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Signaling Resolve, Democratization, and the First Battle of Fallujah

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ABSTRACT Perceptions and efforts to signal resolve can play an important role in counterinsurgency. The Coalition offensive against Fallujah in April 2004 demonstrates the limitations of relying on military force to signal resolve. The offensive catalyzed insurgent violence in Iraq and generated popular support for the insurgency. The Coalition prematurely halted the offensive because the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) could not maintain support for the Coalition in the face of popular outrage. Given the importance of democratizing Iraq and establishing a sovereign government, the objections of the IGC could not be ignored. Without Iraqi political support, military force ultimately signaled weakness instead of resolve.

KEY WORDS: counterinsurgency, Fallujah, Iraq

Perceptions matter in a guerrilla war, as in all conflict. Members of the population may join an insurgency because they perceive the government or occupying power as uncommitted to enduring the costs of counterinsurgency, or they may abandon the insurgency because they perceive insurgent violence as pointless in the face of a determined government or occupying power. Accordingly, signaling resolve – taking actions that indicate that the government or occupying power will bear the costs of suppressing the insurgency – plays a critical role in convincing potential insurgents of the futility of violence. Military force often seems the obvious means to signal resolve. Besides clearing a safe haven or killing a key leader, an offensive or raid can compel the population to recalculate whether they can endure the costs of violence and outlast the governing power.

The First Battle of Fallujah in April 2004 renders a cautionary lesson on using military force to signal resolve in an unconventional conflict. The United States launched the offensive into Fallujah in order to signal

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resolve and deter the population from supporting insurgent violence. Instead of signaling resolve, the offensive catalyzed popular support for insurgent violence in Iraq and threatened to turn the entire country against the Coalition.

Violence escalated in the First Battle of Fallujah because of the precipitous application of military force, unattended by the support of key Iraqi political bodies. The offensive into Fallujah generated a popular backlash against the Coalition. Iraqis viewed the offensive as an unjust act by a foreign occupier. The offensive represented a loss of freedom that made violence worthwhile. Set upon demonstrating rapid decisive action, Coalition leaders had failed to gain sufficient support from the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) prior to the offensive and had failed to implement measures to mitigate the impact of civilian casualties upon the council. Iraqi outrage at civilian casualties compelled the IGC to threaten to renounce support for the Coalition. The political opposition of the IGC forced the Coalition to cut off the offensive before it could signal resolve and deter Iraqis from supporting the insurgency.

Instead of resolve, the Coalition signaled weakness. The premature cessation of the offensive amounted to a military victory for the insurgents, one that induced Iraqis, specifically Arab Sunnis, to support violence rather than compromise. It convinced many Sunnis that the United States could not endure the costs of fighting. This change in perceptions compounded the loss of popular support from the initial offensive. Ensuing efforts to resolve the violence through political means fell apart because Sunnis had no interest in compromise.

The First Battle of Fallujah suggests that signaling resolve in an unconventional environment involves more than the use of military force. The oppressive effects of military force upon a local population can escalate violence and trigger popular support for insurgents, counteracting positive effects from signaling resolve. This alone should bring pause to advocates of military force. The counteractive effects of using military force can be compounded if military force is unaccompanied by robust preparations to strengthen political support from indigenous political bodies and protect those bodies from popular backlash against the escalation of violence. Rather than signal resolve, a military action that generates political opposition, or stalls due to political opposition, heartens insurgents and drives moderates to their cause.

Indigenous political opposition cannot always simply be ignored. Efforts to grant an occupied nation sovereignty or democratize a nation bolster the power of indigenous political bodies. An occupying power cannot disregard the opposition of key political bodies without discrediting those efforts toward sovereignty or democratization. In such circumstances, military force should be tailored to allow the support of

indigenous political bodies, even at the expense of rapid action. Military force may not signal resolve as much as the support of key political bodies that enables a government or occupying power to wield force unrelentingly.

This article derives from my experience advising the I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) in Iraq from February 2004 to February 2005. I MEF was responsible for Al Anbar province in western Iraq, which included Fallujah. The paper is divided into five sections. The first section reviews arguments regarding signaling resolve and using military force in an unconventional environment. The second section discusses the situation in Fallujah and Iraq before April 2004. This section emphasizes how Sunnis equivocated between supporting the insurgents and the Coalition. The third section examines the outbreak of the First Battle of the Fallujah and the military operations to the end of April. It shows that the precipitous use of military force caused a popular backlash against the Coalition. The fourth section looks at the Fallujah Brigade initiative. The section highlights how the cessation of the offensive into Fallujah emboldened Sunnis to reject compromise with the Coalition. The fifth section summarizes the role of political cohesion in signaling resolve.

Signaling Resolve and Military Force

The importance of perceptions and signaling resolve in conflict has received substantial academic attention.[1] Prominent scholars have outlined how conflicts persist because combatants perceive that their opponents have weak resolve or lesser military capability.[2] These perceptions cause combatants to prefer violence to compromise. Certain scholars have noted that perceptions and resolve in unconventional conflicts affect popular support for insurgent violence. In his detailed study of the province of Long An in the Vietnam War, Jeffrey Race described how insurgent successes compelled the population to support violence:

[1]James Morrow, 'The Strategic Setting of Choices: Signaling, Commitment, and Bargaining in International Politics', in David Lake and Robert Powell (eds.), *Strategic Choice and International Relations* (Princeton: PUP 1999), 86–96. James Fearon, 'Rationalist Explanations for War', *International Organization* 49/3 (Summer 1995), 371–414.

[2]James Fearon, 'Civil war since 1945: Some facts and a theory', Presentation to American Political Science Association, Washington DC, Sept. 2005, 25. Robert Powell, 'Bargaining and Learning While Fighting', *American Journal of Political Science* 48/2 (April 2004), 344–61.

> A number of people now became active in the movement who had previously been receptive to the idea of joining but had calculated that it was not expedient to do so. Just as in 1955 and 1956 the government's apparent strength and survival capacity caused many to join who would not otherwise have done so, so now the apparent defeat of the government caused a corresponding shift in the other direction.[3]

Similarly, the Israeli Defense Forces' hasty withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 has been cited as causing Palestinians to perceive violence as a useful means of attaining their aims.[4]

The United States initiated the First Battle of Fallujah in order to signal resolve. Key US leaders feared that the brutal Blackwater murders, if left unpunished, would embolden uncommitted Iraqis to join the insurgency. The premise that military force could build political support related to the Bush Doctrine and the 2002 US *National Security Strategy*, which stated:

> The presence of American forces overseas is one of the most profound symbols of the U.S. commitment to allies and friends. Through our willingness to use force in our own defense and in defense of others, the United States demonstrates its resolve to maintain a balance of power that favors freedom.[5]

Projecting power and demonstrating resolve would presumably cause states to bandwagon with the United States and domestic popular opinion to shift in favor of the US government. Accordingly, American leaders thought that military force would deter the Iraqi population from supporting the insurgency.[6]

Following the First Battle of Fallujah, the failure to signal resolve has sometimes been attributed to the lack of fortitude on the part of US decision-makers to complete the offensive.[7] A more determined use of military force would have signaled resolve and circumvented the escalation of violence. Bing West recounted Lieutenant General Ricardo

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[3]Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley: California UP 1973), 191.

[4]Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (NY: Columbia UP 2005), 125.

[5]*National Security Strategy of the United States*, Sept. 2002.

[6]Jonathan Monten, 'The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy', *International Security* 29/4 (Spring 2005), 148–49, 151.

[7]Michael Rubin, 'To Win in Fallujah', *FrontPageMagazine.com*, 18 May 2004.

Sanchez, commander of all Coalition forces in Iraq, arguing after the battle: 'The lesson is to use massive force.'[8] West himself stated: 'The singular lesson from Fallujah is clear: when you send our soldiers into battle, let them finish the fight.'[9]

No shortage of historians and political scientists argue to the contrary; military force, particularly heavy-handed offensives, only antagonizes the population and spurs an insurgency. Mia Bloom claims that most counterinsurgency tactics are counterproductive. In *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, she shows how Israeli tactics in the Al Aqsa Intifada, such as targeted assassinations, merely inflamed Palestinian public opinion and supplied continual recruits for Hamas and Islamic Jihad.[10] Similarly, Race argues in *War Comes to Long An* that security measures alone offend the population, cause them to side with the insurgents, and ultimately lead to an escalatory spiral of violence.[11]

A broad span of academic literature addresses the effect of domestic political support and democracy upon the use of military force. Political scientists have shown how signals of resolve tend to impress opponents if the governing and opposition parties are unified. Conversely, opponents give signals of resolve less credence if the government is unsupported.[12]

Other political scientists have focused specifically on insurgency. Most notably, Gil Merom argued in *How Democracies Lose Small Wars* that democracy undermines effective counterinsurgency. The effective use of force against insurgents necessitates brutality. Democracies allow domestic political opposition to form against that brutality, which can ultimately curtail the use of force. Successful use of force requires the domestic polity to tolerate casualties and brutality toward the enemy.[13] Merom did not relate political opposition to signaling resolve or consider opposition outside of a domestic context

[8]Bing West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah* (NY: Bantam Books 2005), 234.
[9]West, *No True Glory*, 319.
[10]Bloom, *Dying to Kill*, 17, 35, 37, 82, 90, 92, 195.
[11]Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 283.
[12]Kenneth Schultz, 'Domestic Opposition and Signaling in International Crises', *American Political Science Review* 92/4 (Dec. 1998), 829–44. Ronald Rogowski, 'Institutions as Constraints on Strategic Choice', in Lake and Powell *Strategic Choice and International Relations*, 134–35. Robert Putnam, 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games', *International Organization* 42/3 (Summer 1988), 427–60.
[13]Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (Cambridge: CUP 2003), 19, 24.

but he clearly thought that military force fails because political opposition precludes its full and sustained application.

In general, the literature focuses on domestic political opposition within a democracy. That said, the idea that the actions of a separate political body affect the use of military force parallels the role the IGC played with the Coalition. The establishment of democracy drove the US mission in Iraq. Although only an advisory body, the creation of a sovereign and democratic Iraqi government (the Iraqi Interim Government) slated for June 2004 depended upon the blessing of the IGC. Thus, just as a democracy cannot dissolve domestic opposition, the Coalition could not disregard the opposition of the IGC.

Fallujah and Al Anbar before April 2004

In early 2004, the insurgency in Iraq comprised two broad groups: Sunni resistance and jihadists.[14] The Sunni resistance formed the basis of the insurgency. Centered on local areas, the resistance included Ba'athists, the former military, and a wide pool of young and impoverished Sunni men. In early 2004, the Sunni population, including sheikhs, major civic leaders, and Sunni politicians, broadly supported the resistance, but also interacted with the Coalition.

The Sunni resistance had two general aims. First, they wanted the United States, viewed as an occupying power, to withdraw from Iraq. Cadres of Iraqis, many ex-soldiers, formed the resistance once the United States occupied Iraq. A combination of nationalism, sectarianism, and Islamic belief influenced Sunnis to take up arms against the US invasion. An Oxford Research International poll in March 2004 found that 66 percent of the people in central Iraq, which included the Sunni-dominant provinces, viewed the Coalition invasion as a humiliation for Iraqis rather than liberation. Fifty-seven percent opposed the presence of Coalition forces.[15] Heavy-handed Coalition actions, arbitrary raids, and collateral damage generated support for the resistance. Most notably, on 28 and 30 April 2003, US troops twice fired into mass gatherings in Fallujah, together resulting in 13 civilians dead and 91 wounded.[16] The two incidents spurred popular support for the resistance in Fallujah.

[14]For the sake of simplicity, this article refers to all Iraqi Sunni Arabs as 'Sunnis' even though many Kurds and jihadists were also Sunni. The paper also generally refers to members of the insurgency as 'insurgents' when not differentiating between Sunni resistance and jihadists.

[15]National Surveys of Iraq, Oxford Research International, March 2004. By comparison, 64 percent of southern Iraq (Shia dominant) viewed the invasion as liberation.

[16]Scott Johnson, 'Inside an Enemy Cell', *Newsweek*, 18 Aug. 2003.

Second, the Sunni resistance sought greater political power and economic benefits. The fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, followed by de-Ba'athification and the dissolution of the Iraqi Army, curtailed Sunni political influence and income. The military and bureaucracy had provided a large number of jobs and the Saddam regime had subsidized agriculture and industries. Estimates of unemployment in Al Anbar in early 2004 ranged from 40 to 60 percent.

Jihadists, epitomized by the Al Qaeda-affiliated network of Abu Musab al Zarqawi, comprised the extremist terrorists and foreign fighters. Iraqis as well as foreigners became jihadists. Like the Sunni resistance, jihadists sought to compel a US withdrawal; but only as a means of creating an anarchical environment conducive to supporting terrorist activity in the region. Ultimately, they hoped to establish a new caliphate centered in Iraq. Jihadists attacked Iraqi civilians (especially Shi'a) and the IGC, as well as Coalition forces. Zarqawi targeted Shi'a in order to create tension with the Sunnis and instigate a civil war.[17] Jihadists rejected any compromise with the Coalition or the Iraqi government. Their intention to found a religious state that exported terrorism clearly threatened US national security. In spite of ideological differences, jihadists and Sunni resistance generally cooperated against the Coalition occupation.

Jihadists and hard-line elements of the Sunni resistance perceived the United States as weak and believed that their aims were attainable through fighting. They thought that the United States could not endure a prolonged conflict and would shortly withdraw from Iraq.[18] Zarqawi wrote to Osama Bin Laden in early 2004: 'The enemy [the United States] is apparent, his back is exposed, and he does not know the land or the current situation of the mujahidin because his intelligence information is weak. We know for certain that these Crusader forces will disappear tomorrow or the day after.'[19] The letter also stated: 'It [the United States] is looking to the near future, when it hopes to disappear into its bases safe and at ease.'[20] Vietnam, Beirut, Somalia, and the 1991 Iraqi intifada added to the perception that the United States would withdraw and abandon its supporters in Iraq.

Many Sunnis did not perceive a US withdrawal as inevitable. Moderate Sunnis, largely composed of prominent sheikhs, civic leaders, and politicians, passively supported the resistance but still tentatively cooperated with the Coalition and were not committed to violence.

[17]Zarqawi letter, <www.cpa-iraq.org/transcripts/20040212_zarqawi_full.html>.
[18]Ahmed Hashim, 'The Insurgency in Iraq', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 14/3 (Aug. 2003), 9.
[19]Zarqawi letter.
[20]Ibid.

They chose to proceed with their daily lives, lending passive support rather than taking up arms. The Oxford Research International poll from March 2004 found that only 29 percent of the people in Sunni provinces viewed attacks on the Coalition as acceptable.[21] Fifty percent believed the Coalition should remain in Iraq until the establishment of a permanent government or the restoration of security, compared to 33 percent who wanted the Coalition to withdraw immediately. Zarqawi noted the non-violent position of moderate Sunnis with concern: 'they [the Shi'a-dominated IGC and the United States] have succeeded in splitting the regular Sunni from the Mujahidin. For example, in what they call the Sunni triangle, the army and police are spreading out… putting in charge Sunnis from the same region'.[22]

Even in Fallujah a small degree of interaction occurred. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and the 82nd Airborne Division set up the Fallujah Provisional Authority Council to run the city. It contained the few moderate Sunnis still willing to work with the Coalition.[23] The local 505th Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC) Battalion (national guard) showed some signs of cohesion and cooperated in training with the Coalition. They proudly bragged about nine jihadists they had killed in a major battle on 14 February.[24]

Growing Insurgent Strength

By early 2004, before the First Battle of Fallujah, insurgents had organized within cities – such as Fallujah, Ramadi, and Husaybah – in cells of four to five men, primarily from the local population.[25] They regularly conducted guerrilla attacks, albeit at a low intensity. However, the strength of the insurgency was growing. With limited forces, the 82nd Airborne Division could not regularly operate in most cities and towns, leaving the insurgents freedom of movement.[26] Indications of insurgent strength abounded in certain areas. Local tribally based Sunni resistance dominated the border city of Husaybah, a major smuggling point to and from Syria. In Ramadi, cadres of Sunni resistance had been fighting since summer 2003, funded by former regime leaders.

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[21]National Surveys of Iraq, Oxford Research International, March 2004.
[22]Zarqawi letter.
[23]Discussion with 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division, Camp Fallujah, 22 March 2004.
[24]Discussion with 505th ICDC Battalion, Camp Fallujah, 23 March 2004.
[25]Johnson, 'Inside an Enemy Cell'.
[26]Discussions with 2/4, 1st Marine Division Headquarters, Camp Pendleton, 22 March 2005.

The most ominous indications of insurgent strength came from Fallujah. Residents and city leaders supported the resistance, partly because of the April 2003 violence but also because of the city's religious fundamentalism and large population of Ba'athist and former Iraqi army officers.[27] The insurgents exploited the absence of Coalition forces. Jihadists centered much of their activity in Fallujah. The terrorist leaders that planned the devastating suicide bomber attack in Karbala in early March 2004 operated out of Fallujah. Abdullah al Janabi, an imam, helped coordinate local Sunni resistance activity with jihadist elements.[28] Jihadists were gaining dominance over the city. On 14 February, a group of jihadists, probably from the Zarqawi network, assaulted the police station, resulting in a major firefight. The 505th ICDC Battalion managed to defend the station but not before the police had been overwhelmed and 82nd Airborne reinforcements had been repulsed. Completely demoralized, the police resigned in droves. A series of major insurgent attacks followed during March, culminating in a Marine foray into the city on 26 March that generated heavy fighting against roughly 100 insurgents.[29]

The worsening situation suggested that Fallujah needed Marine forces lest the jihadists gain control and turn the city into a base for operations throughout Iraq. However, the situation remained stable enough for I MEF and the 1st Marine Division (its ground combat element) to consider a cautious plan for taking Fallujah and not rushing into a major battle. The I MEF leadership wanted to wait before clearing the city. Relationships needed to be formed with moderate Sunnis in order to mitigate popular resistance. Furthermore, information needed to be collected on insurgent activity. Better intelligence would reduce collateral damage through identifying precise targets. Marine officers strongly wanted to limit damage to the city and its inhabitants.[30] Finally, the two local ICDC battalions needed further time to train and build confidence. They resisted entering the city alongside Marines or even holding checkpoints in rear areas while Marines advanced. Iraqi participation would dilute the image of occupation.

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[27]Discussion with 505th ICDC Battalion, Camp Fallujah, 23 March 2005. Fallujah Planning Brief, Camp Fallujah, 16 March 2004. Charles Clover, 'Smiles and Shrugs Speak Volumes about Nature of Attacks on American Troops', *London Financial Times*, 25 Sept. 2003.

[28]3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division Targeting Meeting, Camp Fallujah, 8 March 2004.

[29]Discussions with 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, Camp Baharia, June 2004.

[30]I MEF Brief to Lieutenant General Sanchez, Camp Fallujah, 3 April 2004.

The Mahdi Uprising

As the situation in Al Anbar worsened, a threat to stability formed in southern Iraq. After the fall of the Saddam regime, the Shi'a population, located in southern Iraq, largely cooperated with the Coalition. Violent activity was minimal. Shi'a political and religious leaders worked with the Coalition in order to promote Shi'a power in the new Iraq. Shi'a political leaders and parties held 13 of 25 seats in the IGC. Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the most prominent Shi'a leader, commanded wide respect from the Shi'a population. Sistani embraced moderate beliefs and opposed violence. He usually cooperated with the Coalition, although he advocated a peaceful solution to the insurgency. In general, the support of the Shi'a population (the largest ethnic group in Iraq) lent tremendous credibility to the Coalition presence in Iraq.

The major exception to Shi'a support for the Coalition was Moqtada al Sadr, a vocal young cleric from Najaf. Sadr condemned the CPA and demanded an immediate US withdrawal from Iraq. He wanted to create an Islamic government in Iraq and gain personal political power. He tried to compete with Sistani for religious leadership of the Shi'a. Since the fall of the Saddam regime, Sadr had been making statements that verged on inciting violence. Poor and unemployed elements of Shi'a society served as a base of popular support. Sadr formed an armed militia, the 'Mahdi Army', estimated at 3,000 to 10,000 strong. Baghdad and every city in southern Iraq had a Mahdi Army contingent.

Throughout March, Sadr acted increasingly aggressively. In reaction, on 28 March Ambassador Paul Bremer, head of the CPA, shut down Sadr's newspaper, *al Hamza*. On 2 April, the Coalition arrested one of Sadr's key lieutenants. The following day widespread protests broke out. Then, on 4 April, violence shook Coalition control over southern Iraq. The Mahdi Army assaulted Coalition and ICDC compounds in Najaf, Nasiriyah, Al Kut, Baghdad, Al Amarah, and even Kirkuk. Literally thousands of Shi'a took part. Fighting spread to Basra, Karbala, and Hillah. The militia captured several police stations and city government centers. Sadr cast the uprising as a revolt against occupation. Thousands of Shi'a protested in major cities in the south. The ICDC and police in several cities largely disintegrated. By 8 April, the Coalition had lost control of Najaf. Over the next two months, the Coalition fought to regain control of the southern cities.

The Mahdi uprising imperiled Coalition control of the Shi'a south and the support of the Shi'a majority of Iraq. Sadr had easily overthrown Coalition control. Moderate Shi'a did not counter the moves of extremists, even if they opposed Sadr and his activities. Shi'a religious and political leaders objected to the military force used by the Coalition to reassert control over Najaf and Karbala. Although Sistani

reportedly preferred the Coalition to the Mahdi Army, the Ayatollah issued an official statement that condemned the US approach toward the Shi'a uprising. He called for both sides to pursue a peaceful resolution.[31] Sistani's equivocal approach did little to deter public participation in protests against the Coalition. These events placed the IGC and the Coalition in an extremely weak political position on the eve of the First Battle of Fallujah.

The First Battle of Fallujah

Before the Mahdi uprising broke out on 4 April, tensions between the Coalition and Sunni population escalated in Fallujah. On 31 March, insurgents and people in Fallujah murdered four Blackwater Corporation American civilian security contractors driving through the city and hung their bodies from the bridge over the Euphrates. Large crowds of people, including police, gathered, cheering and waving enthusiastically. The media televised the gruesome event. In the aftermath, local universities reportedly endorsed the violence and Fallujah imams refused to explicitly condemn the killings.[32]

The US government, CPA, and Combined Joint Task Force SEVEN (CJTF-7, the military command over Coalition forces in Iraq) viewed the murders as an inexcusable affront. They wanted the insurgent sanctuary in Fallujah permanently removed. The importance of resolve permeated the thought processes of key US leaders. They thought that the insurgents and Sunni population would scoff at the power of the United States if flagrant rejections of Coalition authority went unpunished. Inaction would signal weakness to the insurgents and Sunni population. Rapid military action would deter moderate Sunnis from supporting the insurgency. Lieutenant General Sanchez (commander of CJTF-7) wanted Lieutenant General James Conway (commander of I MEF) to immediately enter the city.[33] General John Abizaid, commander of US Central Command (CENTCOM), felt I MEF's March plan to clear Fallujah would signal weakness internationally.[34] The plan allowed too much time to pass while building intelligence and developing Iraqi forces. Ambassador Paul Bremer told Sanchez, 'We've got to react to this outrage or the enemy will conclude we're

[31]Rajiv Chandrasekaran, 'Anti-U.S. Uprising Widens in Iraq', *Washington Post*, 8 April 2004.
[32]Fallujah Fatwa, Hamza Abbas Muhana and Muhammad Mutlik Obeid, 1 April 2004.
[33]L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (NY: Simon & Schuster 2006), 317.
[34]West, *No True Glory*, 59.

irresolute.'[35] Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld also pressed for immediate military action.[36] On 1 April, Rumsfeld relayed the direction for Coalition forces to enter Fallujah. CJTF-7 dubbed the operation 'Vigilant Resolve'.

Bremer wanted to use military force to signal resolve in southern Iraq as well. He told key US national security officials, including Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet, 'we must respond forcefully to Muqtada. There are lots of people sitting on various fences to see how we will react (other militia, tribes, etc.) – and all those pleasant folks in Fallujah. If we show weakness now we will be pushing Iraq to civil war.'[37] He later repeated this argument to the secretary of defense, secretary of state, and national security advisor.

The decision to attack Fallujah appears to have been reached with little consultation with the IGC. The Fallujah crisis and the Mahdi uprising placed the council under great stress. Supporters of Sunni ministers disparaged the offensive against Fallujah while supporters of Shi'a ministers disparaged military action in the southern cities. On 5 April, Bremer met with the Iraqi Ministerial Committee for National Security. He described the ministers as 'wobbly'. Most of the ministers resisted endorsing firm action against Sadr.[38] Apparently, CPA took no further actions to build political support in the IGC, or with Sistani, for the offensive into Fallujah.

I MEF was also not prepared to conduct a major offensive into Fallujah. Lieutenant General Conway and Major General James Mattis, commander of the 1st Marine Division, preferred to wait longer. The problems that had been identified in March – poor relationships with moderate Sunnis, inadequate intelligence collection, and undeveloped Iraqi forces – still existed. The heavy fighting encountered during the 26 March foray reinforced the importance of careful and thorough preparations. With just two Marine infantry battalions and two shaky ICDC battalions in the immediate vicinity of Fallujah, Mattis possessed few forces to conduct a major urban offensive, especially without thorough preparations. In spite of these concerns, he obeyed orders and created a plan for two battalions to advance into the city. CJTF-7 assigned its available Iraqi forces to I MEF for the operation. These forces included the only two trained Iraqi army battalions and the 36th ICDC Commando battalion.

[35]Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 317.
[36]West, *No True Glory*, 7.
[37]Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 322.
[38]Ibid., 325–6.

In their haste to launch an offensive, Coalition leaders paid insufficient attention to minimizing civilian casualties. Conway and certain members of the I MEF staff recognized that the battle risked sparking wider Iraqi resistance and that civilian casualties could turn international and Iraqi public opinion against the Coalition. However, the need to expedite the attack meant that measures could not be taken to evacuate all civilians from the city, which would have been the best means of minimizing civilian casualties, or construct an information operations campaign to mitigate the impact of civilian casualties upon international and Iraqi public opinion. I MEF underestimated the presence and effectiveness of insurgent propagandists in the city. Furthermore, instructions from Sanchez, Abizaid, and Rumsfeld deemphasized the importance of minimizing civilian casualties by endorsing harsh military action.[39] The mood within I MEF shifted from working with the population to a combat mindset necessary for fighting an urban battle.

On 3 April, the two battalions moved into the outskirts of the city, setting up blocking positions and preparing to attack. Media broadcasts and the movement of forces warned the local population that an attack was imminent. Major firefights erupted with the insurgents. Jihadists and members of the Sunni resistance fought together. A large number of Sunnis sided with the insurgents, especially in the Fallujah area. Locals moved in large groups from their homes to makeshift fighting positions in buildings and mosques. Mosques called Iraqis to defend the city. Outlying villages were emptied of men.[40] Iraqis poured into Fallujah from western citys. Insurgents formed into groups as large as a platoon. Total insurgent strength in Fallujah probably reached roughly 2,000 men. Although over 65,000 residents fled, the majority stayed in the city.[41]

Why did Sunnis flock to join the insurgency? Marine offensive preparations provoked Iraqis who would not have normally turned to violence. People from Fallujah told news reporters that the majority of locals had been unwilling to fight the Coalition in 2003 but that sentiment changed in April 2004.[42] People saw Coalition offensives in southern Iraq and Fallujah as an attack on their whole society. Iraqis in Fallujah and Ramadi considered resisting the occupation to be a right.

[39]I MEF Brief to General Abizaid, Camp Fallujah, 9 April 2004.
[40]Civil Affairs Mission, Regimental Combat Team 1 Civil Affairs Detachment, Fallujah, 2 May 2004.
[41]I MEF Operational Planning Team on Displaced Persons, Camp Fallujah, 16 April 2004.
[42]Nicholas Riccardi, 'A Peacemaker Runs the Gauntlet in Fallouja', *Los Angeles Times*, 16 April 2004.

A large number of Sunnis joined the insurgents before the Coalition offensive even commenced. Dissatisfaction with their political and economic conditions further justified resistance. The Coalition had not improved their standard of living since the fall of the regime and the shift of political power to the Shi'a disgusted Sunnis.

Not all Sunnis joined the insurgency at this point. Moderate Sunnis outside of Fallujah wavered over whether to side with the Coalition or the insurgency. They waited for the outcome of the crisis to take sides. People were both frightened by the insurgents and offended by the offensive but they were still willing to work with the Coalition. Even in Fallujah, a few sheikhs and imams told the people not to take up arms. Refugees from the city waved at Marines and interacted with them in a friendly manner.[43] Many locals hid in their homes, waiting for the fighting to end.[44]

The Marine advance into Fallujah officially began on 6 April with a limited two battalion attack. The battalions encountered widespread resistance from insurgents fighting in groups of 8 to 30 men. First Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment captured the southeast quadrant of the city. A limited foray by 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment into the northeast corner of Fallujah (the Jolan district) resulted in 36 hours of intense fighting, which drew the battalion into the outer edge of buildings.[45] Heavy fighting continued over the next three days. Insurgents often coordinated mortars, volleys of rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and machine-gun fire in defense of positions.

The Iraqi forces assigned to the offensive lost their nerve. One Iraqi army battalion deserted and the other refused to deploy. The two ICDC battalions largely deserted as well, rather than fight their fellow Sunnis in Fallujah. Many actually joined the insurgents. Only the 36th Commando Battalion did not dissolve, benefiting from close integration with US Special Forces.[46]

The intensity of the fighting caused Mattis to reinforce the Fallujah area with four more battalions and a regimental headquarters before the end of April, removing nearly all forces from elsewhere in the I MEF area of operations, with the exception of Ramadi and Husaybah.

The fighting in Fallujah quickly spread to most of Al Anbar. As I MEF attacked into Fallujah on 6 April, the Sunni resistance mounted

[43]I MEF Brief to General Abizaid, Camp Fallujah, 9 April 2004.

[44]Discussion with CPA Representative to Fallujah and Regimental Combat Team 1, Camp Fallujah, 8 April 2004.

[45]Comments by Lieutenant Colonel Gregg Olson, RCT-1 After Action Review, Camp Fallujah, 5 May 2004.

[46]Significant numbers of men lost the will to continue fighting after one week of combat, though.

a set of ambushes in Ramadi that rapidly turned into a popular uprising. Coalition preparations to attack Fallujah probably encouraged the insurgents to act. Some came from outside citys to fight. As in Fallujah, mosques called men to arms. Locals, incensed over Fallujah, readily joined the fighting. The insurgents fought in groups of four to ten men. The Marines lost 12 killed and 30 wounded on 6 April. Fighting in Ramadi continued until 10 April when a major clearing operation broke insurgent resistance for the time being. Overall, the Marines estimated that they killed 300 insurgents.[47]

In rural areas, insurgents conducted massed ambushes on Coalition supply lines, choking the major supply routes surrounding Fallujah. Insurgents knocked out convoys around Fallujah, Ramadi, Abu Ghurayb, and North Babil province. Supplying Coalition forces became difficult until I MEF devised new convoy techniques.

Political Opposition

Overcoming resistance in Fallujah demanded the use of air strikes, artillery, and tanks. Their firepower accidentally killed civilians and damaged buildings and mosques. The media estimated total civilian deaths as high as 700, whereas the Iraqi Minister of Health gave a lower figure of 220 deaths.[48] Firm evidence for both of these figures is lacking. Bing West calculated that air strikes destroyed over 75 buildings.[49]

Civilian casualties were not the result of any malicious Coalition intent but a function of the firepower necessary to overcome insurgent positions. The large size of insurgent units meant that they could lay down a heavy volume of fire. Insurgent defensive positions were too strong to be taken via maneuver without support from artillery, mortars, air strikes, or tanks. An axiom of warfare since World War I has been that a well-manned position defended by automatic weapons cannot be taken without risk of prohibitive casualties in the absence of artillery fire or air strikes. The urban environment of Fallujah made taking such positions even more difficult. Given these constraints, US Marine units followed their combined arms doctrine to apply suppressive firepower in assaulting insurgent positions under fire. Marines applied firepower selectively against discrete targets rather than lavishly and indiscriminately as had been the case in the Vietnam War. Nevertheless, precision weapons struck some insurgent positions in

[47]Discussions with 2nd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division Headquarters, Camp Pendleton, 22 March 2005.
[48]Camp Fallujah, I MEF Refugee Planning Meeting, 20 April 2004.
[49]West, *No True Glory*, 225, 315.

mosques and firepower unintentionally killed and injured some civilians.[50]

Insurgents, the Iraqi people, and the Arab media greatly exaggerated civilian casualties. Insurgents spread rumors of Coalition atrocities and aggressively distributed false information of civilian casualties to the media and local people. Locals spoke of dead in the streets and ambulances being shot up. Doctors from Fallujah declared hundreds had been killed in the first few days of the battle. Children told the press of their parents being gunned down and their homes destroyed. The Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya television channels showed footage of US air strikes and Iraqi bodies. They reported wounded civilians even before the offensive had begun.[51] During the battle, Arab journalists claimed that 40 civilians had been killed in an air strike against a mosque when in fact no civilians had died.[52] Al Jazeera played stock footage of injured civilians from previous battles and claimed the footage was from Fallujah.[53] Largely because of inadequate time, I MEF had not prepared a solid plan to issue its own news releases that would preempt the false information coming out of the insurgency and the Arab media.

Collateral damage upset the Arab media and the Iraqi people, especially televised footage of air strikes on mosques and images of wounded civilians. Iraqis felt the Coalition was killing and attacking Iraqis indiscriminately. Sunnis across Iraq protested US tactics.[54] Al Anbar Governor Abdul Karim Burjis received calls from his contacts throughout the Arab world, who asked why the Coalition was butchering the people of Fallujah. The provincial council called for a cease-fire.

Fallujah redefined the resistance for Sunnis. For many, the offensive justified jihad against the Coalition. An International Republican Institute poll in Baghdad in early April showed that people saw the offensive in Fallujah as a disproportionate response to the killing of four contractors.[55] Collateral damage spurred larger numbers of Sunnis to join the insurgency. According to many Iraqis, people that would not

[50]Ron Hassner, 'Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground', *Washington Quarterly* 31/1 (Spring 2006), 156. Christine Hauser, 'War Reports From Civilians Stir Up Iraqis Against U.S.', *New York Times*, 14 April 2004.

[51]Interview with Ahmad Mansur, Al Jazeera correspondent in Fallujah, Al Jazeera Satellite Channel Television, 5 April 2004.

[52]Chandrasekaran, 'Anti-U.S. Uprising Widens in Iraq'.

[53]Comments by Lieutenant General James Conway, Camp Fallujah, 29 April 2004. Discussion with Lieutenant General John Sattler, Camp Pendleton, 10 Nov. 2004.

[54]Chandrasekaran, 'Anti-U.S. Uprising Widens in Iraq'.

[55]International Republican Institute Poll, April 2004. Karl Vick and Anthony Shadid, 'Fallujah Gains Mythic Air: Siege Redefines Conflict for Iraqis in Capital', *Washington Post*, 13 April 2004.

otherwise oppose the Marine presence in Fallujah took up arms because of the destruction of homes and injury to family members.[56] On 8 April, roughly 1,500 Iraqis staged a protest at the cloverleaf just outside the eastern entrance to the city, shouting anti-American slogans and carrying pro-insurgent banners.[57] The crowd included Shi'a waving Sadr propaganda as well as Sunnis. This marked the first recorded occasion that Sadr propaganda had been seen in the Fallujah area. Fallujah was becoming perceived as not merely a Sunni, but a national, event.

The offensives against Fallujah and the Mahdi Army made the Coalition into a mutual enemy for many Sunnis and Shi'a. Shi'a involved in the Mahdi uprising found common cause with the insurgents fighting against the Coalition in the Sunni Triangle. Shi'a empathized with images of wounded women and children in Fallujah.[58] Shi'a mosques called people to help the Sunnis in Fallujah. Similarly, certain Sunni neighborhoods in Sadr City actively assisted the Mahdi Army.[59] Graffiti in one Sunni neighborhood of Baghdad signified the moment of common cause: 'Long live Fallujah's heroes'; 'Down with America and long live the Mahdi Army'; 'Long live the resistance in Fallujah'; and 'Long live the resistance'.[60]

The crisis came to a head when the IGC called for cease-fire negotiations in Fallujah. Members received tremendous pressure from their supporters to oppose the offensive. The IGC was furious that it had not been fully consulted prior to the initiation of the offensive. The council refused to condemn the insurgent defense of Fallujah. Division marked a council meeting on 7 April, as certain members attacked the Coalition for its heavy-handedness. Later, Sunni members, including Hachem Al Hassani (representing the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party) and the prominent Sunni Ghazi al Yawr, threatened to leave the council if the Coalition did not initiate cease-fire negotiations with representatives of Fallujah.[61] Even Adnan Pachachi, a staunch US ally, openly criticized the offensive. Some of the members began negotiating with Fallujah city leaders. In the end, only Iraq's human rights minister resigned but the discontent voiced by the council members threatened the cohesion

[56]Alissa Rubin, 'Fallujah's Fighters Trade Weapons, Not Allegiances', *Los Angeles Times*, 9 May 2004.
[57]Pamela Constable, 'Marines Try to Quell "A Hotbed of Resistance"', *Washington Post*, 9 April 2004.
[58]James Hider, 'We All Fight Together, Rebels Proclaim', *The Times* (London), 8 April 2004.
[59]Hider, 'We All Fight Together, Rebels Proclaim'.
[60]Vick and Shadid, 'Fallujah Gains Mythic Air'.
[61]I MEF Brief to General Abizaid, Camp Fallujah, 9 April 2004. Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 333–34.

of the council.[62] Simultaneously, the Shi'a Minister of the Interior resigned and a prominent Shi'a member of the IGC suspended his membership. Both were under pressure from the Mahdi uprising. These resignations and threats promised to fragment the IGC. Such an event would cripple democratization of Iraq and paint the Coalition as an occupier oppressing the Iraqi people against the will of its leaders. As a result, Iraqi, international, and domestic US opinion would likely turn against the mission in Iraq. Late on 8 April, Bremer began working toward a cease-fire in Fallujah.[63]

With violence spreading throughout Iraq, the US government halted the offensive. On 9 April, CJTF-7 ordered I MEF to cease offensive operations but hold and defend its positions within the city. Although initially meant to be only a 24-hour pause to relieve Iraqi domestic political pressure on the IGC, the US government never resumed the offensive.[64]

The United States faced international political pressure as well, although the bulk of it appears to have transpired after the unilateral cease-fire. Lakhdar Brahimi, UN special representative to Iraq, disapproved of the offensive and threatened to quit his mission to construct a plan for the selection of an interim government.[65] The British government strongly pressured the United States to find a solution to the situation other than continuing the military offensive. The British Foreign Office and military criticized US tactics as heavy-handed. On 16 April, Prime Minister Tony Blair met with President George W. Bush. He said that renewing the offensive threatened to break up the Coalition.[66]

The 9 April cease-fire halted the Marine advance but fighting continued, including several firefights involving 30 to 100 insurgents.[67] Insurgents also launched battles with Coalition forces in towns near Fallujah, such as Khalidiyah, Karma, and Abu Ghurayb. Violence even spread northwest along the Euphrates to Husaybah, where roughly 150 insurgents fought a major battle with Marines on 17 April. Apparently, local resistance worked with the Zarqawi network to mount the attack,

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[62]Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (NY: Henry Holt 2005), 234.

[63]Operational Planning Team on MEF Operational Plan, Camp Fallujah, 8 April 2004. Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 333.

[64]I MEF Brief to General Abizaid, Camp Fallujah, 9 April 2004.

[65]Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 326–27.

[66]Lieutenant General James Conway, Address to I MEF Command Element, Camp Fallujah, 29 April 2004. West, *No True Glory*, 159–60.

[67]Comments by Lieutenant Colonel Gregg Olson, RCT-1 After Action Brief, Camp Fallujah, 5 May 2005.

which may have been planned in coordination with the fighting in Fallujah.

Different insurgent groups coordinated attacks and moved fighters across the entire Sunni triangle. Insurgents from Ramadi, Mosul, Tikrit, and Kirkuk supported Fallujah with arms, supplies, and men. The insurgency no longer consisted of disconnected cells in each city or city operating independently. In Fallujah itself, a new group of insurgent leaders had emerged. Janabi acted as the predominant leader, but former Iraqi generals helped guide the defense. New jihadist leaders also emerged, most notably Omar Hadid, who won fame for personal bravery on the front line.

By the middle of April, the use of military force to suppress the insurgency in Fallujah appeared an utter failure. Military force had escalated the conflict, inspiring previously quiescent Iraqis to take up arms. The Oxford Research International poll from March 2004 had found that 49 percent of all polled (throughout Iraq) viewed the invasion as a humiliation for the Iraqi people rather than liberation. A new poll in late April, by a different polling agency, found that 89 percent of Iraqis considered the Coalition to be an occupying force.[68] The Oxford poll had also shown that only 26 percent of Iraqis thought the US should withdraw immediately. The new poll found that 76 percent of all Iraqis thought the US should move to bases away from the citys after the transfer of sovereignty in June.[69] Popular discontent undermined the Iraqi political support necessary to complete the military action. Tactical success meant nothing without this popular support.

The Creation of the Fallujah Brigade

The Coalition and I MEF gradually turned to addressing the insurgency through political means, culminating in the formation of the Fallujah Brigade. In the end, though, a political solution failed because, after the unilateral cease-fire on 9 April, Sunnis viewed the Coalition as weak and compromise as unnecessary, creating an atmosphere where jihadists gained dominance. The First Battle of Fallujah had signaled US weakness instead of resolve.

After the 9 April 'cease-fire' the IGC began negotiating with moderate Sunni leaders from Fallujah and Ramadi, most of whom interacted with the Sunni resistance. The Coalition wanted a cessation of violence and the locals to turn over insurgent heavy weapons and foreign fighters within the city. The I MEF leadership viewed the

[68]ICRSS Poll, 20–29 April 2004. The poll was conducted in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Babil, Diyala, Ramadi, and Sulaymaniya. It surveyed 1,530 households.
[69]ICRSS Poll, 20–29 April 2004.

negotiations skeptically because insurgent attacks continued despite the fact that offensive operations had already ended. Reports from the negotiations suggested that Sunni leaders were not interested in ending the violence, but rather in capitalizing on Coalition concessions.[70] They repeatedly denied the presence of foreign fighters within the city and said just a few wayward criminals perpetrated the violence. Additional lines of negotiations emerged as different Coalition entities made contact with various Sunnis from Fallujah, who claimed authority. Reportedly, by 15 April, President Bush sought an option other than restarting the offensive and risking political progress in Iraq or withdrawing from Fallujah and leaving the insurgents in control.[71] Nevertheless, negotiations dragged on with little movement toward ending the fighting.

General Conway resolved the dilemma by establishing the Fallujah Brigade, a unit of Sunni former military recruited to enforce order in the city and root out foreign fighters. The Fallujah Brigade was an ambitious attempt to neutralize the insurgency by addressing the major grievances behind the Sunni resistance. Conway disliked holding static positions in the city and facing persistent heavy fighting and steady Marine casualties. Realizing that the US government would never restart the offensive, he sought an option that would save Marine lives while also providing security to the city. Conway and his chief of staff, Colonel John Coleman, perceived a division between jihadists and Sunni resistance within the city. They understood that opposition to a foreign occupier united the resistance and the jihadists. However, they perceived that the Sunni resistance had no interest in creating anarchy or a fundamentalist state.[72] If the Coalition withdrew and enabled the Sunnis to provide their own security, then the resistance would see no reason to continue the insurgency. Hopefully, the resistance would turn on the jihadists, who otherwise perpetrated violence harmful to the Sunni community.

The idea of the Fallujah Brigade matured when the director of the nascent Iraqi National Intelligence Service, General Shehwani, proposed establishing a local Sunni force around a reliable former Iraqi army general and other dependable officers. Conway thought that the old Sunni officers of the Iraqi Army might be a means to create stability in Fallujah. Perhaps the former soldiers, with no interest in terrorism or

[70]I MEF Commanders' Discussion, Camp Fallujah, 14 April 2004.
[71]Lieutenant General James Conway, Address to I MEF Command Element, Camp Fallujah, 29 April 2004. Discussion with CPA Representative to Fallujah, Camp Fallujah, 30 April 2004.
[72]I MEF Commanders' Discussion, Camp Fallujah, 26 April 2004.

religious extremism, would root out the jihadists. Meanwhile, the Coalition would start funneling in civil assistance to rebuild the city.[73]

Besides pacifying Fallujah, Conway and Coleman wanted the brigade to become a vehicle for reversing Sunni marginalization and bringing Sunnis into the political process.[74] Coleman felt that military force was not the key to success. The only means of defeating the insurgency, from his perspective, was to allay their political and economic concerns.[75] He believed the Fallujah Brigade could help do so by giving the resistance prestige within the Sunni community – building their position against the jihadists – as well as a stake in interacting with the Coalition and IGC. The old Iraqi Army embodied one of the most revered structures in Iraq. An Iraqi army formation would draw Sunnis from Fallujah to its colors and regenerate nationalist bonds. I MEF could try to place the brigade under the Ministry of Defense, which would give the Sunnis a direct role in the military.

Economic assistance and advocacy of Sunni political concerns to the CPA could further encourage the moderates to join the political process of building an independent Iraqi government. Using these tools, Conway and Coleman believed the Sunnis might be brought back into the Iraqi political process and induced to reduce their military activity. They pursued the Fallujah Brigade initiative cautiously, however, always aware that former Iraqi officers might prove unreliable and that the entire enterprise might need to scrapped at any moment.

On 25 April, Conway began negotiations with five former Iraqi generals, identified by Shehwani. I MEF and the Iraqi generals shared a common goal of ending violence in Fallujah and removing terrorists from Iraq. The generals agreed with the concept of forming a locally recruited brigade to secure Fallujah.[76] After the meeting, one Iraqi general, Brigadier Abdullah Muhamdi, and some other former officers entered Fallujah and obtained the sanction of Sunni resistance leaders to form a brigade. The next day the generals reported a battalion could be formed in three days, under the command of former Staff General Muhammed Jasim Saleh.[77] Apprised of the situation, CENTCOM gave I MEF the authority to create the Fallujah Brigade. Negotiations rapidly came to an agreement that the Marines would withdraw from their foothold in the city, the insurgents would cease attacks in the area, and the Fallujah Brigade would pacify the city. The Fallujah Brigade

[73]Comments by Lieutenant General James Conway, Camp Fallujah, 17 April 2004. Comments by Lieutenant General James Conway, Camp Fallujah, 26 April 2004.
[74]I MEF Brief to General John Abizaid, Camp Fallujah, 5 May 2004.
[75]Colonel John Coleman, Talk to I MEF staff, Camp Fallujah, 10 March 2004.
[76]Comments by Lieutenant General James Conway, Camp Fallujah, 26 April 2004.
[77]Ibid., 9 May 2004.

leadership promised to fight jihadists in the city.[78] I MEF and the leadership of the Fallujah Brigade set four objectives for the brigade: ending attacks on the Coalition, securing heavy weapons from the city, obtaining an apology for the American contractor murders, and capturing all the foreign fighters in the city.

On 30 April, Saleh led roughly 300 uniformed new soldiers of the Fallujah Brigade out of Fallujah and met Conway about 100 meters away at the cloverleaf. The soldiers had been recruited over the past few days. Any training originated with the old Iraqi Army. Many of the soldiers had been fighting the Coalition days earlier.[79] The 1st Marine Division withdrew to the outskirts of the city. Insurgent leaders ordered a cessation of attacks in the city and its immediate outskirts. Imam Janabi enforced a moratorium on operations in the vicinity of Fallujah. The imams forbade the firing of weapons within the city or armed presence on the streets. They implied that Fallujah had been successfully defended, stating 'There have been several efforts to defend the city from the inside and outside and we need to continue doing that against any aggressors, and it is important to keep our unity.'[80] The Fallujah Brigade would rapidly grow to roughly 2,000 men, largely Sunni resistance from the city area. The Coalition paid for their service.

The US government accepted the brigade as the best option yet for resolving the crisis surrounding Fallujah. The IGC generally opposed the brigade because it created an armed Sunni militia. Days after the formation of the brigade, the IGC forced the removal of Saleh because of his connections to the Saddam regime. Bremer and the CPA completely distrusted the Fallujah Brigade as well.[81]

From the point of view of the insurgents, they had attained their major military objective of keeping the Coalition out of Fallujah. They declared victory and initiated a propaganda and rumor campaign that spread that message.[82] Both the insurgents and moderate Sunnis (those Sunnis passively supporting the resistance yet open to interacting with the Coalition in March 2004) revised their calculations of the likelihood of the Coalition persevering in Iraq. Moderate Sunnis had expected the Coalition to overcome insurgent opposition easily. When

[78]Ibid., 29 April 2004.

[79]Discussion with Captain Rodrick McHaty (I MEF Foreign Area Officer), Camp Fallujah, 30 April 2004.

[80]Friday Prayer Messages in Fallujah, Translated by Captain Rodrick McHaty, 9 May 2004.

[81]Comments by Colonel John Coleman, Camp Fallujah, 1 May 2004. Discussion with CPA Representative to Fallujah, Camp Fallujah, 2 May 2004. Lieutenant General Sanchez Briefing, Camp Fallujah, 9 June 2004.

[82]Norland, Masland, and Dickey, 'Unmasking the Insurgents', 27.

the insurgents survived, they perceived the Coalition as weak. Intelligence reports repeatedly stated that insurgents and moderate Sunnis felt that Americans withdrew because they had been defeated. The media reported that Fallujah residents believed that the resistance taught the Coalition that the city could not be taken.[83] One former general said that defeating the Americans in Fallujah represented only the first step in evicting them entirely from Iraq.[84]

Moderate Sunnis stopped resisting the insurgency, deciding that it might defeat the Coalition.[85] Fallujah Brigade meetings often included extended espousals of insurgent strength by prominent Sunni leaders.[86] Moderate Sunnis feared the repercussions of siding with the Coalition and the Iraqi government when the United States departed and they faced the insurgents alone.[87] Arab Americans on the 1st Marine Division staff could not identify any group of Sunnis within the city that was willing to compromise.[88]

The deleterious effects of the cease-fire spread beyond Fallujah. A Kurdish member of the IGC, Mahmoud Othman, stated: 'Fallujah has been given to the very people the Americans were fighting.... This sends a bad signal to Iraqis... it encourages the pro-Saddam people and Ba'athists to carry out more [insurgent] actions in other parts of the country.'[89] Journalist Anthony Shadid wrote that the defense of Fallujah reached mythic proportions. Iraqis compared Fallujah to the Battle of Karameh, where the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Jordanian Army repulsed an Israeli Defense Forces incursion after the Six Day War. They perceived that the insurgents in Fallujah had forced an embarrassing withdrawal upon the United States.[90] In Ramadi, Khalidiyah, and Karma, moderate Sunnis stopped interacting with the Coalition partly because they doubted that it could protect them or ultimately defeat the insurgency.[91]

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[83]West, *Not True Glory*, 227.
[84]Daniel Williams, 'Despite Agreement, Insurgents Rule Fallujah', *Washington Post*, 7 June 2004.
[85]Discussion with RCT-1, Camp Fallujah, 19 May 2004. Discussion with 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, Camp Fallujah, 26 April 2004.
[86]Comments by Lieutenant General James Conway, Camp Fallujah, 29 April 2004.
[87]Discussion with 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, Camp Fallujah, 24 April 2004.
[88]West, *No True Glory*, 190.
[89]Rubin, 'Fallujah's Fighters Trade Weapons, Not Allegiances'.
[90]Vick and Shadid, 'Fallujah Gains Mythic Air'.
[91]Discussions with 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st US Division, Camp Ramadi, 14 June 2004. Discussions with 1st Battalion, 34th Armored Regiment, Camp Habbaniyah, July 2004. Discussions with 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, Camp Mercury, 1 Aug. 2004.

The leadership of the Fallujah Brigade, headed after the ouster of Saleh by Major General Mohammed Latif, met with Marine officers nearly every other day to review progress on the remaining objectives of the cease-fire – turn-in of heavy weapons, an apology for the contractor murders, and the capture of foreign fighters. The meetings, originally meant to review and plan military operations against the jihadists, rapidly dissolved into negotiations between the resistance and the Marines. The Sunni resistance, particularly Janabi, strongly influenced the brigade leadership. Sometimes Janabi directed the content of their negotiating statements.[92] I MEF had little control over the Fallujah Brigade, other than payments. The brigade leadership refused an embedded advisory team, training, or any combined operations.[93]

Still, at first the Fallujah Brigade initiative met some success. Generous allotments of economic assistance induced Sunni insurgents to break from the jihadists, who opposed any dealings with the Coalition. Sunnis throughout Iraq praised the Fallujah Brigade as a model for stability. Several cities wanted to form their own brigade. On 10 May, Latif convinced Janabi to allow General Mattis to drive a convoy into the city and meet with the mayor at his compound. Generals Latif and Abdullah exerted all of their influence to prevent jihadists and hardliners from attacking the convoy, reportedly physically stopping some insurgents from attacking.[94] On 20 May, the mayor of Fallujah apologized for the contractor murders. A few days later, Latif negotiated the release of three NBC journalists detained by jihadists in the city.[95]

Despite this success, the Fallujah Brigade leadership never produced significant numbers of heavy weapons or any foreign fighters. They never even allowed civil affairs teams into the city. The Sunni resistance leaders had little intention of permanently laying down arms or committing to fighting jihadists. They viewed the Fallujah Brigade discussions as proof of their military success and the weakness of the Coalition.[96] For example, locals greeted the completion of the 10 May convoy with celebrations, declaring that jihad had defeated the Marines.[97] With its forces outside the city, I MEF had limited leverage over the resistance, other than economic assistance. The negotiators actually raised their demands, continuously calling for I MEF to pull

[92]Fallujah Brigade Meeting, Fallujah Liaison Center, Fallujah, 20 May 2004. Discussion with Captain Rodrick McHaty, Camp Fallujah, 8 May 2004.
[93]Fallujah Brigade Meeting, Fallujah Liaison Team Center, Fallujah, 6 May 2004.
[94]Fallujah Brigade Meeting, Fallujah Liaison Team Center, Fallujah, 6 May 2004. Conversation with Captain Rodrick McHaty, Camp Fallujah, 11 May 2004.
[95]Discussion with Captain Rodrick McHaty, Camp Fallujah, 28 May 2004.
[96]Observations at I MEF Headquarters, Camp Fallujah, 30 April to 10 June 2004.
[97]West, *No True Glory*, 224.

farther and farther back and expand the Fallujah Brigade's area of operations. The harsh bargaining position (espoused by moderate Sunnis) derived from the perception that the insurgents had 'won' the battle and forced the Coalition to the negotiating table. Insurgents expected that I MEF would withdraw completely from the area surrounding from Fallujah, since they had abandoned the city. They took faith that visible popular support signaled the strength of the resistance and that therefore the United States must heed their wishes.[98]

Most disturbingly, Fallujah grew into a burgeoning insurgent base of operations. Large insurgent units and strongpoints remained within the city.[99] Although the Fallujah-based insurgent groups honored the truce there, they went to fight in Baghdad or other cities. Jihadists ravaged Baghdad with car bombs created in car bomb 'factories' in Fallujah.[100] Numerous unsubstantiated reports claimed that Zarqawi himself actively operated in the city. Jihadists also enforced fundamentalist law against the population of Fallujah. Rather than marginalize the jihadists, pulling out had allowed their strength to grow.[101] The successful defense of Fallujah caused many locals to view jihadists as heroes. The 'victory' endowed them with popular support and prestige. Hard-line elements of the Sunni resistance aligned with the jihadists and began espousing extremist rhetoric. Some moderate Sunnis declared fundamentalist laws acceptable. Moderate Sunnis opposed to the jihadists stayed quiet, frightened by intimidation and convinced that insurgent violence would succeed. Jihadists clearly outgunned the Fallujah Brigade. In these conditions, openly opposing the jihadists was foolhardy. Mattis believed that the brigade would fold or reach an agreement with the jihadists if ever forced to oppose them.

By late May, I MEF and the US government had lost confidence in the ability of the Fallujah Brigade and its leadership to meet the 30 April conditions, let alone enforce security in the city.[102] As the limited influence of that leadership became clear, I MEF approached Imam Janabi. Conway pressed Generals Muhamdi and Latif to set up a meeting between Janabi and Mattis. After two weeks of excruciatingly difficult preliminary negotiations, during which I MEF repeatedly considered dissolving the Fallujah Brigade altogether, Janabi met with Mattis on 14 June.[103] Janabi cited several grievances: lack of

[98]Rubin, 'Fallujah's Fighters Trade Weapons, Not Allegiances'.
[99]Conversation with CPA Representative to Fallujah, Camp Fallujah, 4 May 2004.
[100]Brief to Ambassador Robert Blackwill, Camp Fallujah, 23 May 2004.
[101]Briefing on Future Development of Iraqi Security Forces, Camp Fallujah, 20 May 2004.
[102]Brief to Ambassador Robert Blackwill, Camp Fallujah, 23 May 2004.
[103]Briefing to General John Abizaid, Camp Fallujah, 2 June 2004.

Al Anbar representation in the new Iraqi Interim Government, the slow process of compensation for damage from the battle, the detention of people from Fallujah, the reputation of the city as a 'terrorist' safe haven, unemployment, and the poor status of public services. Furthermore, Janabi claimed to have been personally offended when soldiers entered his home and tore his Koran in 2003. Although sympathetic to these grievances, the I MEF leadership could not consider other demands, which were excessive. Janabi wanted the Coalition to stop asking the Fallujah Brigade to arrest jihadists, to withdraw from cities near Fallujah (Karma and Saqlawiyah), and to remove forces between Fallujah and Baghdad. Mattis did not respond to these demands.

The meeting with Janabi represented the last hurrah of the Fallujah Brigade initiative. Negotiations fell apart in late June as Janabi refused to compromise. The jihadists (particularly Omar Hadid) had grown stronger than the Sunni resistance. Janabi was in a precarious position. He had directly opposed the jihadists by enforcing a cessation of military activity in Fallujah. The jihadists now refused to tow this moderate line. Ironically, as Janabi lost power, I MEF at last saw real signs of a wedge between the resistance and the jihadists. Locals gave reports of Sunni resistance and jihadists skirmishing in the city.[104] In retrospect, the fighting was a function of the strengthening position of the jihadists, rather than the resistance acting to rid their city of the jihadists. The Fallujah Brigade and the rump Sunni resistance lacked the strength to defeat the jihadists and hard-line elements of the resistance. It was only a matter of time before the Fallujah Brigade initiative fell apart.

The Coalition may have laid the final straw that broke the Fallujah Brigade initiative's back. On 19 June, the Coalition initiated a series of precision air strikes against the Zarqawi network in Fallujah. Although carefully directed against jihadists, the attacks may have discredited negotiating efforts by the Sunni resistance. After the first strike, Marines began taking fire at TCP-1, the last Coalition position on the outskirts of the city. On 24 June, insurgents mounted a major attack on TCP-1. The Marines repulsed the attack but suffered 16 casualties.[105] Local resistance readily joined in the fighting. City leaders connected to Janabi told I MEF that they did not care that the air strikes targeted jihadists. Sometime during this period, Janabi ceded power to Hadid and the jihadists. He now shared leadership of the insurgency in

[104]Meeting with Fallujah Brigade leadership, Camp Fallujah, 2 June 2004. I MEF Commanders' Discussion, Camp Fallujah, 5 June 2004. Discussion with Captain Rodrick McHaty, Camp Fallujah, 6 June 2004. Comments by Lieutenant General Conway, Camp Fallujah, 8 June 2004.

[105]Discussions with 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, Camp Baharia, 27 June 2004. Discussions with 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, TCP-1, Fallujah, 27 June 2004.

Fallujah. By the end of June, internecine fighting had ended and the wedge had disappeared. Thereafter, despite attempts to reinstitute the cessation of hostilities, insurgents regularly attacked TCP-1 and convoys passing by the city.

The demise of the Fallujah Brigade initiative should not be attributed to the Coalition precision strikes. The strikes accelerated jihadist assumption of power, but the Sunni resistance had been losing ground for a month. In any case, the Sunni resistance had only been using the cease-fire to facilitate insurgent activity and had offered no meaningful concessions. They had been intransigent since the end of the First Battle of Fallujah, which they read as a Coalition defeat. Rather than defuse and fragment insurgent activity, the cessation of military operations had allowed it to consolidate and grow more intransigent.

The Insurgency after June 2004

Over the next four months, Fallujah experienced intensifying violence. The city became a major insurgent command and control node and staging ground for attacks. By mid-summer, insurgents from Fallujah threatened the integrity of the new Iraqi state. Meanwhile, insurgents launched large-scale attacks over the summer and into the fall in Ramadi, North Babil, the western desert, Baghdad, and Samarra. Consequently, in November 2004, the Coalition launched a second offensive into Fallujah. The Coalition had carefully prepared for the assault. Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and the Interim Iraqi Government strongly supported the offensive. Extensive discussions with the obstinate Fallujah leaders exhausted all diplomatic options. Civilians evacuated the city and I MEF created an aggressive information operations campaign. Battalions from the Iraqi Army accompanied the Marines and Army soldiers in the assault. The offensive captured and cleared the city without either an escalation of Sunni support for the insurgency or political interruption. Thereafter, the scale of insurgent activity fell in the city and throughout Al Anbar province.

In spite of the Mahdi uprising and the First Battle of Fallujah, the Shi'a and Sunni never formed a national resistance. The Shi'a never united behind Sadr. The majority of Shi'a looked to Sistani as their leader. Following his initial silence, the Ayatollah called for a peaceful resolution to the violence and even warned Shi'a against joining the Mahdi uprising.[106] Many Shi'a clerics and sheikhs opposed Sadr as

[106]Farnaz Fassihi, 'Strange Bedfellows in Iraq: Complex Web of Shiite Politics Helps and Hinders U.S. Efforts', *Wall Street Journal*, 16 April 2004. John Burns, 'Leading Shiites and Rebel Meet on Iraq Standoff', *New York Times*, 13 April 2004.

well.[107] Additionally, Sunni willingness to cooperate with Sadr died out after April, partly because of their antipathy toward the Shi'a. Eventually, the Coalition isolated the Mahdi Army in Najaf and Sadr City and reached an informal truce with Sadr in June. Sadr mounted a second uprising in August 2004, which the Coalition and the Iraqi Interim Government put down through a more decisive use of force.

Conclusion

The attempt to use military force to signal resolve failed in the First Battle of Fallujah. Violence escalated throughout western Iraq. Insurgent activity rarely dropped to the levels of early 2004 again. The insurgency gained broad and active popular support from the Sunni population.

Sunnis turned to violence for two major reasons.

First, the Coalition offensive against Fallujah represented oppression by a foreign occupier that warranted taking up arms. Hyped media coverage of collateral damage exacerbated the hostile Sunni reaction.

Second, the cessation of the offensive caused Sunnis to view the battle as a military victory. Iraqis perceived the Coalition as weak for not completing the battle. The perception of US weakness encouraged insurgents to avoid compromise and moderate Sunnis to espouse violence, exemplified by their intransigence during the Fallujah Brigade negotiations. Jihadists gained popular support because of their leading role in conducting violence.

Thus, US civilian and military leaders were not mistaken regarding the importance of signaling resolve. However, these leaders were mistaken that military force alone was the best course for signaling resolve. Military force can escalate violence by oppressing the population. Resolve will not be signaled if the costs of escalation preclude an offensive's completion.

The Coalition failed to complete the offensive into Fallujah in April 2004 largely because of Iraqi political opposition driven by the popular backlash to military force. The Coalition could not complete the offensive without risking the fragmentation of the IGC. Democratization of Iraq would be crippled. Sheer determination by the US government or military could not negate the cost of such a setback, which would completely change the nature and objectives of the occupation. The demand for rapid action precluded setting conditions for the IGC to weather the crisis. I MEF could not take the greatest possible efforts to minimize collateral damage, such as evacuating all

[107]Diamond, *Squandered Victory*, 216, 232, 243–44.

civilians from the city or enacting an information operations campaign to preempt propaganda depicting its actions as heavy-handed. Additionally, the Coalition pressed with the offensive even though the Mahdi uprising was placing the IGC under tremendous stress. Finally, CPA did not obtain the IGC's support for the operation. In sum, the Coalition neglected to build the Iraqi political support necessary to carry through the offensive.

The key point is that military force alone could not signal resolve given the political constraints within Iraq. The goal of democratization constrained the United States from disregarding the concerns of key Iraqi political bodies. In similar circumstances, efforts to signal resolve via military force probably need the firm support of indigenous political bodies. Absent such support, the use of military force should be delayed. Unsupported use of military force is counterproductive. Even with political support, the use of military force can produce high costs and generate recruits for an insurgency until battlefield success demonstrates the futility of violence to these new recruits. Without political support, the use of military force may be prematurely curtailed and may never demonstrate the futility of insurgent violence. An offensive crippled by the opposition of indigenous political bodies is no way to signal resolve.

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