

GI SPECIAL 3A42:



“Election Day” (To GI Special 2.3.05, from Soldier Z, Iraq)

Defense Organizing For Sgt. Kevin Benderman

From: Monica Benderman

To: GI Special

Sent: Thursday, February 10, 2005 9:51 PM

Subject: Thank you from Sgt. Kevin and Monica Benderman

Monica Benderman
Hinesville, Georgia

We have received tremendous support from readers who have learned of our situation through your website. Thank you for all the support you have given by providing a valuable forum in which my husband Kevin Benderman can tell his story and reach out to people with a message of peace.

We do try to individually thank everyone who emails us with their kind messages and their encouraging words. We would also like to thank the countless others who have read of Kevin's case on your website but who may offer their support by speaking out in their communities and by spreading word of the information on your website, but who do not choose to tell us of their actions in emails.

We can feel the energy of so many millions of people who are speaking out in solidarity with what we are doing, and it helps to keep us fighting strong when it comes to spreading our message of finding solutions of peaceful means for the world's problems.

We have established a Kevin Benderman Defense Committee, with a webpage, www.BendermanDefense.org that will provide updates regarding Kevin's case, as well as links to articles, veteran's organizations providing support and information for others, and an opportunity to make a PayPal donation towards covering Kevin's legal expenses.

We hope this fund will not only cover Kevin's legal costs, but can also provide support after his case for any soldiers who choose a similar path. If possible, we would appreciate your listing the link to The Kevin Benderman Defense Committee on your site: www.BendermanDefense.org.

We appreciate everything you have done and are continuing to do to support this effort.

And Please, thank your readers for their support as well.

In Peace,
Monica Benderman

Support Kevin Benderman

Kevin needs your support to mount his defense. To support the Kevin Benderman Defense Committee, go to the web site, click on the "Make a Donation" button (page opens on the Kevin Benderman Defense Committee Paypal page)

Donations by check should be made out to "Kevin Benderman Defense," and sent c/o Kevin and Monica Benderman, P.O. Box 2322, Hinesville, GA 31310.

Contact Us

Kevin and Monica Benderman
P.O. Box 2322
Hinesville, GA 31310

Email: mdawnb@coastalnow.net

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward this E-MAIL along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing

resistance to the war, at home and inside the armed services. Send requests to address up top.

IRAQ WAR REPORTS:

Rock Island Woman Killed



Jessica Housby

February 10, 2005 Moline Dispatch

A Rock Island woman was killed in Iraq Wednesday when a roadside bomb exploded near the truck she was driving in the Baghdad area.

Sgt. Jessica M. Housby, 23, of the 1644 Transportation Unit of the Illinois National Guard based in Rock Falls, was part of a convoy hauling cargo from forward operating base Scania to forward operating base Stryker at the Baghdad Airport, according to the Illinois National Guard.

Scania is a convey support center about 90 miles southwest of Baghdad near the village of Nippur along the main supply route to Kuwait.

First news of her death was released by her family, through Wheelan-Pressly Funeral Home, Milan.

The 1644 was mobilized for its second deployment in Iraq in August. It is a medium truck company with about 170 members.

In 1999, Ms. Housby was named top cadet of 187 cadets from eight Explorer Posts taking part in a training exercise at Fort McCoy, Wisc.

Lt. Archie Rose of the Illinois National Guard said at the time that her "hard work, enthusiasm and the responsibility" resulted in the award.

She graduated from Rock Island High School in 2000.



Deborah Bundy, of Milan, the mother of Sgt. Jessica M. Housby, fights back the tears Thursday afternoon while talking about how much she is going to miss her daughter. Ms. Bundy is holding a photo of her daughter, left, and Robert Cather, a cousin and fellow National Guardsman. Photo: Todd Mizener

Two Fort Steward Soldiers Killed; “The Young Soldier Had Doubts He Would Return.”

February 10, 2005, The Times

Two Fort Steward soldiers were killed in Iraq when a roadside bomb exploded, hitting their patrol vehicle.

Sgt. Daniel Torres and Staff Sgt. Steven G. Bayow were the first casualties reported from the Army's 3rd Infantry Division since its 19,000 soldiers deployed for a second tour in Iraq last month.

Five other soldiers were wounded in the blast Saturday near Baji, about 140 miles north of Baghdad.

Torres, 23, of Fort Worth, Texas, had been looking forward to his girlfriend giving birth to their first child. But Torres' father said the young soldier had doubts he would return.

The Army said Bayow, 42, was from Colonia, on the island of Yap in the Federated States of Micronesia.

British Says Iraq More Intense Than Falklands War

Feb 10, 2005 By Luke Baker, AMARA, Iraq (Reuters)

British troops say they fought harder in the Iraqi city of Amara last August than they had done since the Falklands war against Argentina 23 years ago.

In August last year, Shi'ite militiamen loyal to a rebel cleric rose up in unison in towns and cities across the region, producing weeks of intense fighting.

A British commander compared it to the infantry battles of the 1982 Falkland Islands campaign, more intense even than their assaults on Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1991 and 2003.

TROOP NEWS

Moldova Ends Iraq Military Mission

10/02/2005 CHISINAU, Feb 10 (AFP)

A group of 12 Moldovan minesweepers returned from Iraq Thursday, ending a six-month deployment in the US-led coalition forces, defense officials said here.

The team defused 180 explosive devices over their six month-mission, the defence ministry in this former Soviet republic told AFP, adding that parliament's approval would be required for any further military deployment in Iraq.

NATO Recruiting For Iraq Not Going Well

February 10, 2005 Associated Press, NICE, France

Fewer trainers have signed on to a NATO mission in Iraq than the U-S is hoping for. This is one of the issues Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is talking about at a meeting with his NATO counterparts in Nice, France.

Army Lieutenant General David Petraeus, who oversees the effort to train and equip Iraq's security and military forces, says European allies have mustered fewer than 100 trainers. He says the goal is 159 and that he's hoping several dozen more may step forward in coming weeks.

NATO aims to develop Iraq's military on a strategic level, rather than train individual soldiers. This includes efforts to set up military staff and officer colleges.

General Casey Does Stand Up Comedy At Change Of Command

Feb. 10, 2005 By CHRIS TOMLINSON, Associated Press, CAMP VICTORY, Iraq

The U.S. Army's 18th Airborne Corps formally took control of coalition ground forces in Iraq on Thursday, bringing in a new commander and staff to replace 3rd Corps, which is returning to Fort Hood, Texas.

Lt. Gen. John Vines became the new commander of what is formally known as Multi-National Force-Iraq. A 34-year veteran infantryman, he took over from Lt. Gen. Thomas Metz at a ceremony held in one of Saddam Hussein's former palaces near Baghdad International Airport.

The transfer of authority was conducted by Gen. George Casey Jr., who commands all forces in Iraq. He said Metz's troops had made possible the transfer of sovereignty to a new Iraqi government in June.

Senior U.S. Embassy Fool Thinks U.S. Troops Will Be Fighting "Quite A Number Of Years"

February 10, 2005 By Steve Fainaru, Washington Post

A senior U.S. Embassy official in Baghdad told a group of reporters: "First of all, I think this is going to take quite a number of years. I do not see an early end."

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said "the most optimistic scenario" was a political solution that both reassures and protects Iraq's Sunni Arab minority combined with increased military pressure that would make the insurgents "less and less effective."

"And then," the official said, "it will still take you years." [Wrong. The troops won't stand for it.]

Sixteen All-Time Biggest Soldier Lies

Strategypage.com

1. "I put it in distribution."
2. "Your pay will be straight at the end of the month."
3. "I know I left it right here on the top of my desk."
4. "Of course I can read a map."
5. "It's on valid requisition."
6. "No Sir, I don't smoke dope!"
7. "He's in the motor pool."
8. "I have to go back to the rear."
9. "I don't give a d@!& if the General hears about this!"
10. "I need this for the old man right away!"
11. "I was here until midnight last night working on this!"
12. "I read the after action report."
13. "Sorry I'm late, but the Colonel called me just as I was about to leave."
14. "Give me your number and I'll call you back."
15. "This is a courtesy inspection."
16. "We're here to help you."

IRAQ RESISTANCE ROUNDUP

Ten Allawi Cops Killed, 65 Wounded:

Resistance Attack Takes Salman Pak Police Station

2.10.05 (AFP) & (CNN) & Reuters, BAGHDAD:

An Iraqi police station at Salman Pak was overrun by rebels. At least ten police were killed in the rebel assault.

Insurgents overran the police station at Salman Pak, following a siege that lasted several hours.

The rebels had fired anti-tank rockets at the building, police said.

The fighting was so fierce that police reinforcements were unable to reach many of the wounded or recover the dead, who were left lying in the road.

"The insurgents did assume control of the police station temporarily," a US military spokesman told AFP. "We attacked them with helicopters, which fired missiles, and the insurgents fled."

The US spokesman said six police and an unknown number of insurgents were killed.

Earlier police sources said at least 65 officers had been wounded.

About 20 cars were ablaze after the fighting ended.

Occupation Cop Officer Killed In Baqouba, Two Wounded

2.10.05 AP

Insurgents fired on an Iraqi police patrol Thursday in the city of Baqouba, north of Baghdad, setting off a gunbattle that killed a civilian bystander and wounded two police officers, a security official said.

In a separate attack, assailants killed a police lieutenant in Baqouba's industrial neighborhood, the official said.

Convoy Wiped Out South Of Baghdad; Not Discovered For Two Days

10 February 2005 (AFP)

BAGHDAD - The bodies of more than 20 Iraqi drivers and security forces from a convoy of government trucks carrying sugar were found on Thursday south of Baghdad, police said.

The drivers had all been burned in their vehicles. Police said they believed the convoy was attacked at least two days ago but the bodies left to rot.

“This morning a police patrol was in the Suwairah region and found about 20 vehicles that were taking sugar to Baghdad. They were all burned,” said a police official.

Suwairah is about 60 kilometers (38 miles) south of Baghdad.

As well as the drivers, two policemen and two soldiers who were protecting the convoy were also killed, the official told AFP.

“The bodies were rotting in the vehicles which indicates the attack was at least two days ago,” he added.

The convoy had been taking sugar to Baghdad for food warehouses which distribute monthly rations. They were attacked on the road from Salman Pak to nearby Suwairah.

<p style="text-align: center;">IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE RESISTANCE END THE OCCUPATION</p>

5 Occupation Guard Bodies Found In Ramadi

2.10.05 AP

Five bodies in Iraqi National Guard uniforms were found in the insurgent stronghold of Ramadi. Ala al Ani, director of the hospital, said residents reported that the slain men were among 13 Guardsmen who went missing recently.

Assorted Resistance Attacks

2.10.05 (AFP) & Aljazeera

A civilian and a police officer were killed in attacks in the town of Baquba.

Three Iraqi soldiers were killed by a roadside bomb at Dhuluiyah, the army said, and the body of an interpreter for US forces was found near the key refinery town of Baiji.

In Baghdad's Haifa Street neighbourhood, three members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party were killed in an ambush.

This was followed by clashes between Iraqi and US troops and an unknown number of fighters.

A remotely detonated car bomb exploded near an Iraqi police patrol in al-Hafriyah, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) southeast of Baghdad, Iraqi police said.

Five Iraqi police officers were wounded, police said. After the explosion, police detained 25 people, authorities said.

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

One day while I was in a bunker in Vietnam, a sniper round went over my head. The person who fired that weapon was not a terrorist, a rebel, an extremist, or a so-called insurgent. The Vietnamese individual who tried to kill me was a citizen of Vietnam, who did not want me in his country. This truth escapes millions.

**Mike Hastie
U.S. Army Medic
Vietnam 1970-71
December 13, 2004**

Continued:

51. Mines are equal opportunity weapons.
52. B-52s are the ultimate close support weapon.
53. Whenever you have plenty of ammo, you never miss. Whenever you are low on ammo, you can't hit the broad side of a barn.
54. Killing for peace is like screwing for virginity.
55. The one item you need is always in short supply.
56. Interchangeable parts aren't.
57. It's not the one with your name on it; it's the one addressed "to whom it may concern" you've got to think about.
58. When in doubt, empty your magazine.
59. The side with the simplest uniforms wins.
60. Combat will occur on the ground between two adjoining maps.
61. If the Platoon Sergeant can see you, so can the enemy.

62. Never stand when you can sit, never sit when you can lie down, never stay awake when you can sleep.
 63. The most dangerous thing in the world is a Second Lieutenant with a map and a compass.
 64. Exceptions prove the rule, and destroy the battle plan.
 65. Everything always works in your HQ, everything always fails in the Colonel's HQ.
 66. The enemy never watches until you make a mistake.
 67. One enemy soldier is never enough, but two is entirely too many.
 68. A clean (and dry) set of BDU's is a magnet for mud and rain.
 69. The worse the weather, the more you are required to be out in it.
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OCCUPATION REPORT

Notes From A Lost War:

Pipeline Guards Hide As Resistance Attacks; “We Don’t Want To Lose Our Lives.”

February 10, 2005 By Steve Fainaru, Washington Post

Insurgents attacked an oil pipeline before dawn about 15 miles north of the town of Baiji, setting the pipeline ablaze.

A security guard hired to protect the site said that he and other guards fled before the attack because they had been warned by the insurgents.

“Let me say it frankly: We are afraid of these people,” said Mahmoud Mohammed, 21.

<p>“They came to us and threatened us if we do not cooperate with them or if we resist them, they will kill us. So when they came, we went immediately to our rooms and they attacked the pipeline. We don’t want to lose our lives. They know everything about me: my family, my house. Even the authorities in Baiji know them, but they cannot do anything to them because they are afraid.”</p>
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Sadr City As A Classic 'Liberated Area':

Dual Power In Urban Iraq

[This is very very long but worth it because it contradicts the three big lies the Occupation propaganda machine has been pumping out about why the U.S. dictatorship in Iraq must go on:

- [1. Iraq is too messed up to leave.
- [2. The Iraqis don't really want the U.S. armed forces to get out.
- [3. The U.S. occupation can't end because if does, there will be a civil war.

[When this Bush bullshit infects the anti-war movement, use this to slap it down.]

Cities all over Iraq are totally outside the control of either the US forces or the government of Iraq. Not only Ramadi and Samarra, but other population centers in central Iraq are virtually self-contained city-states.

The Kurds run their little enclave all by themselves. Parts of Baghdad are no-go zones for Americans. And in the south, ... Shi'ite militia and armed gangs controlled by Iranian-backed mullahs and the likes of Ayatollah [Ali al-]Sistani run things without any help from Baghdad.

The existence of these dual governments in many cities rebuts American claims that US withdrawal would result in chaos. Ironically, just the reverse is true; US success in defeating the guerrillas would result in chaos, whereas a guerrilla victory would bring greater stability (and perhaps too strict an order) to the Iraqi cities.

As this article is written, the US has honored a semi-official truce that keeps American troops out of the guerrilla-held area, and therefore allows for the Sadrist government to continue its rule of the nascent city-state. As long as this lasts, there will be "law and order" in Sadr City, even if the law is anti-American and the order is fundamentalist Islam.

Jan 12, 2005 By Michael Schwartz, Asia Times

Sadr City - the overcrowded, under-serviced 3 million-person Baghdad slum that has been the site of some of the fiercest fighting in Iraq - is the linchpin of the war.

Though there have been more spectacular battles in Fallujah and Najaf, Sadr City is of paramount importance because it is the center of the Shi'ite rebellion, and the Shi'ites represent 60% of the Iraqi population.

As a consequence, the Mehdi army - the military arm of the Sadrist movement that has dominated the area's politics for the past quarter century - has become the most important of all the insurgent groups, and a close look how it operates in its home base yields some startling conclusions about the trajectory of the struggle for control of Iraq:

The Sadrists have developed an effective political-military strategy aimed at converting Sadr City into a "liberated area", in the classic guerrilla warfare model.

Their main military strategy is to expel the US from their domain; only when they are under attack themselves do they venture outside Sadr City to attack US bases or supply routes.

The al-Sadr organization is attempting to construct a coherent "dual" government that replaces the central government and which administers the usual set of public services - from traffic control to apprehending street criminals - within limits set by their inability to coordinate with a national government. This proto-government has been particularly assiduous in addressing the number one problem of public order, street crime, and has actually cooperated with the local police in this campaign.

Mehdi soldiers - the guerrilla forces led by the Sadrists - though prone to thuggery, are largely under the control of this dual government, which is led by civilians - tribal leaders and Muslim clerics. The Mehdi soldiers act as the police force within the community.

The Sadrists have been surprisingly successful in co-opting the Iraqi police, by rewarding them for working on community issues and fighting them when they participate in efforts to suppress the rebel political-military structure. American military complaints about the unreliability of their Iraqi trainees is actually a reflection of successfully applied guerrilla policy.

The Sadrists have begun to enforce strict Islamist fundamentalism by suppressing such "moral crimes" as liquor sales and prostitution.

The Sadrists, and parallel groups in other cities (notably Fallujah), have publicly denounced the spectacular bombings perpetrated by various terrorists groups, complaining about their negative impact on the lives and livelihoods of Iraqi civilians and calling for an active alliance with the Iraqi police in suppressing foreign jihadis and domestic terrorists.

The organization in Sadr City is an echo of similar developments in Sunni cities (with Fallujah as the center), and it may foreshadow similar developments in the all-important Shi'ite south. The American attacks on various Iraqi cities, including the brutal battle of Fallujah, was an attempt to reverse this trend toward self-governed cities into which American forces rarely intrude.

The existence of these dual governments in many cities rebuts American claims that US withdrawal would result in chaos. Ironically, just the reverse is true; US success in defeating the guerrillas would result in chaos, whereas a guerrilla victory would bring greater stability (and perhaps too strict an order) to the Iraqi cities.

Sadr City As A Classic 'Liberated Area'

The Sadrist movement had erected a governing structure that could viably lead the community, including a legislature (made up of tribal leaders) and an executive branch made up of movement activists (including key clerics), with the Mehdi army playing the role of the police. For the near term, this incipient government had two key tasks: to make Sadr City inaccessible to US troops (and whatever allies it could muster among Iraqi armed forces); and to institute "law and order" within its boundaries. These dual goals, if successfully achieved, would offer Sadr City a semblance of a normal existence that had been disrupted when the US toppled the Saddam regime.

Looking first at the relationship with the American army, we note that the Mehdi army has adopted a distinctly defensive posture.

Militia members rarely attack American convoys outside Sadr City, nor do they lob grenades into American bases located around Baghdad, two strategies they used regularly during the Najaf battles. On the other hand, once the Americans enter Sadr City, the Mehdi usually resist ferociously.

They are determined to carve out areas into which Americans are at least hesitant to come, and, over time, make these areas more-or-less immune to American incursions.

This goal may be unreachable in the sense that US military superiority will always allow it to mount an attack from the air or to march through the community by massing a force of sufficient size; but if the end result is that Americans come to Sadr City infrequently and stay briefly, then the guerrillas will have won a sufficient victory to proceed with their broader plans.

Phillip Robertson, writing in Salon.com, described how this strategy played out in practice when he described the reaction of Sergeant Reggie Butler (the ranking non-commissioned officer of the 1st Platoon of the 1st Cavalry) to orders that his unit patrol one of the areas in Sadr City that the Mehdi were most determined to defend:

Butler instantly understood that the officers in the operations center had given the 1st Platoon the worst patrol in the Shi'ite ghetto, a loop around the entire northern side of the city. It was also a provocative one. The Bradleys would go within blocks of the al-Hekma mosque, a place where the Mehdi army has laid many ambushes and constantly fires at American patrols.

During this patrol, there was no fighting because both sides stayed within certain unspoken boundaries. The Americans did not attempt to actively search for guerrillas, contenting themselves with a "snap checkpoint", which involved "choking off traffic in both directions, while Iraqi soldiers searched cars full of young men". The Mehdi spotters, for their part, contented themselves with tracking the progress of the patrol:

At each of the stops, someone fired a few shots from a rifle. "When you hear that pop-pop from an AK, they are tracking you. That's how they tell everybody where you are," a gunner explained. The invisible men were watching us and holding their fire ... **Three hours later, the ceasefire hadn't collapsed and Butler's platoon had only had to endure a hail of rocks thrown by Iraqi boys. They had trouble believing their good luck.**

But this "truce" was only situational. Several days earlier, a vicious firefight had erupted. In this case, the patrol that invaded Sadr City was intent on searching a residence that the Americans suspected was being used to sell arms. Robertson described the events this way:

On a busy street in the middle of the day, the people and traffic disappeared. Spotters for the Mehdi army had seen the Americans coming in their convoy and signaled the fighters, who were ready to shoot from alleys and rooftops. As the street cleared out, a heavy soldier named Barron was yelling over to me in the back of the last Bradley ... "See that? No people. That's bad." Seconds after he said it, the street around the Humvees disappeared in clouds of dust where the Mehdi army bullets hit the ground. The dust came up around the wheels. It looked like the Humvees were sinking.

The heavy guns on the vehicles shuddered. Gunners standing up in the Humvees were returning fire, but it was hard to see if they hit any of the Mehdi fighters who were trying to hit the convoy. It was a gun battle on an empty street against invisible men ... When we drove into the ambush, the 1st Cavalry soldiers were on their way to meet the Iraqi police and search an arms dealer's house. As the convoy arrived at the dealer's street, the four Iraqi police trucks slowed down but didn't stop. The Iraqis were supposed to conduct the search while the Americans provided security ... With the Iraqi police missing and the locals firing rockets at the convoy, Alpha Company abandoned the cordon-and-search and headed for the base at 50 miles an hour, narrowly missing a roadside bomb.

There are three noteworthy elements to this event that speak to the strategy of the Mehdi army in Sadr City. *First*, this incursion involved the invasion of someone's home, one of the most provocative acts the US routinely undertakes. The rules of engagement for such action call for smashing the door (rather than giving the suspect a warning by knocking) and extremely aggressive behavior inside; actions that are pregnant with the possibility of greater violence, including death, if the residents resist or act in a suspicious manner.

Sadr City residents consider this terrifying procedure a heinous attack on respected members of the community. Because of notoriously faulty intelligence, the suspects are usually not guilty of anything; but even if this suspect were an arms dealer, his neighbors would not see this as a crime. After all, an arms dealer supplies his neighbors with needed guns to resist crime or the Americans. Because the resistance has spies within the Iraqi police, they knew the destination of this mission; and were able to prevent an American assault on a respected resident of the neighborhood; and to create a deterrent against future house invasions. This sharply contrasts with the actions in Najaf and Karbala, where the battles were between militia members and US troops, both of whom did not live there.

Second, the conduct of the battle was designed to protect the guerrillas from casualties.

By occupying strategic places in the buildings above the convoy, the Mehdi were able to fire at the American and Iraqi soldiers while using the buildings to protect themselves from the superior weaponry of the American troops. As Robertson put it, "It was a gun battle on an empty street against invisible men." Typically, the guerrillas sought to start

and finish battles before gunships could arrive, thus reducing the danger to themselves and to the buildings. They could easily hide their guns and pose as civilians to escape capture; a strategy that often did not work among the frequently unsympathetic townspeople in Najaf. This posture of protectiveness to the guerrilla cadre reflects classic guerrilla strategy, which seeks to fight battles only when casualties can be limited. (It of course completely precludes suicide attacks, a strategy that has not been practiced by the Sadrists.)

Third, the community was forewarned about the impending action, and given a chance to evacuate the area. Our attention is called to this by Robertson's dramatic remark, "On a busy street in the middle of the day, the people and traffic disappeared." They disappeared because of the warnings issued by the guerrillas that a battle was brewing.

It is important to note that warning the civilians also warned the Americans, since the quiet streets were a sign that the American 1st Cavalry noticed and understood. **The Mehdi army was therefore sacrificing the element of surprise in order to reduce civilian casualties.**

Evacuation of civilians from the battlefield is a central element in winning a guerrilla war. High levels of civilian casualties alienate the local population (even if they hate the invader). This sort of consideration is part of the explanation for the almost unanimous respect for Muqtada al-Sadr in Sadr City. His standing is indicated by the following incident reported by Washington Post reporter Scott Wilson during a patrol conducted by American and Iraqi troops (July 6, 2004):

A column of six US military vehicles and a flatbed truck carrying Iraqi National Guard soldiers stopped in traffic next to an outdoor market. A child emerged from the roadside stalls, carrying a cardboard poster of Muqtada al-Sadr ... On tiptoes, the child handed the poster to the Iraqi soldier manning a machine gun, as US soldiers watched in dismay. The Iraqi soldier, part of a nascent security force trained and funded by the United States, held Sadr's picture aloft for a gathering, cheering mob ... "If we took it from them now, this whole place would explode," said Sgt Adam Brantley, 24, of Gulf Shores, Ala, watching from behind the wheel of a Humvee.

The testimony of the American sergeant - that the community would "explode" if they tampered with the display of the Sadr portrait - is graphic evidence of the Sadrist base in this neighborhood (and most neighborhoods in Sadr City). This military strategy contrasts sharply with the orientation adopted by much of the Iraqi resistance. Many groups try to undermine the viability of the occupation army by attacking convoys and bases in order to inflict casualties, by fighting sustained battles designed to use up huge amounts of the US's ammunition; and by bombing supply convoys in order to deprive the military of needed ordinance.

This strategy intends to exhaust the army and the American people by making the war expensive in every respect.

The Sadrist strategy abandons all these goals in favor of carving out liberated areas free of American influence and - most particularly - free of the havoc and destruction caused by the various activities of the American armed forces. It

involves withdrawing into Sadr City, not engaging in battles or even demonstrations outside its confines, but creating a strong deterrent against incursions by American armed forces. Insofar as this military strategy is successful, it enables the creation of a viable governing structure. Knight Ridder reporter Tom Lasserter described how this looks in practice (Houston Chronicle, July 17, 2004):

From directing traffic to organizing blood drives, the militia overseen by firebrand cleric Muqtada al-Sadr is taking control of Baghdad's largest neighborhood, even as Iraqi and US officials demand that the group disband. Al-Sadr's office, not the beleaguered police station, is often the first stop for Sadr City residents who want to report a crime in this teeming slum of 3 million.

"Who runs Sadr City? Only the Mehdi army," said Ali Qassim, who works in an ice cream shop off one of the area's dusty boulevards ... On Tuesday morning, Iraqi police near downtown Baghdad arrested at least 500 Iraqis in a roundup targeting petty crooks and organized crime groups, but the sweep didn't extend to Sadr City. To do so would require the Mehdi army's cooperation. "If there is something wrong in this city, they will fix it," said Jasem Jaber, an Iraqi policeman assigned to Sadr City ... Most residents interviewed said the Mehdi army - named after the Shi'ite Muslim messiah - doesn't need to carry weapons anymore because it's in charge.

Christian Parenti, in a thorough Nation article put it more bluntly:

If there is anything like "progress" in Iraq it takes place here, under the radar, in the rubble of occupation. Sadr's followers, despite many faults, including thuggishness and misogyny, are central to creating what order there is in this ravaged ghetto.

This assertion of the Mehdi army as the backbone of law and order is not a simple usurpation of power by an armed gang. The Sadrists, like most successful guerrilla armies, are the enforcement arm of a politically controlled revolutionary movement. Parenti provides a vivid snapshot of how this larger structure operates in his description of the Sadrist functionary in the al-Thawra district of Sadr City:

I try to meet Muqtada's local representative, a 29-year-old sheik named Hassan Edhary, but he is on the run. The First Cav wants him, dead or alive. His two predecessors are already in Abu Ghraib. A few weeks ago, US tanks blew up this office. Reconstruction [of the office] started the next day at dawn.

When Edhary arrived suddenly at his office later that week, he sounded and acted very much like other politicians:

A stream of supplicants files through Edhary's little office, asking for advice, money and letters. One lives in an IDP (internally displaced people) camp and has no roof. Can the organization help? Edhary says, "I don't have enough people to go investigate your claim. But if you can find a religious sheik in your area to write a letter on your behalf, then come back." A young doctor explains that a group of medical workers has some money and wants to open a free or low-cost pharmacy to serve the people. Can the office contribute some money? The sheik leans close and plays with his string of black prayer beads as the young man talks. Finally, he tells the doctor that Hussein, our

hacker pal (and Parenti's interpreter), can help the clinic with its computers. Hussein and the doctor exchange numbers.

Though the resources are meager and Edhary's presence is made episodic by his "wanted, dead or alive" status, the dual government is nevertheless visible and accessible to the local community. As long as his decisions are even-handed; as long as his authority is buttressed by both the Mehdi army and by respected community leaders, and as long as he can avoid the clutches of the Americans, Sheik Edhary will probably retain legitimacy among his constituents - a legitimacy that is aggressively withheld from the US and its appointed interim administration.

Sheik Edhary is one element in a much larger system of administration headed by the Tribal Council, a legislative body made up of 28 members. The council issued its most dramatic edict in June last year in response to a year of problematic public order after the fall of Saddam. (Though order was largely restored in the fall of 2003 after the Mehdi army was formed, it became much worse when the US forces began their campaign to eliminate the Mehdi).

The new edict, circulated by leaflet throughout Sadr City, sought to reverse this trend with a comprehensive ban on a daunting range of anti-social activities, all of them enforced by the Mehdi army and all of them punishable by death. (NY Times, July 16, 2004) Among the offenses were:

Street crime, notably hijacking (a favorite of street criminals who resell stolen vehicles and/or the contents of stolen trucks), kidnapping (a lucrative and widespread criminal activity targeted at prosperous citizens, who pay as much as \$50,000 to redeem family members), and robbery (both from commercial sites and from individual homes). Street crime is, by all measures, what most Iraqis consider to be the worst problem of post-Saddam Iraq.

Political crimes, including both collaboration with the US government and terrorist activities. The leaflet specifically mentioned members of al-Qaeda, as well as locally bred Wahhabis and Saddam loyalists. (This should not be construed as purely anti-Sunni; the Sadrists vocally and physically supported the Sunni guerrillas in Fallujah and elsewhere.)

Moral crimes, including prostitution, pimping, pornography, gambling and alcohol sales. These crimes reflect the deep streak of Islamist fundamentalism that forms a core part of the Sadrist movement.

There are several noteworthy elements to this policy.

First, the list was circulated so broadly that even the American mass media took notice of it. The broad circulation reflects confidence among Sadrist leadership that the campaign would find favor with local residents.

Second, the list of crimes, particularly the moral crimes like selling liquor, was more than a little offensive to Western sensibilities.

Third, capital punishment for thievery is excessive at least, while it is unimaginably brutal for gambling or selling liquor. The Sadrists themselves

preferred to use much less drastic (but often extremely brutal) means of enforcing their new legal system; but as long as the Americans controlled the larger political context, they had no way to detain prisoners or punish them with normal judicial sanctions. Their ability to threaten perpetrators therefore depended on punishment that could be enforced without courts and jails.

Fourth, for most residents of Sadr City the moral crimes were secondary to the promise that the Mehdi army would act decisively against the most pervasive problem faced by virtually everyone in Iraq: street crime.

The apparent illogic is unraveled if we reference this fact of war: the Iraqi administration, the US occupation and the multinationals are all part of the occupying force and therefore are the enemy. Since time immemorial, warring countries have confiscated the goods of their enemy, even when they were first illegally taken by pirates or thieves.

Liberated Areas And The Question Of 'Law And Order'

Despite important differences in religious beliefs, the proto-government in Sadr City is similar to the proto-governments that developed in Fallujah and other Sunni cities after the first battle of Fallujah in April 2004. **The summer of 2004 saw an increasing number of liberated cities, with the American troops on the outskirts, unsuccessfully trying to reconquer them, leading to Tom Engelhardt's elegant portrait of the new Iraqi reality:**

Think of Sunni Iraq - and possibly parts of Shi'ite Iraq as well - as a "nation" of city-state fiefdoms, each threatening to blink off (the US") map of "sovereignty", despite our 140,000 troops and our huge bases in the country.

He quoted independent reporter Robert Dreyfuss to the effect that this process is already very far along (TomPaine.com July, 22, 2004):

Cities all over Iraq are totally outside the control of either the US forces or the government of Iraq. Not only Fallujah, Ramadi and Samarra, but other population centers in central Iraq are virtually self-contained city-states.

The Kurds run their little enclave all by themselves. Parts of Baghdad are no-go zones for Americans. And in the south, Shi'ite militia and armed gangs controlled by Iranian-backed mullahs and the likes of Ayatollah [Ali al-]Sistani run things without any help from Baghdad.

In attacking first Najaf, then Tal Afar and Samarra, and finally tackling the center of the Sunni resistance in Fallujah, the US was seeking to reverse this process. But these attacks were not designed to restore order; they were, instead, intended to prevent the consolidation of a very orderly anti-American status quo in a constantly expanding set of "liberated" areas.

Ironically, the American attacks in the fall of 2004 underscore the larger contradictions in American policy in Iraq: that the chaos American leaders keep

saying they are preventing will, in fact, occur only if US military forces succeed in destroying these nascent city-states.

To see this we need only begin by recalling the description above of the Sadrist regime in Baghdad.

While there is ample room for concern that the consolidation of Mehdi power might result in the forcible imposition of fundamentalist orthodoxy, there appears to be little chance that law and order would disintegrate.

Without underestimating the thuggish tendencies among the Mehdi and granting that there is currently far too much street crime in Sadr City, the Sadrists are the only effective governing force in the Baghdad Shi'ite community.

The removal of US troops would allow Sadrist civilian authority to operate openly and thus consolidate their daily supervision of the militia. This would enhance their ability to control the excesses of the militia and systematically reduce street crime, and would almost certainly result in an orderly (perhaps too orderly) daily existence in the areas they control.

The same prognosis could have been made with even more assurance, in Fallujah and the several other Sunni cities that were off limits to the Americans during the summer of 2004.

That is, before the US upset this guerrilla-imposed order with invasions followed by ongoing battles with the resistance. In the early winter of 2004, therefore, the choice in the Sunni areas appeared to be between peacefully run cities controlled by the resistance, or chaotic, constantly disrupted cities in which large numbers of American troops prevented the guerrillas from exercising control.

In the meantime, the Kurdish provinces had a peaceful existence based on a much more fully developed form of local control, resting largely on their own militia, the *peshmerga*, and the two political formations that control them. The absence of an American military presence in the Kurdish region has not been a problem; on the contrary, this absence is another reassurance that the other areas could and would be quite stable if only the Americans were not disrupting their efforts.

In the Shi'ite areas of the country, the US maintains a form of technical control, but most troops are stationed outside the cities and do not pacify or disrupt daily lives. There is no evidence to suggest that the American presence has reduced violence or prevented chaos. In fact, accepted wisdom has been that American entry into the cities would be a disruptive, not a pacifying, force.

Local law and order would not collapse if the US left.

Quite the contrary - US withdrawal would remove the key force currently preventing law and order in local communities.

Civil War?

Another form of chaos, less frequently invoked, is civil war, triggered by long-standing friction among the key groupings in Iraqi society. Such issues as the disputes over hegemony in Kirkuk, the degree of autonomy to be granted to the Kurdish provinces; and the Sunni and Kurdish fears that Shi'ite dominance would lead to tyranny of the majority are all real points of division that require attention whenever Iraq becomes a sovereign state.

The American presence, however, can do no more than postpone resolution of these frictions. And, while there is no predicting the course of the negotiations, there is some reason to be optimistic.

The key factor is the Shi'ites, since they are the overwhelming majority, and Sistani seems to be able to lead the Shi'ites toward compromise on these issues. Ironically, the greatest barrier to Sistani's leadership (besides the occupation) is the soaring popularity of Muqtada, which rests on his militant resistance to the US.

Though the Sadrists have consistently endorsed cooperation with Sunnis and Kurds, they appear to be more volatile and less committed to this stance than Sistani. The longer the US remains, therefore, the more the ongoing guerrilla war strengthens the position of the Sadrists and weakens the leadership of Sistani. As a consequence, the continuing US presence may be undermining the chances of a peaceful resolution on the key divisive issues in Iraqi society.

The final irony is that US success against the guerrillas would almost certainly guarantee long-term chaos in Iraqi society. The evacuation and destruction of Fallujah certainly suggests this, but the chaos there is so monumental that it is probably not typical. The situations in Samarra - successfully reconquered by the US just before Fallujah - and Mosul - the main battleground after Fallujah - are more representative. In each city, the fall and early winter of 2004 were marked by the ongoing guerrilla war, the constant disruption of city life, an absence of any orderly law enforcement, and degenerating economic and social conditions.

The US effort to destroy the insurgency can only succeed if it also destroys the ability of Iraqis to govern their own communities. Since the local clerics and tribal leaders have - from the very beginning - been instrumental in the resistance, defeating the guerrillas involves detaining or killing the leaders who form the backbone of local civil society.

This became apparent in the fall of 2004, before the demolition of Fallujah, when the US failed to convince "moderates" in key cities to negotiate truce agreements that delivered militant leaders to the Americans for arrest and punishment. The failure of these negotiations left the US with the choice of conceding rule to the insurgents or attempting to reconquer the cities and removing the local leadership. In Fallujah, the US military leadership decided that they could only accomplish this by demolishing much of the city and converting the vast majority of residents into refugees.

Contrary to the almost universally accepted mantra, the US is not preventing chaos in Iraq, it is creating it.

So far, Sadr City has escaped the frontal assaults visited upon Tal Afar, Samarra, Mosul and Fallujah. In some sense, the failure of the American military to complete the pacification of these cities may be Sadr City's main protection, since the US troops have been stretched thin by the ongoing fighting there.

Sadr City's status as the center of Shi'ite insurgency is another protection, since a full-scale attack there could well trigger insurrections throughout the currently quiescent Shi'ite areas of Iraq.

As this article is written, the US has honored a semi-official truce that keeps American troops out of the guerrilla-held area, and therefore allows for the Sadrist government to continue its rule of the nascent city-state. As long as this lasts, there will be "law and order" in Sadr City, even if the law is anti-American and the order is fundamentalist Islam.

MORE:

Comment: The Fictitious Specter Of Civil War

From: Shailmanman, Anti-Allawi Group
Sent: January 13, 2005

The article is indeed of great value. **We seldom come across an article on the social activities of the resistance movement.**

A few conclusions of note may be drawn. It just goes to show that a society that has discovered and practiced "civilization" for millenia can be counted upon to re-organize itself socially (with what it's got) under any circumstances.

This is the basis for our confidence that the specter of civil war (however hard some try to sell the idea) is and will remain fictitious.

The disintegration of a nation that has held together for centuries is also thereby difficult to contemplate in the long run, once external force presence is ended.

However, the statement "the Sadrist movement has dominated the area's politics for the past quarter century" is simply untrue and groundless. The movement did not exist at all prior to the occupation. In fact, it was naturally formed as an immediate reaction to the vacuum of absence of central authority created by the invasion.

Similar movements and groups sprouted immediately upon the fall of the former regime, in almost every district of Baghdad and in the provinces. These local groups assumed upon themselves social duties to guard their areas and public property within against looting, and organized local makeshift public services of health, transport, etc. **Most were later disbanded after a few weeks by the occupiers, because they represented a real threat to their designs to present imported collaborator parties as representatives of the people.**

The Sadrist movement was one of the few that survived and expanded, but by no means the only one. The reasons for its survival include the allegiance and respect of the Sadr city inhabitants to the present Sadr's deceased father and uncle, as well as the nature of the district itself being a rather closed but large slum area.

I hold that the overall moral of the story goes a long way to refute claims that US needs to remain the course and fix what it broke. First, thanks for the mess. Now at least leave the people alone to figure out their own solutions.

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

DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK

Bush Promises To Bring Troops Home Through Iran; Most Direct Route, President Says

February 9, 2005 The Borowitz Report

Under pressure to detail an exit strategy for Iraq, President George W. Bush said at a White House briefing today that he would not designate an exact timetable for a withdrawal of U.S. troops but added, "The fastest way to bring the troops home would be through Iran."

After reporters audibly gasped, the president explained that bringing the troops home through Iran would be "the most direct route" and produced driving directions from Mapquest to back up his claim.

But less than an hour after his remarks, Iranian president Mohammed Khatami blasted Mr. Bush's exit strategy, arguing that bringing U.S. troops home through Iran was far from the most direct route, and was, in fact, going totally in the wrong direction.

Using a map of the world and a magic marker, President Khatami showed that by traveling east rather than west, U.S. troops would have to circumnavigate the globe in order to reach their final destination.

In response, Mr. Bush acknowledged that it would be a long journey, but added, "If necessary, we'll stop in North Korea."

On a related subject, Mr. Bush said that the vote-counting in Iraq's historic presidential elections was not yet complete but that it looked like the winner would be actor Jamie Foxx, for his performance in "Ray."

"He's won everything else so far," Mr. Bush said.

NEED SOME TRUTH? CHECKOUT THE NEW 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)

Received:

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

From: Simon Assaf assafsimon@yahoo.co.uk

To: GI Special

Sent: Thursday, February 10, 2005

Subject: Are soldiers speaking?

I am investigating reports of massacres inside Fallujah during the December offensive. Do you know of any soldiers involved in the siege who are will to talk (even off the record) about any incidents of wanton killing of civilians.

I have spoken to a doctor who just returned form the city and he told me that many families were told to report to outside one of the main mosques in the city and then gunned down.

Other reports are that families were shot in cold blood inside their houses.

Thanks for your help.

[FYI, Simon Assaf is very active in the movement in England to bring all the troops home now. If he says off the record, he means off the record. T]

Received:

GI SPECIAL AVAILABLE IN ROMANIA

To: GI Special

Sent: February 09, 2005

Subject: Re: GI Special 3A40: Defend Sgt. Kevin Benderman

First of all, I am a fan of your news! I really appreciate your work and I wish you many-many readers.

I also ask you to subscribe to my group, elkorg3 on yahoogroups, and to send your news for my Romanian members.

All the best,

[GI Special is now available through the Yahoo elkorg3 group, Moderator Radu Iliescu. elkorg3-owner@yahoogroups.com]

Web Copies

For back issues see: GI Special web site at <http://www.militaryproject.org/>

The following that we know of have also posted issues:

<http://www.notinourname.net/gi-special/> ; www.gifightback.org ;

<http://www.albasrah.net/magalat/english/gi-special.htm>,

www.williambowles.info/gispecial

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