs with little capacity to expand (A/5-73 Recon Operational Summary, April 2007).

AQIZ would have to look elsewhere in Zaganiyah. Eventually, they found their first recruit in Ali Latif Al-Zuharie, a 28 year-old miscreant. Ali Latif began pursuing religious Wahabbi studies in 1994. At the time, the remainder of the Al-Zuharie tribe viewed his studies as peculiar, as if one's relative had moved deep into the Appalachians to test his religious merit with the handling of snakes.

After his recruitment, Ali Latif traveled to Mukisa to begin his military training. The training camps operated in a five sequential phases: Phase One: Traffic Control Points, Phase Two: Basic Rifle Marksmanship, Phase Three: Infantry Tactics, Phase Four: Explosives, and Phase Five: Martyrdom Operations. After a successful graduation, Ali Latif engaged in indoctrination and religious training reinforcing his earlier Wahabbi studies. Eventually, he received acceptance as a full-fledged card carrying member of AQIZ.

AQIZ sent him back to Zaganiyah to begin recruitment for his cell, conduct limited offensive operations, and establish his power base within the village. From the spring of 2004 to the spring of 2006, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (AMZ) reportedly visited Ali Latif to encourage, mentor, and provide guidance for future operational planning. Although relatively miniscule at the time, AQIZ successfully penetrated into Zaganiyah. In the coming days, this foothold would prove decisive.

PYSCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION OF THE PEOPLE

"We practice selective annihilation of mayors and government officials, for example, to create a vacuum. Then, we fill that vacuum. As popular war advances, peace is closer."

-Peruvian Guerilla General *Civil War, 1991*

The purpose of the psychological preparation of the people is to dissolve the 'social adhesive' of the community. Accordingly, AQIZ needed to "destroy the 'social adhesive' that had traditionally integrated the villager into his society and provided him with a sense of identity" (Andrews, 1973, p. 51). Zaganiyah's 'social adhesive' resided in a rather complex "conflict ecosystem" (Kilcullen, 2006) consisting of competing tribal and sectarian influences. The strategy of AQIZ "was designed to illustrate that the customary elements of authority and leadership in the peasant's world were bankrupt, that they were unable to provide meaningful solutions to the problems facing the village and its inhabitants and therefore undeserving of loyalty" (Andrews, 1973, p. 51). To achieve these ends five simultaneous tactics were employed: propaganda, reduction of prestige, destruction of the opposition, land reform, and peasant resistance.

Propaganda

In his works On Guerilla Warfare, Mao Tse-tung defined three distinct types of revolutionary psychological activities-those 'first as applied to the troops; second, as applied to the people; and third, as applied to the enemy.

-Andrews, 1973, p. 52

From spring 2004 to October 2006, Ali Latif's cell began distributing approved AQIZ propaganda in this fashion. As applied to the troops to enhance recruitment, bolster morale, and show authority, Latif's cell created and distributed multiple forms of propaganda. Of utmost importance, soldiers received videotaped sermons and books from various AQIZ leadership and scholars including Osama Bin Laden, Al-Zawahiri, Abu Bakr Naji, and Sheik, and Uthman Bin Abd al-Rahman al-Tamimi. The purpose of these messages was to further indoctrinate potential recruits into AQIZ's religious principles and dogma, explain the importance of the cause, and provide guidance for future operations. Second, videos of successful attacks on American forces in both Afghanistan and Iraq were distributed to show the weakness of the Infidel and encourage strength and resolve in the fight. Third, attacks on Iraqi security forces were distributed to show the weakness of the current regime. Fourth, videos and pamphlets outlining the virtues of jihad and martyrdom were distributed to begin laying the foundation for the recruitment of suicide bombers. Finally, Latif began producing videos of his own warriors training in the palm groves and conducting limited attacks on security forces and acts of intimidation on the populace (A/5-73 Recon Operational Summary, April 2007).

As applied to the people, Latif's cell distributed pamphlets to condition the people to Shar'iah law and prepare them for the eventual establishment of the ISI. Operating under the umbrella of the Mujahedeen Shura Council (MSC), pamphlets provided instruction on the proper actions of good Muslims. Examples included:

- Smoking is illegal and immoral. Anyone found smoking will have his hand cut off.
- If a man drives his daughter to school in the same car, then he is violating Shar'iah law and will be punished.
- One cannot eat tomatoes and cucumbers together because one is male and the other is female. This action is immoral. Failure to comply will result in death.

As applied to the enemy, AQIZ divided its efforts towards three actors: Americans and Jews, the Government of Iraq, and the Shias. Examples included:

- Distributed pamphlets describing how Shias are rejecters of the faith.
- Distributed pamphlets describing how Israel and America desire to establish a world-wide empire and subject Muslims to slavery.

Reduction of Prestige

In the fall of 2006, misconduct by AQIZ trainees in Mukisa led to social friction between the AQIZ leadership and the local mukthars and tribal leaders. Eventually, the elders would protest. In between training sessions, soldiers would sneak off to drink alcohol. Due to AQIZ's manpower requirements during its recruitment stages, the AQIZ senior leadership decided not to enforce Shar'iah on its soldiers. These drunken soldiers would take to the town brazenly in search of local women to enjoy. After several incidents, local leadership requested an audience with the AQIZ leadership.

The mukthar explained the shame caused to the young women of his town, and asked AQIZ why their soldiers did not follow the Koran. He implied that these actions reflect a level of hypocrisy

within the organization. In reply, the AQIZ leadership dragged the mukthar into the streets and beat him publically.

This humiliation was shattered traditional views of legitimate leadership unthinkable. Iraqi society reveres the mukthar. For the average villager, he represents wisdom and leadership. He is to be treated with respect. This act of domination proved to the villagers that AQIZ was in charge. Furthermore, this action served as a lesson to the other mukthars and tribal elders that it was not wise to stand up to them. Subsequently, soldiers began inter-marrying within the tribes to establish bloodlines and strengthen the tribal ties (A/5-73 Recon Operational Summary, May2007).

Peasant Resistance

From 2004 to October 2006, AQIZ contended with multiple competing tribes and insurgent groups. Ali Latif began conducting attacks on civilians to intimidate them into submission. In October 2006, Ali Latif began forcing the displacement of the Shia populace. Over the course of four months, half of the town was forced out. Families packed up personal belongings and travelled throughout Iraq to escape the violence of Zaganiyah. They left their homes, possessions, and farms (A/5-73 Recon Operational Summary, October 2006).

Destruction of the Oppression

In the spring of 2005, AQIZ employed a suicide bomber on Major Karim as he travelled to work. This assassination rocked the local community. Major Karim represented stability and hope. He was the face of democracy for the majority of Iraqis living in Zaganiyah. Subsequently, AQIZ attempted assassinations on Karim's successors: LT Farras and Ali. Luckily, ISF foiled these attempts. Throughout this time, they conducted limited attacks on Coalition and Iraqi Forces; however, they maintained a level of violence that did not exceed the average daily attacks on CF across Iraq. After a year of conducting the psychological preparation of the people, AQIZ had a major breakthrough. In the spring of 2006, Sheik Septar Al-Zuharie committed the Al-Zuharie tribe to AQIZ through financial negotiations to include contracts to transport goods from Syria to Anbar and Diyala. Septar acknowledged the rapid growth of Ali Latif's cell in Zaganiyah, the total control of Anbar Province, and the impotence of Coalition Forces and the Government of Iraq (A/5-73 Recon Operational Summary, April 2007).

In September 2006, AQIZ brutally murdered the Abu Waji Imam as he visited elders in Mukisa. This imam failed to submit to the theological doctrine prescribed by AQIZ. In November 2006, AQIZ murdered the Little Abu Sayda mukthar. This Sunni mukthar was instrumental in assisting Alpha Troop at their patrol base in Abu Sayda. The net effects of the assassinations of leadership resulted in AQIZ dismantling the tribal and governmental ties of the Sunni residents of Zaganiyah.

The Break Point

The insurgents took control of the Diyala River Valley outside Baqubah almost as soon as the Americans deployed elsewhere in Iraq. That was back in November 2006. The streets of Diyala province then became deadlier than ever, as the string of placid farming hamlets nestled among dense palm groves shuddered with violence. The province and its capital, Baqubah, which lies 30 miles north of Baghdad, unraveled. The once mixed villages have become sectarian enclaves;

banks, stores and markets have shut down for fear of murder and bloodshed... It wasn't always this way. When U.S. Captain Mike Few was stationed outside Baqubah in November, tensions between Shi'ites, who make up 30% of the population of Diyala, and Sunnis were being held in check by tribal leaders. "It was manageable in the beginning," says Few. "The sheiks were working it out." But as the U.S. began shifting military resources to Baghdad, sectarian tensions erupted. Late last year the largely Shi'ite government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki choked off supplies of food and fuel to the predominantly Sunni province. Tribal violence, which has long been a source of unrest, intensified as resources dwindled. Sunni insurgents who had gathered in the area under the banner of Abu Mousab al-Zarqawi, killed by U.S. forces near Baqubah last June, launched a campaign to exterminate Shi'ites, who retaliated in kind. As in Baghdad, kidnappings and gruesome murders have become everyday fare.

-Mark Kukis, *Small Town Wars*, 2007

Ali Latif's efforts coupled with a series of state blunders brought about Zaganiyah's breakpoint. On 17 October, the Abarra provisional government crumbled. Elected officials succumbed to death threats and resigned from government service. On 19 October, Ali's AQIZ cell conducted complex attacks on the Zaganiyah IP station to force the local police to quit their positions. Aggressive close tactical reconnaissance conducted by elite paratroopers the previous two weeks allowed CF to respond in force – launching Air Weapons Teams (AWTs) destroying the assault force consisting of ten fighters.² AQIZ responded with leaflets dropped at the police officers' homes warning them not to return to work. On 20 October, CF reinforced the police station. I attempted to no avail to conduct a hasty governance meeting with the local sheiks. No one showed up, and the police force unraveled.

The GOI decided to reinforce the police station with the Baqubah Emergency Response Force (ERF), a paramilitary unit molded after the Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) brigade.

Unfortunately, Jaysh Al Mahdi (JAM) forces had successfully infiltrated the Baqubah ERF, and this interdiction only served to reinforce the sectarian strife in the town. Zaganiyah was no longer a tribal society. Now, it was a sectarian warzone with Shias competing with Sunnis in a zero-sum game.

On 24 October, Ali Latif sent a sent wave of attacks to disperse the Baqubah ERF. CF responded with a combined air and ground campaign. AQIZ counterattacked with a defensive belt surrounding Zaganiyah. The net result of this contact was ten AQIZ soldiers killed and four US soldiers wounded. The Baqubah ERF held their ground.

On 31 October, CF conducted Operation Shaku Maku (Arabic slang for what's up) effectively destroying ten miscreants and capturing another three. The following day I conducted emergency reconciliation meetings with the Sunnis. Prior to the leadership engagement, AQIZ placed a bounty of \$10,000 on my head. I met with Sheik Septar and 100 of his closest friends. We discussed the ineptitude of the current government and future prospects of non-partisan governance. I explained that the government must seek reform, but the impotence of the Iraqi government paled in comparison to the savagery of AQIZ's Shar'iah law. I encouraged him to work non-violently through the political process for reform. Finally, I warned him that my troop

² CF actions will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

would not leave the area, and it was my mission to destroy AQIZ and any supporters. I told him that he must decide whom to support. He concurred. At the end of the meeting, it appeared that the situation was contained.

On 1 November, the declining security situation in the Diyala Province led CF commanders to send A/5-73 Recon to other areas. The replacing unit was dual tasked with the Diyala River Valley and parts of Baqubah, so they were unable to maintain a regular presence in the area. Simultaneously, Ali Latif's cell distributed leaflets proscribing a curfew for all Zaganiyah residents. Instructions were given that ordered all residents to remain in their homes until AQIZ successfully drove out the GOI. On 10 November, AQIZ overran the IP station with a spectacular attack consisting of a Suicide Car Bomber followed by an infantry assault. The surviving remnants of the ERF fled the town for the relative safety of Baqubah. Over the next two weeks, ISF stopped patrolling the area, and CF designated Zaganiyah as "No-Go" Terrain. By 10 November, the GOI hit its breakpoint--the ISI owned Zaganiyah.

EXPANSION OF CONTROL

The masses, enlightened by propaganda yet left scattered, do not constitute a force and are not able to cope with the enemies. That is why, side by side with the masses propaganda, one should think of organizing the masses, gathering them into numerous and strong forces to oppose the enemies.

-Vietnamese Communist Party
Vietnamese Communist Directive 75

With the rapid withdrawal of the government, AQIZ immediately stepped in to fill the power vacuum. Ali Latif launched a wave of terror to completely displace or destroy the remaining Shia factions and coerce or intimidate the remaining Sunni factions into submission. This expansion of control consisted of three simultaneous phases: establish governance, destruction of the opposition, and land reform. First, they established governance. Ali Latif distributed a letter congratulating people of ridding themselves of corrupt government and Coalition Forces. They thanked the populace for patience. Then, they established a headquarters in a girl's school, instituted AQIZ indoctrination in all four schools, and instituted Shar'iah courts. Tying in with the ISI infrastructure based in Qubbah, Ali Latif formed a local governing council.

The Destruction of the Oppression

In December, AQIZ destroyed Mustafa (Moose) Al-Zuharie's home as retribution for his working as an American Interpreter. Simultaneously, they defaced Shia shrines and markers throughout the cemetery. In January, they conducted public trials of a captured Shia IA soldier and a Shia resident. Both men were found guilty of rejecting the faith, and they were beheaded in the town's cemetery and square respectively. In February, four black Suburbans rolled into Zaganiyah. Men in black masks kidnapped Sheik Rokhan, the 1920's Revolutionary leader commanding Zaganiyah and Buhritz. He was taken to Qubbah as a prisoner. For two weeks, senior AQIZ attempted to coerce Rokhan into joining the ISI. Rokhan refused. He was put to trial and executed. This execution coupled with Sheik Sattar's earlier treaty obligations shored up control of the Sunni factions.

Land Reform as a Tactic of the Party

Agents of the ISI quickly set about to redistribute Shia farm land, property, and homes to Sunni residents. Property and homes were distributed in proportion to a peasant's loyalty to the Islamic State of Iraq. Moreover, Shia property was consolidated and sold at the newly minted AQIZ warehouse offering prices well below market value. Through sheer thievery and greed, the Sunni residents' net worth doubled overnight. The effect of the land reform was exponential to the ISI's expansion. This reform allowed instant gratification to a populace consumed by constant humiliation, resentment, and neglect that began nearly four years prior when Paul Bremer disbanded the Iraqi military and outlawed the Ba'ath Party (Ricks, 2006, pgs. 203-214).

CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

We must not forget the consolidation of the base areas, the chief task being to arouse and organize the masses and to train guerilla units and local armed forces.

-Mao Tse-tung,
Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung

From December 2007 through March 2007, AQIZ conducted consolidation of power in Zaganiyah consisting of three components: village paramilitary forces, mutual surveillance, and movement. The combination of these components solidified AQIZ's power structure and afforded them a monopoly of the use of violence for Zaganiyah.

Paramilitary Forces

Given his unprecedented success in Zaganiyah, Ali Latif embarked to expand his political and military power within the AQIZ organization. Accordingly, he outsourced instructors and established training camps deep within the palm groves surrounding the town. Then, he instituted a massive recruitment campaign, organizing every able body man and woman in the town. The military age men went through the training camps. In addition to the Qubbah methodology, Ali Latif incorporated military instruction manuals on the use of explosives, Field Manual 7-8 Infantry Tactics, and SERE tactics on how to conduct oneself upon capture. Next, he set out to fortify the town, emplacing disrupt IEDs along the zone of control boundary and emplacing over 160 deep buried IEDs to block any opposing force. Furthermore, his men dug fighting positions and bunker networks to defend the town from attack.

Mutual surveillance

The rapid deterioration of societal norms coupled with the intensive terror campaign created an environment of significant distrust of family, friends, and neighbors. Ali Latif exploited these sensitivities during his occupation. Villagers were instructed to monitor everyone's behavior and inform on anyone that may be a government spy or sympathetic to another insurgent groups. AQIZ rapidly policed up any alleged dissenter for an expedited trial at the Shar'iah courts. Strict and swift punishments of varying degrees reemphasized the omnipotence of AQIZ rule. Furthermore, AQIZ assigned varying security tasks to school children, farmers, women, and taxi drivers. They conducted surveillance and reconnaissance activities, transport of weapons and personnel, and courier traffic.

Movement Controls

Ali Latif established Traffic Control Points (TCPs) along the major avenues of approach into Zaganiyah. These positions effectively allowed him to control vehicular movement and foot traffic in and out of the town. These measures would ensure that he could retain situational awareness on his own villagers and visitors.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the popular belief, the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq was not a reaction of AQIZ to the beginnings of “The Surge.” Instead, its foundations originated from a carefully calculated strategy of guerilla tactics employed successfully in countless insurgencies throughout the last century. Using a small, localized cell of hardcore believers, AQIZ successfully coerced and intimidated the local populace over time through a four phased plan: clandestine organization, psychological preparation of the people, expansion of control, and consolidation of power. This plan allowed for the successful recruitment of training of “the base,” local assessments to determine the enemy disposition and composition of the village, preparation of the battlefield, shaping operations, and decisive action to achieve the government’s “break point.” Once achieved, AQIZ conducted consolidation and reorganization-- effectively securing its objective and preparing for the next fight. The fight to oust AQIZ and regain control of Zaganiyah would prove formidable—ultimately claiming the lives of twenty one US paratroopers and over two hundred Iraqis. However, in the beginning, the outcome was neither predestined nor guaranteed. In the beginning, the Islamic State of Iraq was not in existence; it was merely an idea.

James Michael Few is a US Army Captain currently assigned to Naval Postgraduate School as a Defense Analyst student. He is a veteran of three Operation Iraqi Freedom tours of duty.

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