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REBELLION
In Anger, Ordinary Iraqis Are Joining the Insurgency
By EDWARD WONG

BAQUBA, Iraq, June 27 — At a teahouse in this palm-lined city, jobless men sit on wooden benches talking about killing American soldiers.
"Tell us one benefit they've given us since they've come here," Falah, a 23-year-old man in a shabby checkered shirt, said to an Iraqi reporter.

He boasted about driving a friend to stage attacks on American patrols. The two wait in a farm field by the main road. When the Humvees roll by, his friend fires a rocket-propelled grenade, Falah said. The two hit the ground. The soldiers open fire, but the Iraqis lie still until the patrol leaves.

"I really didn't ask my friend whether they have a boss or not and whether they organize their work or not," he said. "I really don't care as long as I can take part and drive the Americans out of our country. We are all resistance."

As Falah spoke, about a dozen men gathered around him. They nodded vigorously. This was Sunni-dominated Baquba, 35 miles northeast of Baghdad, where the resistance burns as fiercely as anywhere in Iraq.

With just days to go before the transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqis, American commanders concede that they are far from quelling a stubborn and increasingly sophisticated insurgency. It has extended well beyond Saddam Hussein supporters and foreign fighters, spreading to ordinary Iraqis seething at the occupation and its failures. They act at the grass-roots level, often with little training or direction, but with a zealousness born of anti-colonial ambitions.

American commanders acknowledge that military might alone cannot defeat the insurgency; in fact, the frequent use of force often spurs resistance by deepening ill will.

"This war cannot be won militarily," said Maj. Gen. John R. S. Batiste, commander of the First Infantry Division, which oversees a swath of the northern Sunni triangle slightly larger than the state of West Virginia. "It really does need a political and economic solution."
But the new government will find it tough to hammer out solutions to problems like high unemployment and lack of electricity any time soon. It will continue to come under attack, American troops will remain exposed, and the elections scheduled for January 2005 could be at risk. The Americans hope that the resistance will view the new government as legitimate, but insurgents are already assassinating Iraqi officials, and violence continues to inflame virtually every corner of the country.

On Saturday, black-clad insurgents here attacked the offices of the Iraqi National Accord, the party of the new prime minister, Iyad Allawi. The interim government has to persuade the people that it can protect everyone. The insurgents have a much easier task, one they have performed with considerable success so far: sow enough fear into people to undermine confidence in authority.

General Batiste said he did not expect the violence to subside after the transfer of

sovereignty on Wednesday. A jobless man can still make $100 by agreeing to plant a roadside bomb or shoot at the Americans. "It'll be a busy summer," the general said. American officials say Hussein supporters and foreigners like the Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi are directing some cells and are suspects in the major car bomb attacks and recent beheadings.
But much of the insurgency reflects street-level anger at the lack of progress in Iraq. The unemployment rate is still as high as 60 percent in many parts of the Sunni triangle, the region at the heart of the resistance. Iraqis complain about the chronic lack of power and clean water. Hard-line clerics are attacking the occupation in their sermons and are more popular than ever.

At the teahouse here, a muscular 40-year-old who gave his name as Abu Meshaal said: "We have experts in explosives and bomb making, ex-officers who have experience with such missions. We are everywhere, and we will not stop our work until the last soldier leaves Iraq.

"Each day, I get more enthusiastic when I hear that explosions are taking place here and there, in Baghdad and other provinces," he added.

The Sunni triangle — bounded by Ramadi and Falluja to the west, Tikrit to the north and Baquba to the east — remains the most troubled area in the country. In the south, the thousands-strong Shiite militia led by the firebrand cleric Moktada al-Sadr has quieted down in recent weeks, as the popular Mr. Sadr takes baby steps to jump into politics.

The total number of insurgents remains unclear, largely because American officials sorely lack reliable human intelligence. The insurgency does not appear to have a central command structure, said a military intelligence analyst in the Sunni triangle. Cells work independently but occasionally give each other logistical support or intelligence.

There are philosophical divisions within the resistance. Some Iraqis who support an armed struggle against the Americans bristle at bombs that kill their fellow citizens, insisting that only foreigner fighters are capable of such carnage. Some of those attacks could be a result of sectarian tensions flaring up among Sunni Arabs, Shiite Arabs and Kurds.

But during the broad uprising across Iraq in April, a rare confluence of Sunni Muslim and Shiite Muslim insurgents took place in Baquba, as the Shiite followers of Mr. Sadr tried overrunning government buildings while Sunni fighters battled American forces.

Other groups appear to have moved in since, and the city now harbors a caldron of cells working together, officers say.

The April uprisings woke commanders up to the fact that the nature of the resistance had morphed into a more widespread movement than they had previously thought.

That transformation began in November. As the insurgency appeared to grow in strength that month, the military cracked down hard on supporters of Mr. Hussein. Their role in the insurgency waned, and the nature of the resistance became "a fusion between nationalist and Islamist sentiments among the Sunnis" that allowed leaders to recruit a broader pool of fighters, wrote Ahmed Hashim, a professor at the

U.S. Naval War College, in a recent paper on the insurgency.
Professor Hashim, who has interviewed American commanders and insurgents in Iraq, said the anti-occupation movement has "benefited tremendously" from its new populist orientation.

"There is really no way to be charitable about this," he wrote. "From the vantage point of spring 2004, the U.S. has failed at all levels except the tactical military level; which, ironically, is the least important of all the levels in a counterinsurgency campaign."
Here in Baquba, commanders with the First Infantry Division say they face a more formidable foe than the one that confronted their predecessors from the Fourth Infantry Division, which left in March.
"The complexity has changed," said Lt. Col. Steve Bullimore, commander of Task Force 1-6 Field Artillery, responsible for controlling Baquba proper. "The Fourth I.D. was finishing a war, cleaning up the bad guys. While that was happening, the infant insurgency was starting. Now it's more robust."

Commanders in Baquba said they have seen fighters operating recently in squads of about 20 each.

If Americans retaliate with overwhelming firepower, the insurgents simply melt away into the alleyways and farm fields.
In a pitched battle here on Thursday, insurgents set off roadside bombs to paralyze American patrols, then fired on them with AK-47's and rocket-propelled grenades, officers said. The incidence of roadside bombings — an efficient killer of soldiers — increased from 80 or so in April to more than 100 in May, said Col. Dana Pittard, commander of the Third Brigade Combat Team.

Insurgents have also turned their attacks to prime infrastructure sites like power stations and oil pipelines.
Interpreters for the military regularly receive threatening letters at their homes, and insurgents hand out fliers in the crowded bazaars threatening collaborators.

"They're very good at information operations," said Capt. Travis Van Hecke, an artillery commander here. "People are reluctant to help us."
In short, the insurgents understand that the center of gravity in this war is the support of the people. In Baquba, fighters usually distribute fliers in town hours before an attack, telling people to stay off the streets and close their shops.

But no one stirs up popular support better than the hard-line clerics. Their mosques have become rallying points for the insurgency.
"Is there a country that is subjected to occupation, abuse, looting and the stealing of his fortunes and killing of his people, but that when he raises his voice and says, `No!' it's called terrorism?" Sheik Shehab Ahmed al-Badri, the imam of the main Sunni mosque in Baquba, said in an interview on Friday.

"The reality is that the new government represents the occupation and its desire to stay here," he said. "We want full sovereignty."
Zaineb Obeid contributed reporting for this article.