

Iraq Report X
Expanding Security in Diyala
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The security dynamics in Diyala Province demonstrate the continued need for Coalition forces to clear, control, retain, and rebuild the provinces to defend against al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). U.S. and Iraqi forces launched their counter-offensive against al Qaeda in Iraq in June of 2007, driving the organization from its safe havens around Baghdad. Working together they cleared Baqubah, once a major AQI stronghold, in June and July of 2007. Consequently, AQI leaders and fighters fled north up the Tigris River Valley and northeast up the Diyala River Valley to cities and villages that they had previously used as bases for their terror campaign.

By December 2007, AQI held terrain and had freedom of movement in the remote Hamrin Ridge where the organization attempted to re-infiltrate Diyala. Friendly forces had retained control of Baqubah throughout the second half of 2007, forcing AQI to focus its violence on Muqdadiyah, the Diyala province's second city, and on the rural, tribal areas west of the Diyala River. AQI thereby tried to regain a toehold from which to launch spectacular attacks, rearm, undermine the tribes' rejection of al Qaeda, and re-establish safe havens in Diyala.

Coalition operations from December 2007 to May 2008 prevented AQI from achieving its objectives and forced many of the remnants further north toward Tikrit, Baiji, and Mosul. AQI in Diyala retained only tenuous connections with its command and control elements in the Tigris River Valley and Ninewah provinces. Deprived of large sanctuaries and substantial resources, the organization adapted its tactics. AQI launched a new suicide-bombing campaign in Diyala, aimed not only at the urban population but also at the Sons of Iraq (SoI) responsible for preserving local security.

U.S. and Iraqi Security Forces responded with targeted raids and strikes while working actively to bring economic assistance to the province and extend Iraqi government control over remote rural areas. Despite these efforts, AQI partially reconstituted in southern areas of Diyala, such as Balad Ruz and Turki Village, where there was a relative shortage of military forces. Iraqi Security Forces have recently launched operations in these towns and villages to clear them of AQI, eighteen months after Coalition forces cleared them.

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