



(U) Complex Environments: Battle of Fallujah I, April 2004

(U) Purpose

(U) This is the second of a series of assessments that analyzes recent warfare in complex environments. Enemy employment of asymmetric tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) during the Battle of Fallujah in April 2004 offers many useful lessons learned in how a relatively weak adversary can prevent the United States from accomplishing its military objectives.

(U) Key Points

- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) The insurgent defense of Fallujah was a dispersed, nonlinear defense in depth that involved networks of small combat cells. Mobile cells, often only the size of a fire team, conducted a fluid defense using hit-and-run attacks, ambushes, and standoff attacks.
 - (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Insurgent TTP were designed to allow Marine units to penetrate in depth into their territory so they could set up ambush and swarming opportunities on isolated targets. The insurgents constantly sought to isolate Marine units in order to destroy them piecemeal.
 - (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) There was no central leadership in charge of all insurgents. We assess that the insurgent leadership model was similar to the Shura council model employed in November 2004.
 - (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Insurgents deliberately fought from sensitive areas such as mosques, schools, and residential areas. Mosques served as command centers, fighting positions, weapon caches, rallying points, and hospitals. Minarets were used by snipers, observers, and forward observers.
 - (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) The basic insurgent supply concept was to pre-position and prestock food, water, and ammunition in caches throughout the city and depend on limited resupply once fighting began. Most caches in the city were inside buildings; those outside the city in the surrounding rural areas were often in palm groves.
 - (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) The outcome of a purely military contest in Fallujah was always a foregone conclusion—Coalition victory. But Fallujah was not simply a military action, it was a political and informational battle whose outcome was far less certain. The effects of media coverage, enemy information operations (IO), and the fragility of the political environment conspired to force a halt to U.S. military operations.
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(U) Introduction

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) In April 2004, elements of the First Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) launched an offensive into the Iraqi city of Fallujah to clean out an insurgent sanctuary, secure lines of communication, and arrest the perpetrators of a 31 March 2004 Blackwater ambush that killed four American civilians.

(U) Physical and Human Terrain

(U) Fallujah is a city of approximately 285,000 people situated in the Al Anbar Province about 40 miles west of Baghdad. Spread across 25 square kilometers in a roughly rectangular shape, most of

Fallujah's 50,000+ buildings are residential, except for the industrial (Sina'a) sector in the southeast. Typical homes are one or two stories high, constructed of brick or concrete blocks, with flat roofs and enclosed courtyards and perimeter walls (or there is a wall on the perimeter of the roof). Many neighborhood streets are orderly and arranged in a grid pattern; the exceptions being twisting alleyways and a tangle of streets in the northeast Jolan district and the industrial area in the southeast.

(U) The following is a useful description provided by U.S. Marines:

(U) The layout of Fallujah is random. Zoning distinguishing between residential, business, and industrial is non-existent.

(U) The streets are narrow and are generally lined by walls. The walls channelize the squad and do not allow for standard immediate action drills when contact is made. This has not been an issue because the majority of contact is not made in the streets, but in the houses.

(U) The houses are densely packed in blocks. The houses touch or almost touch the adjacent houses to the sides and rear. This enables the insurgents to escape the view of Marine overwatch positions. The houses also are all made of brick with a thick covering of mortar overtop. In almost every house a fragmentation grenade can be used without fragments coming through the walls. Each room can be fragged individually.

(U) Almost all houses have an enclosed courtyard. Upon entry into the courtyard, there is usually an outhouse large enough for one man. The rooftops as well as a large first story window overlook the courtyard. Generally, all the windows in the house are barred and covered with blinds or cardboard restricting visibility into the house.

(U) The exterior doors of the houses are both metal and wood. The wood doors usually have a metal gate over top on the outside of the house forming two barriers to breach. The doors have two to three locking points. Some doors are even barricaded from the inside to prevent entry. There are generally two to three entrances to the house. The entrances are the front, the kitchen, and the side or rear.

(U) The interior doors are also made of metal and wood. The differences between the interior and exterior doors are the strength and durability of the doors. Interior doors only have one locking point and most of them can be kicked in. All doors inside and outside of the house are usually locked and must be breached.

(U) The layout of all the houses is generally the same. Initial entry in the front door leads to a small room with two interior doors. The two doors are the entrance to two adjacent open seating rooms. The size of the rooms varies according to the size of the house. At the end of the sitting rooms are interior doors that open up into a central hallway.

(U) The central hallway is where all the first floor rooms lead and it contains the ladderwell to the second deck. The second deck will contain more rooms and an exit to the middle rooftop. The middle rooftop will have an exterior ladderwell leading up to the highest rooftop.



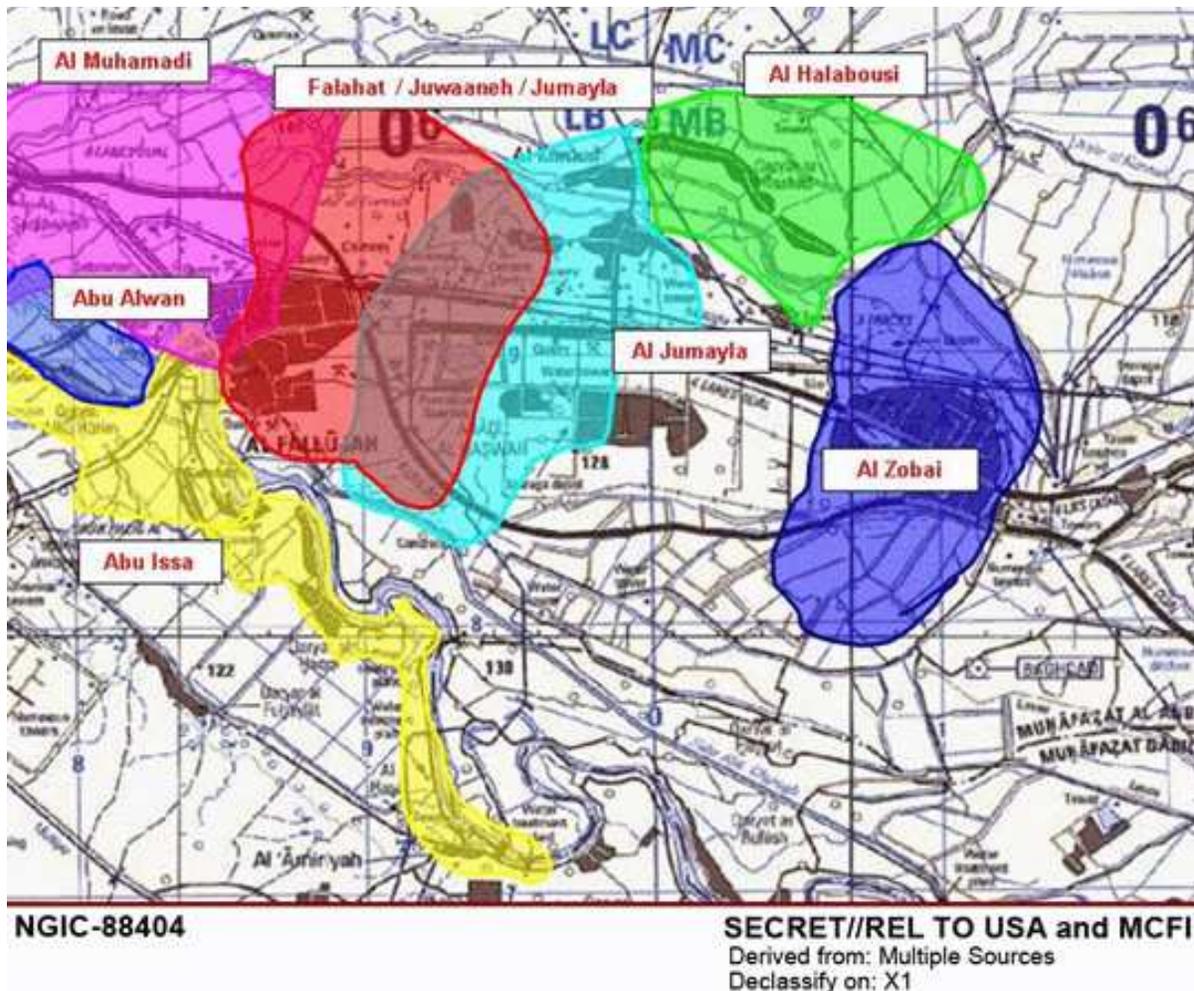
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(U) Typical Fallujah Neighborhood

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Several tribes and subtribes reside in the area, most of whom were and remain "anti-occupation" (see figure below). Tribal leaders and customs played a prominent role in enemy command and control (to be discussed below). The largest tribe in the area is the Jumayla whose clan leaders are roughly split over whether or not to support multinational forces in Iraq (MNF-I). The Abu Issa tribe is the largest inside Fallujah, and it competes with the Al Muhamadi for control. The Al Janabi tribe is mostly hostile; as in most tribes, hostility can vary across subtribes and clans. Abdullah Al Janabi was the most prominent leader of the insurgents and head of the Shura Council in the city.



FULL IMAGE

(U) Tribes in Fallujah Area

(U) Historical Background to Vigilant Resolve

(U) In April 2003 Coalition forces occupied Fallujah with little fighting a few weeks after seizing Baghdad. By the end of the month tensions began to rise over the Coalition presence. On 28 April 2003 a large Iraqi crowd protesting the Coalition takeover of a school turned violent and 15 Iraqis were killed. Violence against Coalition forces continued throughout the late summer and fall of 2003, prompting U.S. forces to shift their garrison locations to a series of camps outside of the city. Foreign fighters began to infiltrate and use Fallujah as a base of operations. Finally, on 31 March 2004, four American Blackwater contractors were killed and images of their bodies being burned and mutilated were broadcast on television around the world. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, CENTCOM Commander GEN Abizaid, and Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Ambassador Bremer decided a military response was needed immediately. Fallujah had become a symbol of resistance that dominated international headlines.

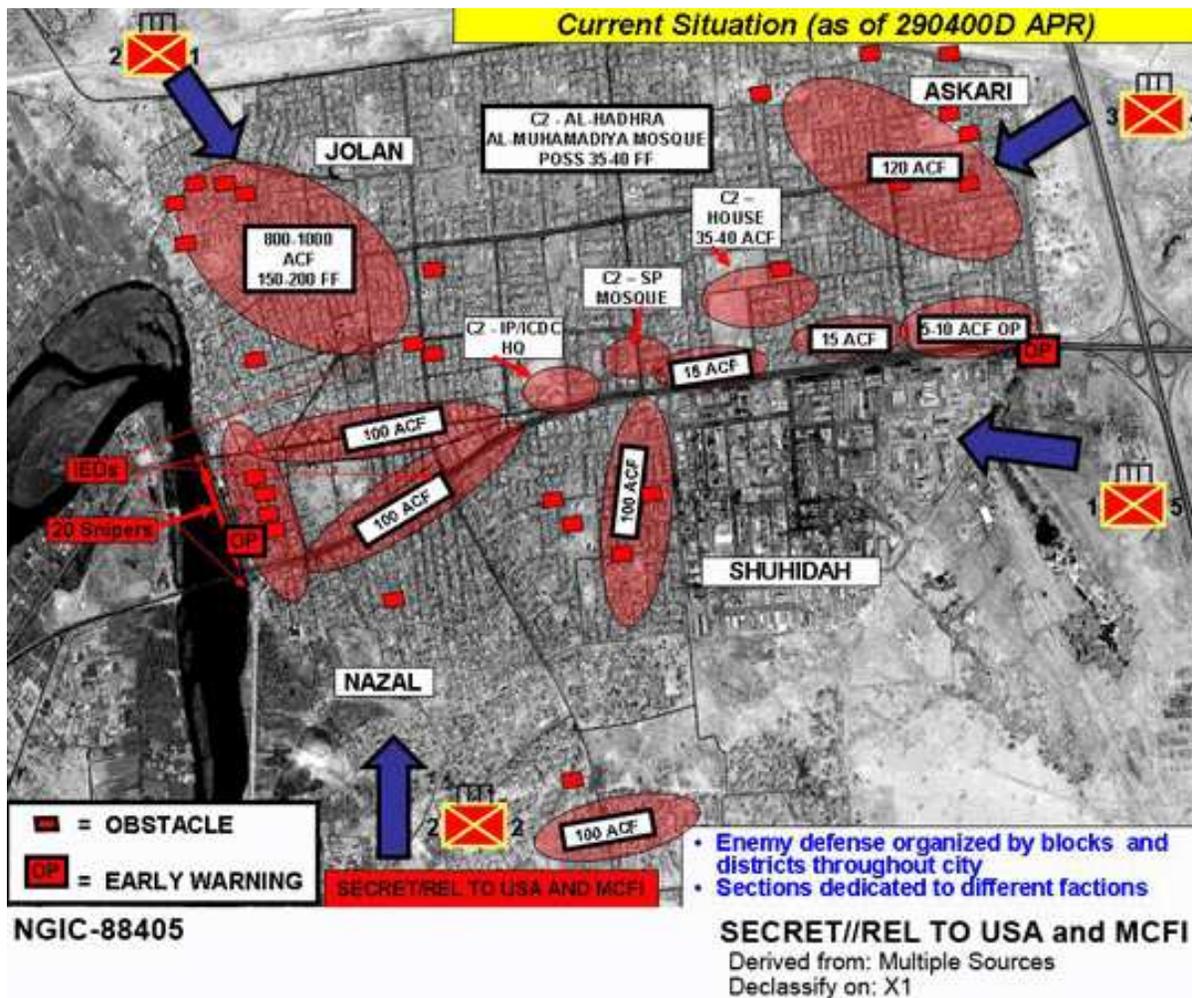
(U) Description of the Battle

(U) On 4 April 2004, I MEF began Operation VIGILANT RESOLVE to deny insurgents a sanctuary in Fallujah and arrest those responsible for the murders of American civilians. The concept of operation included 3 phases:

- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Shaping operations (including IO).
- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Decisive combat operations.
- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Consequence management (conducting humanitarian operations, surging Iraqi Security Forces [ISF], reestablishing local police forces).

(U) During the shaping operations, Regimental Combat Team-1 (RCT-1) from the First Marine Division established a cordon of traffic control points (TCPs) on major roads around Fallujah in order to isolate the city's defenders and prevent their escape. Supplies of food and medicine were allowed in, but only women, children, and old men were allowed out. Other MEF units simultaneously conducted aggressive counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in the surrounding area (Ar Ramadi, Khaldiyah, Al Kharmah, and Northern Babil) in order to interdict and prevent insurgent groups outside Fallujah from interfering. Civilians were warned to evacuate the city.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) On 5 April 2004, Phase II kicked off; two battalion task forces from RCT-1 assaulted Fallujah, about 2000 men in total, mostly light infantry supported by 10 M1A1 tanks, 24 AAVP-7 tracks, and a battery of M198 howitzers. The 2d Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment (2/1) attacked from the northwest into the Jolan district while the 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment (1/5) attacked from the southeast into the industrial district (Shuhidah). The MEF plan was to trap the insurgents between these Marine pincers. 2/2 provided a screening force to the south. On 13 April, a 4th light infantry battalion, 3/4, joined the fight and drove in from the west. The next figure displays the rough location of the four Marine battalions as well as estimated enemy disposition as of 29 April 2004.



FULL IMAGE

(U) Situation in Fallujah, 29 April 2004

(U) Coalition close air support (CAS) was provided by Marine rotary-wing aircraft (AH-1W Cobra and UH-1N Huey gunships) firing Hellfire and TOW missiles, 2.75 high-explosive (HE) and flechette rockets, and 20-mm, .50-cal and 7.62-mm rounds. Fixed-wing CAS was provided by F-15E, F-16CG, F-16C+, AC-130U, F-18C, and F-14B aircraft that flew over 1000 CAS sorties, dropping 70 GBU-12's, 2 GBU-31's, 1 AGM-65H, 1 Hellfire missile, and numerous 20-mm, 105-mm, 40-mm, and 25-mm rounds. Insurgents feared the AC-130 the most; its firepower, combined with real-time surveillance provided by loitering unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), quickly discouraged most insurgent maneuver at night.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Multiple reporting indicates insurgent strength numbered between 500 and 1000 fighters. They fought with primarily small arms, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), machineguns (MGs), improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and mortars. The enemy operated in small fire-team-size elements that conducted hit-and-run attacks, moving building to building to remain elusive and falling back on pre-positioned weapon and supply caches.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) After two days of fighting, 2/1 had penetrated into the northeast Jolan area, while 1/5 seized a huge foothold in the southeast industrial sector to use as a staging ground for subsequent Marine patrols deeper into Fallujah. Marine patrols began to push up against the south side of Highway 10 (a major road that bisects the city east to west) almost immediately.

(U) Throughout the fight Coalition forces allowed nonmilitary-age men, women, and children to exit through the cordon (at least 60,000) and humanitarian supplies to enter. On 9 April 2004, Marines handed out MREs and water to a caravan of vehicles that stretched over 1.5 miles.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Roughly 2000 Iraqi soldiers and policemen also deployed in support.^a Most of the Iraqi forces deserted soon after fighting began, forcing some Marine units to reposition to fill their intended spots in the cordon around the city. For example, of the 700 Iraqi soldiers of the 2d New Iraqi Army Bn, 38% evaporated from their posts after taking some fire in a convoy on their way to Fallujah on 5 April. An exception was the 36th Iraqi National Guard Battalion (400 Iraqis, 17 SF advisors), which fought well alongside 2/1 in the Jolan neighborhood.

(U) The insurgents defended in depth and employed asymmetric tactics, firing from mosques, lobbing mortar rounds at American positions on the periphery, and staging hit-and-run attacks from the residential areas (see (U) Iraq: Asymmetric Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures Used at Fallujah and by the Mahdi Army for more information).

(U) Political Pressure Curtails Offensive Military Operations

(U) Political pressure to halt U.S. military operations began to build up immediately for several reasons:

- (U) Muqtada al-Sadr's militia, the Mahdi Army, began attacking Coalition forces on 2 April in response to the Coalition shutdown of his newspaper Hawza and the arrest of a top aide of Sadr. This simultaneous Shia uprising added to the pressure to resolve the Fallujah fight as quickly as possible. American soldiers and Marines were stretched thin fighting Sunnis across Al Anbar and Shia in Baghdad, Kut, and Najaf.
- (U) Other Sunni cells and groups escalated their attacks in areas outside Fallujah, especially in Ramadi. Twelve Marines were killed in Ar Ramadi on 6 April alone.
- (U) The British argued for a halt to the attack on Fallujah.
- (U) The Abu Ghurayb prisoner abuse scandal became public knowledge in late April and further enflamed Arab and Muslim anger at the United States.
- (U) Al Jazeera was claiming that up to 600 Iraqi civilians had been killed by the U.S. offensive. Images of dead children were being displayed repeatedly on televisions around the world.

- (U) The Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) began to unravel. Three members quit and 5 others threatened to quit, prompting CPA head Paul Bremer to agree to meet with the IGC on 8 April to discuss their concern over VIGILANT RESOLVE. The Sunni politicians considered the operation "collective punishment." The IGC argued that mass demonstrations were about to occur.

(U) By 9 April, the CPA prevailed upon General Abizaid to order a halt to offensive ground operations in Fallujah.

(U) Siege Continues for Three Weeks

(U) The cease-fire was a bit of a misnomer. Despite the unilateral ceasefire by the Americans, fighting continued, punctuated by rest periods. Although the insurgents maintained an operational defensive posture and chose not to attack entrenched Marines with a direct ground assault,^b they did continue to launch standoff attacks. Mortar attacks remained common. U.S. forces countered with minor maneuvers to strengthen their defensive positions. Coalition air strikes continued. Snipers on both sides made movement hazardous.

(U) Over the next few weeks, Fallujah sheiks and leaders met with representatives from the CPA, IGC, or I MEF to negotiate the conditions for a permanent cease-fire. The American National Command Authority pressed for other options besides finishing the clearing of Fallujah. Given few options, on 30 April I MEF and CJTF-7 terminated the operation and formally turned over their responsibility for Fallujah to a newly stood up Fallujah Brigade, a Sunni militia unit led by former Iraqi Army officers.^c Many insurgents were incorporated into this unit, and its affect on the security situation in the city was negligible.

(U) Casualties

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) After 26 days of fighting, 18 Marines were killed in Fallujah with approximately another 96 wounded.^d In the entire I MEF area of operations (AO) in April, there were 62 KIA and 565 WIA.^e

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) I MEF estimates 600 to 700 insurgents were killed and an unknown number wounded. Approximately 150 air strikes destroyed 75 buildings, including two mosques.

(U) Enemy Forces

(U) Strategy

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) The insurgent strategy to defend Fallujah was designed to accomplish two things: 1) to gain media attention and sympathy and 2) to inflict maximum Coalition casualties by forcing a close-quarters infantry fight in urban terrain. Those cells that remained in Fallujah to fight were intent on dragging the combat out as long as possible to enable political and IO pressure to build to a boiling point.

(U) Operational Plan

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) The Fallujah insurgents could count on cooperation and support from other networks in the surrounding towns of Saqlawiyah, Ar Ramadi, Amariyah, and Karmah. As a result, VIGILANT RESOLVE stirred up a hornet's nest across the Al Anbar Province, especially in Ar Ramadi, as insurgent cells surged their activity to stretch Coalition forces thin during the operation. They emplaced numerous roadblocks, IEDs, and complex ambushes on the key lines of communication (LOCs) in the area to interdict Coalition supply convoys and patrols. MSR's Mobile and Michigan were especially targeted. Insurgents attempted to damage and destroy key bridges, such as the one crossing the Thar Thar Canal.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Throughout the fight insurgents demonstrated operational freedom of movement. Fighters and supplies were infiltrated through the Marine cordon and into Fallujah in

various ways:

- (U) Insurgent local knowledge facilitated using a variety of back roads and hidden trails not blocked by entry control points (ECPs).
- (U) Some contraband was smuggled through Marine checkpoints by "civilians."
- (U) It is likely that Iraqi police voluntarily collaborated or were bribed.

(U) Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) The insurgent defense of Fallujah can be best described as a dispersed, nonlinear, defense in depth. Small mobile combat cells conducted a fluid defense using hit-and-run attacks, ambushes, and standoff attacks using mortars and IEDs. For the most part, the insurgents did not defend systematically nor did the Marines have to clear every house. Many insurgents moved in groups of 5 to 10, rushing forward, firing wildly, and then dodging down alleys.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Typical insurgent TTP were to ambush at close quarters, then immediately displace and attempt to melt back into the population. Typical firefights lasted 30 minutes or less. Many attacks were simply pot shots from windows, roofs, doors, and halted vehicles. Little insurgent activity occurred at night if an AC-130 was on station.

(U) Fire and Maneuver

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Insurgent TTP were based on allowing Marine units to penetrate in depth into their territory so they could set up ambush and swarming opportunities on isolated targets. Once a Marine unit was isolated, the insurgents would swarm from all directions to destroy them piecemeal. In this nonlinear fighting, Marine units faced a 360 degree threat. 2/1 reporting notes that insurgents did not hesitate to fire into their own positions (i.e., from east to west and west to east if there were Marines in the middle).

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Marine officers noticed this spontaneous reaction and employed "bait" tactics:

- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Use of dismounted patrols. Send out small patrols to draw enemy fire, pinpoint their locations, and destroy them with remote precision fires.
- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Use of buildings. Another bait tactic (used by 3/4) was to carefully choose and seize a few buildings with good fields of fire, then assume a defensive posture to destroy enemy counterattacks with CAS, small arms, and indirect fires.
- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Use of tanks. The enemy viewed the M1A1 tank as a U.S. strategic asset and its appearance would bring enemy hunter/killer teams out (i.e., nine insurgents in three-man teams armed with RPGs, making coordinated advancements on tank positions). Consequently, the tanks were used to draw out these elements so that snipers or an AC-130 could target them.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) The enemy did adapt and learn as the fight wore on. Insurgents noted the vulnerabilities of M1A1's for example, waiting to attack when the main gun was raised or using feints and ruses to expose the rear armor. For example, they would initiate an ambush with small-arms fire on one side of a tank in order to get the tank crew to turn its armor into the direction of fire. They would then fire a coordinated 5 or 6 RPG salvo into the exposed rear of the tank.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Some cells acted as "sleeper cells," planning to emerge from hiding places after the Marine FLOT had passed them by. "Reinfestation" of insurgents in buildings previously cleared required "back clearing" by Marines.

(S//REL TO USA, AUS, CAN, GBR) Insurgent maneuver was primarily dismounted. At other times, civilian cars, motorcycles, Nissan pickup trucks, and taxis were employed to ferry combatants to and from the fighting. Cars with sunroofs were valued because insurgents could fire RPGs without

worrying about backblast.

(U) Small Arms and RPGs

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Small arms used by insurgents included the 7.62 x 39-mm AK-47, the Chinese copy of the AK-47 (the Type 56), and the AKM. Machineguns included the 7.62 x 39-mm RPK, RPD, RPD (3d Version), and the 7.62 x 54R-mm PKM. See (U) Iraq: Small Arms (Infantry Weapons) used by the Anti-Coalition Insurgency for more information.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) RPGs were ubiquitous and effective, with the RPG-7 being the most common model. Insurgents fired them in volley whenever possible. RPGs were also used in indirect fire mode—insurgents elevated the weapon, fired from behind buildings and train cars, and then displaced laterally to another firing position. For general information on RPGs in Iraq see (U) Iraq: Rocket-Propelled Grenades and Recoilless Rifles.

(U) Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) When not employing hit-and-run attacks with small arms and RPGs, insurgents used standoff weapons such as mortars and IEDs as much as possible to avoid Coalition firepower. By all accounts IEDs were ubiquitous and they ranged from small booby traps to VBIEDs. Insurgents placed IEDs in streets, street dividers, sidewalks, trash piles, corpses, and buildings. Many parked vehicles hit by Coalition forces resulted in secondary explosions, indicating that they were rigged with explosives. Remote-controlled gasoline bombs were detonated against Marines. Suicide belts filled with lead fishing weights were recovered from weapon caches. IEDs were employed to initiate ambushes.

(U) Indirect Fire

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Insurgents employed 57-mm, 62-mm, and 122-mm rockets as well as 60-mm, 82-mm, and 120-mm mortars. Most indirect fires were ineffective and served a harassment purpose, especially since the enemy rarely fired for effect (indirect fire accounted for 6% of U.S. WIA in April). Indirect fire is effective at disrupting sleep patterns, causing fatigue, and adding to psychological stress. In 3/4's sector, enemy mortarmen used the Euphrates River as cover and fired from outside the city, west of the river. For more information on the likely models and system specifications, see (U) Iraq: Mortar Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures and (U) Iraq: Evolving Anti-Coalition Force Indirect-Fire Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Insurgent mortarmen preregistered targets for their mortars, including the bridge 5 km south of Fallujah. Air bursts that were reported as time-fuzed rounds were observed on at least two separate fire missions in two different locations. Forward observers (FOs) employed binoculars from rooftops and minarets.¹ According to unit reporting, several white phosphorous (WP) mortar impacts were noted. They registered mortars on MSRs/ASRs surrounding the city and achieved first-round effectiveness during some engagements. There were also more 120-mm mortar engagements than in the past.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Trucks were mounted with makeshift rocket launchers to lay and shoot rockets. Mortars, assessed as 60-mm and 82-mm, were also fired from truck beds.

(U) Denial and Deception

(U) Denial and deception were key to insurgent efforts at avoiding U.S. field artillery, mortars, fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, and UAVs. The enemy hid inside buildings, underground, and in the appropriate vegetation (such as palm groves). Insurgents took over many residential homes by simply forcing out residents.

(U) Combat Engineering

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Insurgents built limited countermobility obstacles (rubble, old cars, debris, roadblocks), defensive berms, barriers, tunnels, trenches, spider holes, loopholes, and mouse holes to increase their survivability and mobility and to restrict Coalition movement. They built obstacles in

depth in narrow alleys, covered by fire.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) For the most part, insurgents prepared buildings for use as rally points and temporary battle positions rather than as fixed strongpoints to be defended for prolonged periods. They avoided static defenses and preferred to keep elusive, roaming in small mobile teams and swarming forward when they sensed opportunity. They moved between houses using tunnels, trenches, ladders across rooftops, and mouse holes.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Many buildings simply served as weapon and ammunition caches to enable insurgents to move, in the open, without weapons and not be engaged, then reposition at the next cache where a weapon was staged to fire on the Marines.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) The insurgents usually chose buildings of durable construction, and Marine after-action reports indicate that many enemy fortified positions were impenetrable by any weapon organic to a U.S. infantry battalion. Tanks rounds were usually effective, especially HEAT rounds.⁹ Occasionally a position was found to be resistant even to tank rounds and CAS was called in to destroy the building. Fuel was also employed by Marines to burn insurgents out.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) A good example of one of the few strongpoints located was in 3/4's sector. An enemy strongpoint consisted of a main structure of 3 to 4 adjoining buildings surrounded by a compact network of walls and adjacent buildings. In addition, it was complete with a complex subterranean system that provided significant cover against attacks and allowed the enemy the freedom of movement from one building to the next. Several MEF assaults against the compound failed to destroy it, including 12 HE/2 NE SMAW rounds, numerous AT-4's, a satchel charge, and 12 HEAT MBT rounds. 3/4 sustained one KIA and one WIA during the series of attacks.

(U) Command, Control, and Communications

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) There was no central leadership in charge of all insurgents. We assess that the insurgent leadership model was similar to the Shura council model employed in November 2004 (see section on C2 in (U) Complex Environments: Battle of Fallujah II (2004-2005)), although it was relatively nascent and not as formalized. A limited amount of operational planning was conducted by the Shura Council before the fight (defensive sectors assigned to major groups, observation posts established, mortars pre-registered, etc.), but once the fight began command was decentralized. Many insurgent cells were semiautonomous.

(S//NF) The primary indigenous leader in Fallujah was Imam Abdullah Al Janabi, who continued to encourage Fallujah residents to resist the Coalition throughout the fight. Another key leader and cleric was Sheikh Dhafer al-Ubeidi. Elements of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's network (called Jama'at al-Tawhid wa ' al-Jihad^h or JTJ at the time, now referred to as al-Qaida in Iraq) were also present, including Zarqawi's future key lieutenant, Omar Hadid. According to detained insurgent Abu Ja'far Al-Iraqi, Zarqawi was present during the fight, leading about 100 men, and was in control of 5% to 10% of the territory. Other cell commanders were reportedly former Republican Guard (RG) and Special Republican Guard (SRG) commanders. Other groups operating in the Fallujah area at the time include the Muhamdi network and Jaysh al-Islami.

(S//REL TO USA, AUS, CAN, GBR) Mosques served as command centers. Multiple intelligence sources and open press articles indicate the Al Hadhra Al Muhammadiya mosque was the primary C2 center. It often appeared to Marines that the defense was run by gangs of young men tied to the local mosques.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Command and control varied in sophistication. Reporting indicates some cells reported to a clear chain of command, referred to themselves as "companies" and "battalions," used written orders, established observation points (OPs), and employed organized scouts on motorcycles. Other cells exercised more primitive C2; they just ran toward the sounds of fighting. Smoke and fire often served as target reference points for enemy RPGs and machineguns.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Since some higher-level financiers and facilitators had departed Fallujah before the fight, lower-level commanders probably conducted most of the fighting.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Enemy communication consisted of a combination of radios, cell phones,

Thuraya satellite telephones, human couriers, and visual and auditory signaling. 2/1 reported pyrotechnics, pigeons, and black kites were used as signals. Couriers moved on foot, on motorcycles, and in vehicles such as taxis. Mosque loudspeakers broadcast tactical information and orders. I MEF did cut the power to Fallujah, somewhat degrading enemy landline communication. Mobile ICOM handheld radios in the VHF range were captured. See (U) Iraq: Anti-Coalition Militants (ACM) Command, Control, and Communications Inside Fallujah for more information.

(U) Organization

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Insurgent networks were loosely organized along military, tribal, religious, or social ties. Enemy combatants came from several broad categories including former Ba'thists and soldiers of the Saddam regime, nationalists, local Islamic extremists, foreign fighters, and criminals. They cooperated loosely in the face of a common enemy. I MEF described it an "evil Rotary club" rather than a military organization.

(U) Logistics

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) The basic insurgent supply concept was to pre-position and prestock food, water, and ammunition in caches throughout the city and depend on limited resupply once the fighting began. Most caches in the city were inside buildings; those outside the city in the surrounding rural areas were often in palm groves.¹

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) The Marine cordon was unavoidably permeable, and as a result limited resupply was possible for the insurgents. Insurgents ran through the MEF cordon either on foot or in individual vehicles where there was heavy vegetation and one-lane farm roads not blockaded by the Marines. Multiple reporting indicates the insurgents also used small boats and barges on the Euphrates River to move fighters, weapons and ammunition into the Al-Jolan section of northwestern Fallujah.

(U) Combat proficiency

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Insurgent training and marksmanship was inferior. The Marines noted a general lack of discipline once contact was made and PSYOPs proved successful at goading many insurgents into activity. Speakers along the FLOT blasted rock music or taunted the insurgents into attacking with insults about their marksmanship.

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Marines loosely referred to two general types of insurgent, the "martyrs" and the "guerrillas." The martyrs were inexperienced young fighters, intent on suicide, fighting in sandals and "spraying and praying." They made up for lack of experience with religious zeal and often fought to the death. Some simply stood in the open, firing from the hip until they were killed. Others were reported popping up out of the rubble left from 500-pound bombs and resuming firing at U.S. troops.

(S//REL TO USA, AUS, CAN, GBR) The "guerrillas" were probably more experienced former military men. They wore ear protection and body armor, used covering fire, and employed proper fire and maneuver tactics. Their attacks were better coordinated and showed signs of military experience:

- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Illumination flares were employed to coordinate an enemy probing attack consisting of small arms, RPGs, mortars, and limited maneuver (e.g., 12 April, 1/5 sector).
- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) RPKs were positioned to concentrate fire from several angles.
- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) RPGs were used in direct support of maneuver elements.
- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Enemy fighters made extensive use of fragmentation grenades. According to MEF reporting, it was not uncommon for 10 grenades to explode in the general vicinity, prior to a rush by insurgents.



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FULL IMAGE

(U) Insurgents in Fallujah, April 2004

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) At least some insurgent snipers were formally trained. Military reporting indicates snipers were active in 2/1's and 1/5's AOs. These insurgents displayed quality field-craft in creating hide positions and concealing their weapon signatures. Insurgent snipers were reportedly equipped with Dragunov SVDs, night-vision devices (scopes and goggles), and IR laser sighting systems. Snipers in both areas demonstrated ability to engage at night. See (U) Iraq: Current AIF Sniper Threat for further information.

(U) Use of Protected Structures, Human Shields, and Other Violations of the Law of Armed Conflict

(U) Insurgents exploited Coalition adherence to the Law of Armed Conflict in order to gain a tactical advantage. They employed human shields, positioned themselves in protected structures such as mosques and schools, and appeared to be well aware of the rules of engagement that controlled Marine return fire.

(U) Protected Structures

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Insurgents deliberately fought from sensitive areas such as mosques, schools and residential areas. Red Crescent ambulances transported fighters. Insurgents were aware of the Coalition's concern for collateral damage, which they used as an asymmetric advantage. If the Coalition refrained from indirect counterfire the insurgents escaped unscathed. If the Coalition did respond with counterfire, any collateral damage was used for propaganda purposes. In general, insurgent blame of the Coalition for virtually all damage resonated with the population and received wide coverage throughout the Arab media.

(U) Mosques were particularly crucial nodes in the enemy defense. They served as C2 nodes, propaganda nodes, rallying points, staging areas, fighting positions, weapon caches, and medical facilities. Minarets were used by snipers, observers, and forward observers.

(U) Blending in With Civilian Population/Human Shield Tactics

(U) Insurgents blended into the civilian population and forced or persuaded civilians to assist them. Iraqi children made roadblocks, served as messengers, and manned OPs. One military AAR notes that boys lugged mortar shells to insurgent positions.

(U) In this complex environment Marines were ordered to minimize collateral damage and civilian casualties. As a result, insurgent use of protected structures and human shields directly affected Marine combat capability. There were numerous ways the enemy exploited our adherence to the Law of Armed Conflict:

- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Insurgents seemed to be aware of Marine ROE that limited firing on unarmed individuals so they learned to stash their weapon in a car or cache, then cross the street unarmed to reposition and rearm elsewhere.
- (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Coalition artillery fires into the city were severely restricted during the battle. Because of the concern for collateral damage, only the regimental CO, XO, or S-3 could clear artillery fires.
- (U) Marines could not return fire until sources of attack had been positively identified. This allowed the enemy to take the initiative in many cases.

(U) The very short time allowed for shaping operations before the fight resulted in a battlefield full of civilians at the start of the fighting. The Marines imposed a 0700 to 1800 curfew and banned all public gathering, but it was difficult to enforce. Civilians remained in Fallujah, some observing the fighting, others hiding in their homes (after the first few days most hid). In some cases, RPG gunners fired from within crowds that gathered to watch the fighting as a show, standing in the street laughing and pointing.

(U) Suicide Bombers

(U) Marines in Fallujah recovered a variety of exploding vests and belts, some packed with a blend of explosives and lead fishing weights. Unit reporting does not indicate any suicide bombers were actually employed in combat, however.

(U) Information Operations

(S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Insurgents demonstrated a keen understanding of the value of information operations. IO was one of the insurgents' most effective levers to raise political pressure for a cease-fire. They fed disinformation to television networks, posted propaganda on the Internet to recruit volunteers and solicit financial donations, and spread rumors through the street. Sympathetic imams calling for jihad in their mosque sermons also helped to win support for the insurgency.

(U) Insurgents used IO for both persuasion (e.g., distributing fliers and videos extolling the bravery of suicide bombers) and coercion (e.g., distributing videos of collaborators being beaten or executed). See (U) Iraq: Employment of Information Technology (IT) by Insurgent Groups and Terrorists for more information on how information technology helps insurgents gain control of the local population.

(S//REL TO USA, AUS, CAN, GBR) Enemy IO messages were designed to touch the most sensitive Muslim social hot buttons. For example, one rumor was that Coalition soldiers were not only infidels who targeted and killed innocent Iraqis, but also they deliberately imprisoned Iraqi women in order to rape and impregnate them. The most common IO theme was Jihad against the occupier.

(U) Arab satellite news channels were crucial to building political pressure to halt military operations. For example, CPA documented 34 stories on Al Jazeera that misreported or distorted battlefield events between 6 and 13 April. Between 14 and 20 April, Al Jazeera used the "excessive force" theme 11 times and allowed various anti-Coalition factions to claim that U.S. forces were using cluster bombs against urban areas and kidnapping and torturing Iraqi children. Six negative reports by al-Arabiyah focused almost exclusively on the excessive force theme. Overall, the qualitative content of negative reports increasingly was shrill in tone, and both TV stations appeared willing to take even the most baseless claims as fact.

(U) During the first week of April, insurgents invited a reporter from Al Jazeera, Ahmed Mansour, and his film crew into Fallujah where they filmed scenes of dead babies from the hospital, presumably killed by Coalition air strikes. Comparisons were made to the Palestinian Intifada. Children were shown bespattered with blood; mothers were shown screaming and mourning day after day. Follow this link to see an example of the emotional images highlighted by Al Jazeera.

(U) The absence of Western media in Fallujah allowed the insurgents greater control of information coming out of Fallujah. Because Western reporters were at risk of capture and beheading, they

stayed out and were forced to pool video shot by Arab cameramen and played on Al Jazeera. This led to further reinforcement of anti-Coalition propaganda. For example, false allegations of up to 600 dead and 1000 wounded civilians could not be countered by Western reporters because they did not have access to the battlefield.

(U) Western reporters were also not embedded in Marine units fighting in Fallujah. In the absence of countervailing visual evidence presented by military authorities, Al Jazeera shaped the world's understanding of Fallujah.

(U) Conclusions

(U) The relative failure of the first Battle of Fallujah compared to the more successful second Battle of Fallujah (November 2004) offers useful political-military lessons for how to defeat asymmetric adversaries in complex environments.

- (U) The enemy will seek to utilize the human, informational, and physical complexity of urban areas to avoid direct military confrontation and exploit American political and informational vulnerabilities.
- (U) Shaping operations that clear civilians from the battlefield offers many positive second-order effects. In Fallujah in April 2004, I MEF only had a few days to shape the environment before engaging in decisive combat operations. The remaining noncombatants provided cover for insurgents, restrained CJTF-7's employment of combat power, and provided emotional fodder for Arab media to exploit.
- (U) Information operations are increasingly important in a 21st Century world where cable television runs 24 hours a day and the Internet offers propaganda opportunities for insurgent and terrorist groups.
- (U) The media presence on the battlefield was controlled by the enemy; consequently, they shaped much of the information the world viewed during the fight. In VIGILANT RESOLVE there were few reporters embedded in Marine infantry units; in Operation AL FAJR there were 91 embeds representing 60 media outlets. False allegations of noncombatant casualties were made by Arab media in both campaigns, but in the second case embedded Western reporters offered a rebuttal.
- (U) The Iraqi government was nascent and weak and they offered no political cover for U.S. commanders to finish the operation in a reasonable time period. Without domestic Iraqi political support, offensive operations were halted after 5 days of combat. This stands in stark contrast to the second battle for Fallujah where the Iraqi Interim Government under Prime Minister Ayad Alawi ordered the Marines in and supported them through several weeks of combat.
- (U) Insurgents sometimes get lucky. The Abu Ghurayb scandal and the Shia uprising further enflamed a politically precarious situation and could not have happened at a worse time for Coalition forces.

(U) In summary, several factors explain the difference in outcomes between Fallujah I and II. Longer shaping operations to evacuate civilians, control of the informational realm, more aggressive COIN operations in surrounding towns to protect Coalition MSR's, solid political backing from a more stable Iraqi government, and larger forces that contained a greater percentage of mechanized units to speed up the campaign all contributed to the relative success of Fallujah II (November 2004) versus the failure of Fallujah I.

Footnotes

- a. (U) Support consisted of local police, three Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) Bns, and one New Iraqi Army (NIA) Bn.
- b. (U) There were a few exceptions. On 21 April, several squad-/platoon-size insurgent elements attacked 2/1 along its entire frontage. 2/1 took three friendly wounded in action (FWIA) during this contact that lasted approximately 6 hours.
- c. (U) The Marines were not able to proceed with the attack nor could they maintain a siege indefinitely. The deal struck by MEF commander Conway (it was unusual for a field commander to be given negotiating responsibility) with the Fallujah Brigade was approved by Generals Sanchez and Abazaïd but not coordinated with the CPA. Bremer was furious when he found out about it, but he was in little position to overturn it since he had insisted on the cease-fire in the first place. Complicating matters was the fact that the Abu Ghurayb scandal broke on 29 April, consuming the attention of senior leaders in the U.S. government. Bremer could not organize a consensus to overturn the Fallujah Brigade decision.
- d. (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) According to MNF-I SIGACTs data, cross-referenced with anecdotal casualty data from unit AARs and open sources.
- e. (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Personal protective equipment was effective at preventing trauma to vital organs; head/neck wounds were the most deadly, and wounds to extremities the most common. I MEF wound distribution in April 2004 was 36% to head/neck, 40% to upper extremity, 9% to torso, 6% to pelvis, and 35% to lower extremity (percentage adds to more than 100% due to multiple injury sites on the same person).
- f. (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) Communications between observers and firing units could have been by cellular phones, land lines, runners, and if the weapons were close enough, direct voice. FOs could have reported battle damage assessment, targets moving onto registered or planned targets, and other battlefield intelligence. That data could then be used for subsequent attacks, if not for immediate fire adjustment.
- g. (S//REL TO USA, MCFI) After-action reports from 1/5 noted that MPAT rounds were also effective, causing minimal collateral damage. Overall, the majority of the tank crews preferred HEAT to MPAT.
- h. (U) The Organization for Unity and Jihad.
- i. (U) Infantry companies reported that searching palm groves often resulted in uncovering weapons caches.

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