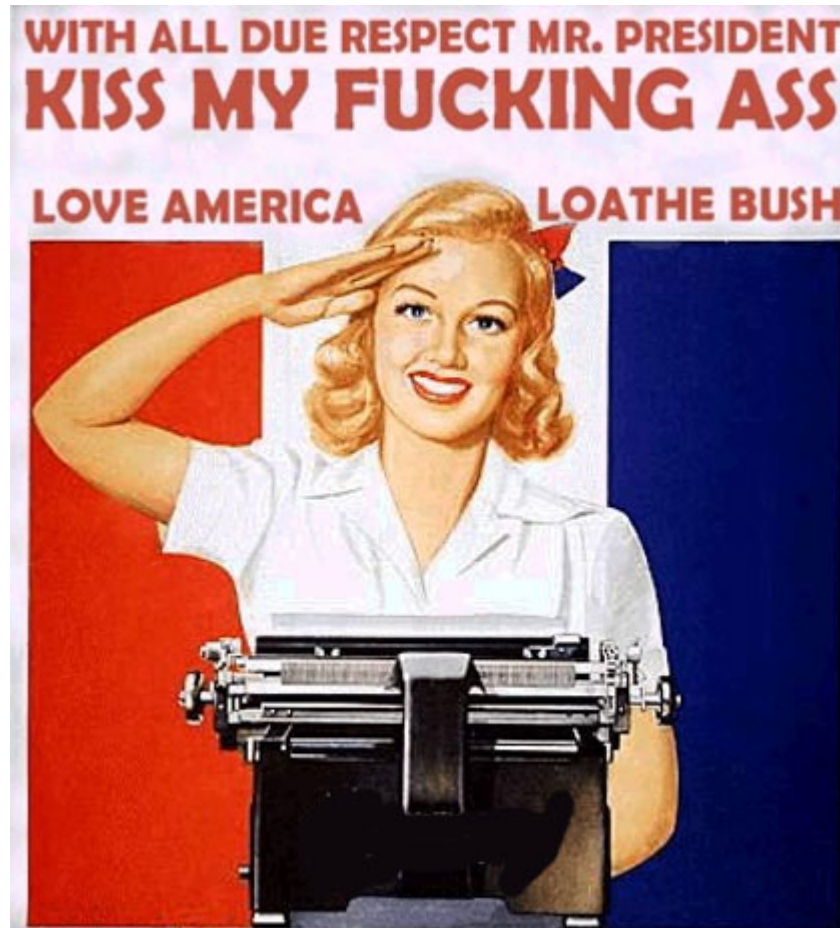


GI SPECIAL 4B16:



[Thanks to Mark Shapiro, who sent this in.]

The Insurgency Is Increasingly Optimistic About Victory

February 16, 2006 The Daily Star [Excerpts]

Below are the Executive Summary and Recommendations from the latest report from the International Crisis Group titled "In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency."

In Iraq, the U.S. fights an enemy it hardly knows.

Its descriptions have relied on gross approximations and crude categories (Saddamists, Islamo-fascists and the like) that bear only passing resemblance to reality.

"In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency," based on close analysis of the insurgents' own discourse, reveals relatively few groups, less divided between nationalists and foreign jihadis than assumed, whose strategy and tactics have evolved (in response to U.S. actions and to maximize acceptance by Sunni Arabs), and whose confidence in defeating the occupation is rising.

Several important conclusions emerge:

The insurgency increasingly is dominated by a few large groups with sophisticated communications. It no longer is a scattered, erratic, chaotic phenomenon. Groups are well organized, produce regular publications, react rapidly to political developments and appear surprisingly centralized.

Despite recurring contrary reports, there is little sign of willingness by any significant insurgent element to join the political process or negotiate with the U.S. While covert talks cannot be excluded, the publicly accessible discourse remains uniformly and relentlessly hostile to the occupation and its "collaborators."

The groups appear acutely aware of public opinion and increasingly mindful of their image. Fearful of a backlash, they systematically and promptly respond to accusations of moral corruption or blind violence, reject accusations of a sectarian campaign and publicize efforts to protect civilians or compensate their losses. Some gruesome and locally controversial practices, beheading hostages, attacking people going to the polls, have been abandoned.

The groups underscore the enemy's brutality and paint the U.S. and its Iraqi allies in the worst possible light: waging dirty war in coordination with sectarian militias, engaging in torture, fostering the country's division and being impervious to civilian losses. [Imagine that; they describe reality.]

The insurgents have yet to put forward a clear political program or long-term vision for Iraq. Focused on operations, they acknowledge this would be premature and potentially divisive.

The insurgency is increasingly optimistic about victory.

Such self-confidence was not there when the war was conceived as an open-ended jihad against an occupier they believed was determined to stay.

Optimism stems from a conviction the legitimacy of jihad is now beyond doubt, institutions established under the occupation are fragile and irreparably illegitimate, and the war of attrition against U.S. forces is succeeding.

That it has survived, even thrived, despite being vastly outnumbered and outgunned, suggests the limitations of the current counter-insurgency campaign.

Its discourse may be dismissed as rhetoric, but, notwithstanding credible reports of internal tensions, it appears to have been effective at maintaining agreement on core operational matters, generating new recruits, and mobilizing a measure of popular sympathy among its target audience.

Countering the insurgency requires taking its discourse seriously, reducing its legitimacy and increasing that of the Iraqi government.

The harm from excessive use of force, torture, tactics that inflict widespread civilian injury and reliance on sectarian militias outweighs any military gain.

What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to thomasbarton@earthlink.net. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS

**REALLY BAD PLACE TO BE;
BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW**



A picture released by the US Marines on 01 February shows a Marine cautiously checking a building for occupants and weapons in the city of Hit in Iraq's western Anbar province. (AFP/USMC-HO/File/Cpl. Christopher S. Vega)

Notes From A Lost War:

“As Quickly As The Counter-Insurgency Catches Up With It, The Insurgency Finds New Ways”

Recorded at various times in the past two years, the footage suggests that the rebel fighters have a remarkable ease of movement in urban and rural Iraq; an ability to acquire the weapons and uniforms of the new Iraqi security forces; and they demonstrate their skill in crafting crude home-made missile launchers and improvised bombs for use in brazen daylight attacks on a range of military, political and economic targets.

February 13, 2006 by Paul McGeough, The Age, Australia [Excerpt]

The masked gunman cradles a sniper's rifle as he sits in the back of a car. Speaking to the camera, he taunts America's President with a chilling outline of his planned mission: "I'm going to give George Bush a small present. I have nine bullets; with each I'll shoot someone and, before your eyes, I'll give the present to Bush."

Getting out of the car in a built-up area, he heads over rough ground to the corner of a building.

The recording then cuts to a tightly spliced sequence of nine shootings, in which the targets appear to be members of the American or Iraqi security forces. It is pure and brutal propaganda. Some of the images are blurred and there is no proof that the man with the gun has even fired the shots. Each target seems to collapse as a single gunshot is heard, but there is no attempt to verify the gunman's claim that he has killed the victim.

Nonetheless, this and three other video CDs gathered recently by The Age in Sunni communities near Baghdad are a graphic indication of how an emboldened insurgency is arming itself with high-tech propaganda as well as low-tech weaponry.

Recorded at various times in the past two years, the footage suggests that the rebel fighters have a remarkable ease of movement in urban and rural Iraq; an ability to acquire the weapons and uniforms of the new Iraqi security forces; and they demonstrate their skill in crafting crude home-made missile launchers and improvised bombs for use in brazen daylight attacks on a range of military, political and economic targets.

When told of the content of the videos, one of American's leading terror analysts, Bruce Hoffman of the Rand Corp, said they indicated that the insurgency was not just entrenched, but that it had become self-perpetuating.

Officially, the cause of most of the 2260- plus American fatalities in Iraq is listed simply as "hostile fire".

But there have been dozens of media reports of deaths and injuries by a single shot that go some way to confirming the sniper-inflicted US losses the insurgency attempts to glorify in its propaganda.

However, official US acknowledgement of the insurgency snipers' competence is rare.

Last year The Guardian quoted US troops at Camp Rustamiyah in Baghdad on their wariness of an elusive Iraqi sniper who they speculated might have killed a dozen of their colleagues. They claimed to have nicknamed him "Juba".

In the previous year, US marines stationed in Fallujah marvelled to The New York Times at the prowess of what some believed was a single sniper who kept 150 Americans pinned down for the best part of a day.

US aircraft dropped bombs and ground forces unleashed an estimated 30,000 rounds of automatic rifle fire before the sniper escaped, apparently on a bicycle, according to the Times.

But one of the more intriguing insights into the secretive world of the insurgency snipers was the capture by American forces of the sharp-shooter who took a shot at Stephen Tschiderer, a US Army medic, in Baghdad five months ago.

Tschiderer was knocked off his feet by the force of the hit. But his body armour prevented any injury and he was able to help his mates give chase, and to treat wounds inflicted on his would-be killer as he was run to ground.

A statement by the US Department of Defence on the discovery of the sniper's vehicle revealed incredible details of the Iraqi sniper and his accomplice's way of working: "The van was lined with diapers to muffle the sound (of shots). The vehicle contained a Russian sniper rifle, a 9-millimetre handgun, three hand grenades and a fourth grenade rigged to the fuel tank with a pin.

"The soldiers also found a full bag of ammunition, as well as a video camera containing footage of (the attack on) Tschiderer. Two holes were cut in the back of the van; one for the camera and one for the weapon."

The speech by the marksman in the video, is thought to be a new benchmark in an extensive, internet-driven propaganda campaign run by a range of insurgency groups.

They show rocket and mortar teams at work, often using crude launchers that appear to have been manufactured from lengths of water pipe and angle iron.

Operating in broad daylight, the teams appear to launch missiles from busy, built-up areas, sometimes waiting for passers-by to remove themselves from the line of fire.

Another remarkable sequence begins with an Iraqi take on what could be a group of labourers going to work anywhere in the world. Carrying tool boxes, they are seen climbing a ladder to the upper level of a two-storey building.

The scene cuts to the men at work; drilling and hammering in a corner of a darkened room that gradually fills with light as they break open a narrow, horizontal slit high on a wall. They build a scaffold on which they erect what appears to be a home-made multiple rocket launcher, with the tube opening positioned against the slit they have cut in the wall.

The scene cuts to the exterior of the building, showing the slit high on the wall that would hardly be noticed from outside until a series of missiles blast through it and towards an unseen target.

The footage also shows rebel fighters attending classes in hand-to-hand combat and bomb-making.

Hoffman says the insurgency film clips are spreading the jihadi propaganda at a quickening pace: "A depressing aspect of these videos is how they reveal the insurgency perfecting the low-risk means of war; it's unique stuff. Seeing them show people how to stage various attacks ratchets things to a new level.

"The arms race we grew up with during the Cold War is unfolding at a different level and as quickly as the counter-insurgency catches up with it, the insurgency finds new ways.

Anthony Cordesman of the Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies points to a dangerous double-up of circumstances in Iraq: "There already were a lot of weapons, ammunition and explosives in Iraq and you can't stop people improvising weapons; the Palestinians did it, the Afghans do it."

Drawing out the theory of asymmetric war, in which varied technologies and tactics mean that the opposing armies bypass each other, he says: "The basic strategy of the insurgents is to avoid a direct fight ... we don't train troops that way, but the insurgents must."

He describes Iraq's massive stocks of arms and explosives as "a unique opportunity" for the insurgents, who have access to increasingly sophisticated trigger technology and the expertise to pack their improvised bomb with even greater firepower.

Noting official Iraqi and US responses to fluctuations in data on the conflict, he observes dryly: "It's easy to claim a trend towards 'victory', but it's generally far more difficult to make them enduring or valid. Equally, it is easy to talk about 'tipping points' or 'turning points', but most such claims are wrong, over simplified and/or premature.

"Real patterns take time to emerge and insurgencies are filled with cycles in which the patterns of a given day, week or month are reversed and later, reversed again."

AFGHANISTAN WAR REPORTS

Two Collaborator Intelligence Agents Killed

February 15, 2006 By Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan: Suspected Taliban rebels abducted two Afghan intelligence agents in a western province and killed them, dumping their nearly decapitated bodies in the desert, a top official said Wednesday.

The men were kidnapped while riding motorbikes in the countryside in Farah province Monday and their bodies were discovered a day later, provincial Gov. Hazatullah Wasefi said. The pair worked as intelligence agents for the province's security forces, gathering information on the Taliban and other militant groups, he said.

A manhunt has been launched for those behind the killings but no one has been arrested, Wasefi said.

Farah has escaped the worst of the Taliban-led fighting that has wracked southern and eastern Afghan provinces. **[Kiss that goodbye.]**

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER

Telling the truth - about the occupation or the criminals running the government in Washington - is the first reason for Traveling Soldier. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers.

<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/> And join with Iraq War vets in the call to end the occupation and bring our troops home now! (www.ivaw.net)

TROOP NEWS

THIS IS HOW BUSH BRINGS THE TROOPS HOME: BRING THEM ALL HOME NOW



The casket of Marine Lance Cpl. Thomas Keeling, 23, St. John Neumann Church June 28, 2005 in Strongsville, Ohio. Keeling died in an explosion in Haqlaniyah, Iraq. He was assigned to the Marine Forces Reserve, 3rd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division. (AP Photo/Tony Dejak)

Determination Speeds Injured Daphne Soldier's Recovery

February 16, 2006 By DANIEL JACKSON, Staff Reporter, The Mobile Register

"He walks up to the hospital every day. It takes him a little while, but he gets there," Brenda Rains said. "When he gets off that plane (in Mobile), he's decided that he's going to be walking. And he's so hard-headed that he'll do it."

During a telephone interview Wednesday, P.D. Rains said he is pushing himself in an effort to rebuild the muscles in his legs. He said doctors also have him do lunging exercises every day in physical therapy.

"I still carry my cane with me, and I use it about half the time," said Rains, who was promoted to sergeant Feb. 2.

A member of the U.S. Army's 101st Airborne Division, P.D. Rains was injured by the bomb blast while his platoon was raiding a farmhouse in southern Baghdad that had been a haven for insurgents, the wounded soldier said in an interview last month.

Rains was standing with his platoon outside the vacant house, when the bomb, what appeared to be a 155 mm artillery shell reconstructed into an improvised explosive device, exploded near him, shattering his arm, rupturing his ear drums and riddling his body with shrapnel.

After being moved 40 miles north to Balad, Iraq, Rains underwent life-saving surgery, his father, Paul Rains Sr., has said. Rains' condition began to stabilize at a hospital in Landstuhl, Germany, where he underwent further treatment prior to his return to the United States last month.

The soldier's family, including his parents and wife, Elizabeth, who graduated with him from Daphne High School, have taken significant time away from home and work since then to be with him during his recovery.

To help with their expenses, Ben and Deborah Trione are holding three fund-raisers for the Rains family.

A benefit concert and block party is to take place from 4 to 9 p.m. Saturday in Lott Park on Main Street in Daphne with musical entertainment and food from the grill. Guests are encouraged to bring lawn chairs because seating will be limited, Ben Trione said.

Two more benefits will be held before and after Mardi Gras parades in Daphne on Feb. 24 and 25 at Red and Tenny Trione's house, which is two doors behind Mancini's Restaurant on Belrose Avenue. Contributions to help the Rains family can also be made at any Regions Bank branch to the Paul D. Rains Jr. benefit account.

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Assorted Resistance Action

16 February, 2006 Agencies & PAUL GARWOOD, Associated Press & Aljazeera & Reuters & Press Trust of India

In the northern city of Kirkuk, guerrillas killed an Iraqi Army captain and his driver as they were heading to work, said police Capt. Firhad Talabani.

In downtown Ramadi, armed fighters killed Mukhaibir al-Alwani, a tribal leader and brother of the governor of Anbar province, in Ramadi, 110 km (68 miles) west of Baghdad, police and hospital sources said.

Resistance fighters killed two more policemen in an attack on a vehicle in west Baghdad's Amariyah district, and another policeman was shot dead in the Amil area, police.

A car bomb exploded as an Iraqi patrol passed in Baghdad's Karradah neighbourhood, killing one policeman and wounding three bystanders, police said.

A local government member, Khalid Ibrahim Ali, was seriously wounded after being shot by drive-by insurgents in western Baghdad's Baiyaa neighbourhood, police said.

Armed men wounded a Jordanian Embassy driver as he left his house in Amariyah, western Baghdad, police said.

Four policemen and two civilians were wounded when a bomb attached to a bicycle went off targeting a police patrol in Baquba, 65 km (40 miles) north of Baghdad, police said.

Guerrillas killed an army lieutenant colonel in western Baghdad, police said.

**IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE
END THE OCCUPATION**

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

Those Cartoons

From: C
To: GI Special
Sent: February 12, 2006

I know your readers are well aware of how things work and can read between the lines. I'm hearing confusion about what's going on in the Muslim part of the world though, and because all the facts might not be reaching America, I'd like to discuss a few things. I think some of the confusion is being caused by a lack of media attention but; I also think there's a lot of misinformation spreading about Muslim sentiments in general. It's hard to tell sometimes if people are trying to twist the truth, or if they are just plain uninformed about the facts. Either way, I'll try to fill in on some half-truths that I've heard lately.

There are some big misconceptions out there about why Muslims are reacting so intensely against the "cartoons" that were recently republished. There is a tendency to attribute the current Muslim reaction, to the insulting way in which the characters were depicted; and also a perception for some that Muslims are trying to define morality for the west; with insistence on controlling satire. There is no doubt in the fact that Muslims are upset over the slur on their religion but, the larger reason for their anger is really much deeper than that.

To understand these things better, it is first important to discuss the 'sanctity of life' concept within an Islamic context. Most religions regard living creatures as special, simply because they are alive. No matter how mankind has been able to manipulate life over time, it can be said for certain, that man cannot, and will not ever be able to 'create' life. Man cannot take a piece of raw earth and make life from it, as God can. For this

reason, life itself has a special sanctity, and in Islam it is considered sacrilegious to defile life in any way. By Islamic standards it is defiling to life, when life itself becomes the object veneration; or when the opposite occurs, and life is considered to be something less than a special gift from God. In other words, life has a unique place and value in Islam, and it is considered immoral to not recognize this.

Secondly, it is important to then understand something about the concept of 'idolatry'. In the west, idolatry is largely seen as worshipping something above God. In Islam however, idolatry is attributing the work of God to somebody or something other than the divine creator himself. In Islam, it is important to never worship anything that God has created, to any extent. In the times of Muhammad, the Muslims were often in conflict with people who also believed in a central and all-powerful God but, who also worshipped lesser gods at the same time. This was considered idolatry to the Muslims. Islamic teaching prohibits any interference with the private idolatry of others but, Muslims are not supposed to engage in idolatry themselves. Worshipping God's creation at all, be it in the form of nature; be it in the form of artwork; or be it in the form of some person who thinks he's a god; these acts of worshipping creation are in every way idolatry to Islam.

So how is drawing a picture of God's creation the same as worshipping it? In Islam, it isn't always considered idolatry to draw pictures of living things. It is idolatry however, to relate the essence of life to inanimate things. To make such associations is considered the same as trying to create a spirit; which is something that only God can do. Therefore, trying to create spirit, in any way, is considered disrespectful to God, and thus prohibited. Pictures of human beings can be drawn in certain limited circumstances, like for instruction in science but, these drawing then should not ever be 'characterized' at all.

In Islam, any attempt to associate graphic images with sacred figures is all the more loathed. As suggested before, the way such images may attempt to portray religious figures is really almost irrelevant. In Islam, it would have been considered the same heresy to associate Muhammad with images even portraying good deeds. If anyone would have drawn pictures of Muhammad doing many of the true things he is reported to have done throughout life, like playing with children; feeding the hungry; or standing up to injustice; all of those things would have been considered equally heretical in graphic form.

The wanting to destroy images associated with sacred figures is not limited to Islam either. In the earlier days of Christianity, trying to recreate religious icons was also seen as heresy, and the early Christians spent significant time and energy seeking them out in public, and destroying them. This practice is now called, iconoclasm. Even today, iconoclastic beliefs are still reflected in many Protestant traditions; an example being their refusal to use the corpus crucifix that the Catholic church uses frequently. The corpus crucifix depicts the body of Jesus on it. Protestants like just a bare cross. Modern Protestants will say that they avoid the corpus crucifix because they prefer to think of Jesus being removed from the cross and his resurrection, rather than his suffering however, anyone who has ever been inside of both Protestant and Catholic churches, knows that Protestant churches never have the same abundance of icons, as do the Catholic churches.

The last concept that I would like to discuss then is, blasphemy. Blasphemy is the intentional denigration of a religion. Blasphemy is an attempt to belittle religious beliefs by either inflaming the sentiments of, or restricting the rights of its adherents. This is done through both overt and public insults toward the tenets of the religion. The original caricatures of Islamic religious figures in western newspapers, that eventually incited international fury, were actually printed months prior to the crisis. When they were originally printed, there was outrage over them but, not anything like we're seeing today. The reason people are toppling over each other to burn down embassies is because; these pictures were reprinted again after the newspapers knew exactly what kind of upset they would cause. The reprinting of these pictures was not only incitement but, it was also a direct attack on Islam as a belief system. This was not an attack on any deviant branch or concept of Islam but, it was an attack on Islam itself. The reprint of this material, regardless of how poor the artistic quality was, is seen to be a malicious act and a crime of blasphemy toward Muslims. This is what the anger is really about. Sure, there's obviously some pent up resentment in the way Muslims have been treated in general as their lands were invaded but, Muslims also see these other attacks for what they are, and what those who've made them will not admit to.

Imagine that you went to a social gathering and your friend introduced you to someone who you had seen before but, never really met. Imagine further, that upon greeting this person, that you decided that you didn't like the style of cloths they were wearing, and because of that, you just told them how you felt in front of everyone. What would it be like if you just met someone and told them, "Hi, my name is so and so, and I really don't like your cloths." You might be justified saying something like that if their cloths had overtly offensive writing on them or something like that but; you wouldn't really make a lot of friends if you just said that kind of thing for no reason; other than to maybe test their reaction. In fact, you'd be pretty stupid to expect anything other than a negative response out of that.

So, if someone knows they are insulting other people, and are still willing to stand behind their insults, why should anyone expect the insulted people to be amused by that at all? Even if everyone were free to insult people at will, what kind of sense would it make for people to expect any sort of relationship to come from that? So, imagine now those same exact emotions, except they are now intensified by an attack on someone's deepest feelings of spirituality. That might offend someone; and if it's done enough, someone might even get smacked eventually.

In the media, these blasphemous caricatures have also been compared with Palestinian cartoons directed at government policy. There have been some tasteless cartoons distributed in Palestine before but, I'm aware of none equivalent to the recent danish attack on Islam. If there are ever any attacks like that on the Jewish or Christian faiths, there should be no tolerance for those attacks either. People should be free to think and express their own thoughts, and be free to associate and worship with whomever they so choose. Going out of the way to hurt other people is not a right though, and the free world should not tolerate it as such.

OCCUPATION REPORT

Mission Preposterous: [Watch Your Back]



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ray Torres of Los Angeles, center, accompanies a highly disciplined, well trained Iraqi collaborator patrol, Jan. 31, 2006, in Jazeera, Iraq.

Note one Iraqi carrying bag of goodies, while the others keep careful watch for possible attackers, ready for instant response to any challenge. (AP Photo/Antonio Castaneda)

Shiites And Sunnis Unite To Defend Their Neighborhood From Occupation Terrorists

With nowhere else to turn, Tobji residents intent on stopping the escalating violence are relying on one another. In recent weeks, both Sunnis and Shiites have contributed manpower to an 80-member neighborhood citizens force that patrols the streets alongside the Iraqi army, manning checkpoints and alerting soldiers to suspicious outsiders.

2.14.06 By Jonathan Finer Washington Post Foreign Service [Excerpts]

BAGHDAD -- To generations of its residents, the tightknit neighborhood known as Tobji was among this city's rare oases. People argued amiably in sidewalk cafes kept open until nearly midnight. Shiite and Sunni Muslims married into each other's families and lived side-by-side. Until recently, Iraq's police and army, with more than enough trouble spots to worry about, rarely came around.

It was a neighborhood, residents said, that lived up to its formal name, Salam, which means peace. But in volatile Baghdad, home to more than 5 million people, even stable sections sit a few stray shots from chaos. It took scarcely two months for the sectarian conflict consuming other corners of the capital to gain a foothold in Tobji.

It began, residents say, one November day when gunmen killed Majid Abdul Hussein, a local preacher and member of a powerful Shiite militia. Days later, a former member of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-led Baath Party was gunned down in broad daylight. Before locals realized it, they said, theirs had become yet another fractured community, a place nearly silent after dark save for the crackle of gunfire.

Then, on Jan. 23, men in camouflage uniforms rounded up 53 Tobji residents, nearly all of them Sunnis, in pre-dawn raids. Two people were killed. Other than two old men who were released days later, none of those taken have been heard from since.

Locals said the uniforms the gunmen wore and the vehicles they drove identified them as Interior Ministry police commandos, whose ranks are dominated by former members of Shiite factional militias. Since Iraq's Shiite majority first gained political power in elections a year ago, raids like the one in Tobji have taken place in neighborhoods in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities. They always target Sunni men, and witnesses always implicate the police.

Asked how many Tobji residents have died violently in recent months, Mariam Nouri, 27, whose family came to the neighborhood more than 50 years ago, counted them by name.

"There's Hussein, Firas, Abbas, Osama, Uday," said Nouri, a Sunni, whose brother, father and uncle were dragged from her home during the recent raid. Hardly pausing for breath, she ticked off 11 of the dead from memory. "It might be more like 15," she said. "There are some I've forgotten."

Sunni leaders have responded to the raids in Tobji, northwest of downtown, and in other Baghdad neighborhoods by calling on residents to defend themselves. Adnan Dulaimi, a prominent Sunni Arab politician, called for further unrest unless the country's next government puts police beyond the control of Shiite militias. The Iraqi Accordance Front, the country's dominant Sunni political group, warned Wednesday of "nationwide civil disobedience" unless what it termed "haphazard raids" were halted.

It started in Iskan, then Sadiya and Ghazaliya," said Abbas Lafta, 35, a Shiite resident of Tobji, citing once-tranquil Baghdad enclaves that have fallen like dominoes toward his neighborhood in the past year. "People used to move here to get away from those places. Now we are one of them."

Bounded by a highway overpass and a park with a scraggly dirt soccer field, Tobji got its name from the cramped commercial street, lined with vendors' stalls, that bisects the neighborhood. Dozens of sheep graze along a grassy median, snarling traffic near an open-air market.

On a recent weekday, side roads leading from a main thoroughfare were blocked with concrete barriers, and Iraqi soldiers operated a checkpoint at the top of one busy street.

A second checkpoint on the neighborhood's southern edge was manned entirely by civilians, who watched cars intently as they departed. It was not always this way.

"It is like someone saw this was a safe place and wanted to provoke things," said Muthana Mahmoud, 43, who has lived in Tobji all his life.

Juliet Hadad, 41, a mother of six, said: "Before, when we lived normally, you would feel no tension here. Now we are scared, not just of Sunnis, but of our own people. I grounded my children. I don't let them go anywhere now."

As the conflict began to escalate late last year, eight people were killed in a two-week span following the country's Dec. 15 elections. But it was the Jan. 23 raid, Sunni and Shiite residents said, that did the most to inflame sectarian tension.

Residents said it began just after 4 a.m., as about 20 sport-utility vehicles and pickup trucks without license plates, resembling those driven by Iraq's police commandos, rumbled into the neighborhood bearing a force of nearly 200 armed men.

For the next three hours, the gunmen, many of them clad in yellow-and-gray camouflage uniforms, burst into Sunnis' homes, sometimes leaping from roof to roof, rounding up men and terrifying their families. They took their cell phones and cut landlines so residents could not call for help.

"They had beards, and their dialect sounded like they were from the south," said Mahmoud, who said three men leapt onto his roof from a neighbor's window. When his brother answered the door, one of the men asked him, "Are you Abu Abbas?"

"No," his brother said. "I don't know who that is."

"They blindfolded him and took him outside," Mahmoud said. "Then they came back for me. They took me up to the roof and held me over the edge by my feet. They only let me go when my mother came up, screaming."

Nouri thought her family would be safe, even though they are Sunnis, because her father and uncle work for Interior Ministry police units. But even after presenting their identification cards to the gunmen, they were detained.

"When my sister asked, 'Why, why are you taking them when they are like you?' they pointed their guns at her and hit her on the head," Nouri said. "I was cursing them and saying, 'God is my defender!' "

Down the street, two men who tried to defend their homes were killed. When the gunmen grabbed the wife of Bilal Ali Ghazal by the hair and pulled her toward their car, he grabbed a rifle and went to his roof, firing shots to try to draw help. An attacker in the street shot him in the stomach.

Ismael Egaidi killed one of the gunmen who entered his home before dying in a hail of bullets, residents said.

Desperate to find what became of the 51 men who were detained but never released, Tobji residents said they had made daily visits to Baghdad's Interior Ministry, only to be told there was no information. When word spread that seven bullet-riddled bodies had turned up in the Rustamiyah neighborhood, relatives of those detained in Tobji dashed to the morgue to look for familiar faces. They found none.

Residents say the government's denial of police involvement in the raid does not square with what they witnessed that night. The assailants were driving around Baghdad in a large convoy of sport-utility vehicles that locals recognized as those used by police since the late 1990s. They wore camouflage uniforms and carried Glock pistols, the same as those issued to police officers.

"Explain to me how this can be anyone other than the Iraqi security forces," said Muhammed Majid, a Tobji resident. But even Majid acknowledged that he could not be sure who was responsible.

With nowhere else to turn, Tobji residents intent on stopping the escalating violence are relying on one another. In recent weeks, both Sunnis and Shiites have contributed manpower to an 80-member neighborhood citizens force that patrols the streets alongside the Iraqi army, manning checkpoints and alerting soldiers to suspicious outsiders.

Neighbors have started collecting money to pay a small salary to the volunteers, who call themselves "the guardians."

When they first took to the streets in December, they were arrested and their guns confiscated by Iraqi police because they had no licenses to carry weapons. But after the January raid, they demanded, and were issued, badges from the Interior Ministry authorizing them to carry rifles.

"Some of them were in the military once, but they all know how to use guns," said Lafta, the 35-year-old neighborhood resident, who helps supervise the program.

"Things have been a bit quieter since they got out there."

**OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION
BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME NOW!**

OCCUPATION HAITI

The Demonstrators Win: Preval To Be Haitian President

16 February 2006 By Stevenson Jacobs, The Associated Press

Port-au-Prince, Haiti: An agreement was reached by Haiti's interim government and electoral council early Thursday to declare front-runner Rene Preval the winner of last week's presidential election, staving off a potential crisis in the Western Hemisphere's poorest country.

With 90 percent of ballots counted, Preval had been just shy of the 50 percent margin needed to win the Feb. 7 election outright and avoid a runoff next month. Under the agreement, some of the 85,000 blank votes that had been cast in the election were subtracted from the total count, giving Preval a majority, said Michel Brunache, chief of Cabinet for interim President Boniface Alexandre.

"We acknowledge the final decision of the electoral council and salute the election of Mr. Rene Preval as president of the Republic of Haiti," Prime Minister Gerard Latortue told The Associated Press in a phone interview.

Last week's election had triggered massive street protests by backers of Preval, who said fraud was being carried out to deprive him of the majority he needed for a first-round victory. Preval had vowed to formally challenge the results if officials insisted on holding a March runoff.

On Wednesday, the U.N. mission in Haiti issued a statement denouncing the discovery of voting bags, marked ballots and other election materials in a garbage dump near the capital, urging "the Haitian authorities to investigate fully and prosecute anyone found guilty of this apparent grave breach of the electoral process."

Earlier in the day, AP journalists saw thousands of ballots, some marked for Preval, deep in the dump along with a vote tally sheet and four bags meant to carry returns from the election. Discovery of the ballots was initially reported by Haitian TV Tuesday night.

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

Bush Traitors Out Of Control:

US Terror Suspect List Rises To 325,000:

“It Was Virtually Impossible For Those Wrongly Listed As Terrorist Suspects To Clear Their Name”

February 16, 2006 The Guardian

Civil liberties organisations expressed outrage yesterday after it was reported that the database of terrorist suspects kept by the US authorities now holds 325,000 names, a fourfold increase in two and a half years.

The list, maintained by the National Counterterrorism Centre (NCTC), includes different spellings of the same person's names as well as aliases, but the Washington Post quoted NCTC officials as saying that at least 200,000 individuals are on it.

Timothy Sparapani, an expert on privacy rights at the American Civil Liberties Union, said the ACLU's response was one of incredulity, and alarm that many people are likely to be on the list by mistake, with serious impact on their lives and few, if any, means of getting themselves off it.

"The numbers continue to grow by leaps and bounds," Mr Sparapani said. He had no idea what methods were being used to add names to the database, but added: "I have to say we're probably adding names faster than we can figure out how to deal with them ... We worry greatly about the potential stain to anyone's life who ends up on this list."

It is unclear how many of the names on the list were collected as a result of a domestic wiretapping programme by the National Security Agency, the existence of which only became known through a leak in December.

Administration officials yesterday refused to confirm or deny the reported size of the NCTC list.

Thousands of Americans have only discovered their name, or a similar one, is on the list when they have been prevented from taking a commercial flight. Senator Edward Kennedy found himself in that position in 2004.

Mr Sparapani said he had heard officials from the Transport Security Agency estimate that about 30,000 people a year had been denied the right to board a flight because of the list.

The database was set up in 2003, initially with 75,000 names. The NCTC is the principal agency for analysing terrorist data, under the control of John Negroponte, the director for national intelligence.

Marc Rotenberg, the head of a watchdog group, the Electronic Privacy Information Centre, said: "It's problematic not simply in the big brother way with the loss of privacy, but it's also problematic because it doesn't seem to work."

He said it was virtually impossible for those wrongly listed as terrorist suspects to clear their name.

"We passed a very good law in the 1970s ... at least when the US government makes a decision about a US citizen, that process had to be transparent and people had to be able to appeal those decisions, but now those agencies get exemptions to the law."

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Chevron Chief Tells Saudis Bush Lacks Understanding Of Oil

February 15, 2006 The Daily Star

JEDDAH: Saudi Arabia's massive oil resources are key to international energy security and U.S. President George W. Bush's desire to cut U.S. dependence on Middle East oil shows a "misunderstanding" of global energy supply, the vice chairman of Chevron said.

"This notion of being energy independent is completely unreasonable," Robertson said to a largely Saudi audience at the Jeddah Economic Forum.

"I don't think anyone actually believes that the U.S. can end its dependence on oil in the Middle East at all."

Bush in his State of the Union address this month pledged to cut U.S. dependence on Middle East oil by 75 percent by 2025.

"Quite frankly, I think these comments reflect some misunderstanding of global energy supply. I believe Middle Eastern oil can and must play a certain role in the system," Robertson said.

Robertson said singling out the Middle East for a reduction in U.S. oil imports would be difficult, since oil is a commodity traded on the open market. What's more, he said, that would require more expensive oil imports from elsewhere.

"All it would end up doing is raising prices," Robertson said.

Chevron is also lobbying heavily against proposals floated in the U.S. Congress to raise taxes on oil earnings, after oil companies made record profits as a result of skyrocketing oil prices.



[Thanks to MR, who sent this.]

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