

# THE INSTITUTE ==FOR THE== STUDY OF WAR



## **Backgrounder #5**

### **Local Security: A Grassroots Effort, August 27, 2007**

**Will Waddell, Researcher, Institute for the Study of War**

What began in Anbar as a local movement of tribes is developing into a national phenomenon. In Baqouba, the erstwhile capital of al Qaeda's Islamic State of Iraq, between 40 and 60 al Qaeda operatives sought on August 15 to attack the southern Buhriz neighborhood of that city. As the first wave of attackers entered they were met with withering fire from a group of concerned citizens, calling themselves the 'Baqouba Guardians.' These volunteer fighters killed seven in that first clash, including two suicide bombers interdicted before they could reach their intended targets. A call for Coalition gunship support broke up the next attack even as it prepared for action. At the end of the fight some 21 al Qaeda terrorists were dead.

Not simply another militia group, the Guardians were formed in late July at the initiative of the townspeople and are sworn to cooperate with Coalition Forces. Additionally, the group is uniformed and registered in a U.S. Army database. Already they are credited with the identification of several al Qaeda suspects and the discovery of several caches of ordnance within the city. Perhaps even more significant is the group's goal – to join the established Iraqi Security Forces. Attacks against Coalition Forces have fallen off citywide by 79% and by 93% in the hotly contested western portion of the city.

The movement for 'Reconciliation' and an intense desire to restore security seem to have found grass roots traction elsewhere as well. In Taji, a 'Neighborhood Watch' association, 500 strong and urged on by tribal leadership, has helped the U.S. military discover multiple weapons caches and, on at least one occasion, stepped in to stop the illicit transport of arms through their town. The group, purely volunteer in nature, carries its own weapons (i.e. the one AK-47 each family is authorized to own by law), is biometrically monitored by Coalition Forces (the Biometric Automated Tool Set system ensures that criminals cannot enroll) and operates exclusively in a defensive capacity. Demonstrating a political savvy perhaps lacking in the early years of the war, Coalition Forces now rely heavily on tribal sheiks to manage this force and, similarly, hold the sheiks accountable when things do not go well. In fact, by using sheik clout within the community, the Taji Neighborhood Watch was able to conduct an extensive search of 113 homes, which yielded three substantial caches of small arms and ammunition. A local sheik secured the permission of the community to conduct the search prior to the operation.

Developments of a similar sort can also be seen in nearby Abu Ghraib, where one tribe's wide geographical span has brought in stories of the success of the Anbar 'Awakening' movement. Improvement, by all accounts, has been dramatic. As recently as May U.S. military personnel say that one could not even walk the streets of Abu Ghraib for fear of attack. Just days ago, however, the governor of Baghdad visited the area, which is boasting a markedly improved security situation. He is the first politician from Baghdad to visit the formerly strife-ridden county.

This improvement, like the others, has been largely effected by volunteers who are now taking an active role in the establishment and maintenance of security in their neighborhoods. Some are former insurgents; all are unpaid. Still, according to the U.S. military, they are swearing their loyalty to the Iraqi government and openly repudiating al Qaeda.

Recruitment into the Iraqi Police, which U.S. officials view as the necessary next step, has also increased sharply. To date in Abu Ghraib the Ministry of the Interior has screened some 2,400 candidates, of which 1,738 will begin training for entry into the police force. Those left over are being organized by the U.S. military into a Critical Infrastructure Security service (CIS) that will, in addition to providing employment to military-age males, free up more seasoned security personnel for offensive operations. LTC Peter Andrysiak, deputy commander for 1<sup>st</sup> BCT, 1<sup>st</sup> CAV Division, is especially pleased that the local tribes are now willing to aid in local security "as part of the legitimate government of Iraq." 1<sup>st</sup> BCT, 1<sup>st</sup> CAV reports that since the inception of the 'Reconciliation' movement and the emergence of the grass roots efforts, violence in their sector has diminished by nearly 60%.

In the town of al-Arafia the power of the 'concerned citizen' movement has perhaps been demonstrated most poignantly. A member of that town's concerned citizen group jumped in front of a suicide bomber as he attempted to strike a group of American soldiers and Iraqi civilians. The man, at the cost of his own life, saved four U.S. soldiers and eight of his countrymen.

In the Iraqi capital the citizens of the Adhamiyah district have likewise taken an active role in community security concerns. In early August approximately 80 residents, enraged by the news that terrorists had killed two relatives a local sheik, stormed the Abu Hanifa mosque - an action that led to the capture of 44 terrorists and three weapons caches. Now residents of Adhamiyah can be found signing up for positions in the Critical Infrastructure Guard Force, which will protect vital community facilities, like schools and hospitals.

The willingness of locals to take responsibility for their neighborhoods and reject al Qaeda has, it would seem, not gone unnoticed in Baghdad. As previously stated, the governor of Baghdad province is currently visiting Abu Ghraib with advisors from the Ministries of Health, Water, Electricity and Oil. He is there to discuss hastening various reconstruction projects. Talks with the Vice President are reportedly in the offing as well.