



## THE S.C.O.R.P.I.O.N.

### DAILY WESTERN MEDIA ANALYSIS

SUICIDE ATTACKS KILL AT LEAST 26

7 DECEMBER 2007

*Iraq Fact:* Billy Joel's new single, "December in Fallujah," premiered December 4 on iTunes. Cass Dillon, a relatively new singer-songwriter, sings the music. On his website, Joel, who famously addressed the **Vietnam War** in "Goodnight Saigon," said his new song is inspired by letters he received from soldiers who took solace in his music in Iraq. Proceeds from the song will be donated to [Home for Our Troops](#), a nonprofit organization that builds specially adapted homes for severely disabled veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

## I. MOC Flashpoints

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### SUICIDE ATTACKS KILL AT LEAST 26

On Friday, the most prominent Iraq-related story in the Western press involved **two** suicide bombings in **Diyala** Province that left at least **26** people dead. According to news agencies, one of the two bombings was perpetrated by a woman, who was "wearing a vest packed with explosives..." The [Associated Press](#) cited an Iraqi official who claimed the woman "was seeking revenge for her two sons who were killed fighting for Al Qaeda." [Reuters](#) provided a slightly different account, citing a "security source" that said the bomber "had **three** children who had been killed by Iraqi forces." She reportedly targeted a building used by members of the **1920 Revolution Brigades**, a group that Reuters noted, "were once one of the main groups of **Sunni Arab** insurgents fighting U.S. forces and the **Shiite**-led government..." However, in recent months, members have reportedly begun working alongside security forces against Al Qaeda. Most news sources did not express uncertainty about the bomber's gender in their reports, but the [NY Times](#), in its coverage, cited a police official who said that it "was not clear whether the bomber was a man or a woman because two heads were found alongside shredded bodies near the bombing site." This attack killed **10** and wounded **27** people, according to police reports. In a second incident, also in Diyala, a car bomb killed **seven** Iraqi troops and **three** members of a local neighborhood patrol.

Several news sources reporting on the bombings today noted that the security crackdown has squeezed Al Qaeda militants out of their former strongholds in **Baghdad** and **Anbar** Provinces and caused them to shift north to Diyala [see cited [NY Times](#) article in December 6 SCORPION]. [BBC](#) correspondent **Crispin Thorold** in Baghdad noted that "Diyala has been the focus of some of the fiercest clashes in Iraq in recent months. Insurgents displaced from their former strongholds in Anbar province and parts of Baghdad are now thought to be in Diyala." The NY Times, in its assessment, added, "A police official there said he expected attacks in Diyala to increase because local security forces were weak and Sunni extremists had established strong footholds across the province."

Although militants are said to have shifted north in Iraq, an article in today's [Guardian Unlimited](#) reported that the number of foreign jihadists entering Iraq has "fallen by nearly half in recent months as a result of tougher action by the country's neighbors and the rejection of the 'Al Qaeda-brand' by ordinary Iraqis..." The newspaper interviewed the top U.S. commander in Iraq, **Gen. David Petraeus** on Thursday, who said that, "There is still a lot of hard work to be done." On the decline of foreign militants entering the country, he stated, "It's a result of source country

operations, the actions by certain countries, the issue of *fatwas* [such as in Saudi Arabia] condemning extremism, which have been hugely important in the effort.” Gen. Petraeus also credited **Syria** with “staunching” the flow by taking “more aggressive action against some foreign fighter facilities there.”

## II. Commentary

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### THE SURGE IS A SIDESHOW

On Friday, the UK newspaper, the [Guardian](#), released a commentary by op-ed columnist **Jonathan Steele**, who commented on the progress of the U.S.-led “surge” in **Iraq**. He wrote, “If the gladdest tidings of this pre-Christmas season have been the U.S. intelligence community's brilliant move to undermine a **Bush** attack on **Iran** by revealing there is no Iranian nuclear weapons program, the worst news concerns U.S. policy on Iraq.” He added, “And it is not just the U.S. announcement of plans to get the Iraqi government to agree to permanent U.S. military bases and an open-ended occupation, thereby confirming what most analysts had long assumed was the **Republicans'** intention.” More alarming, says Steele, was the **Democratic** Party’s reaction and “indeed[,] that of the U.S. media,” Steele noted, adding that the announcement produced “no burst of headlines or commentaries, even though it rides roughshod over most Americans’ wishes.” He cited a recent **Pew Research** poll conducted two weeks ago that found that **54%** of Americans wanted troops home “as soon as possible.”

Despite such statistics, Democratic presidential hopefuls “barely murmured,” argued Steele. He contended that “[t]he passion for a clear timetable of an early U.S. troop pullout that was raging in large sections of the Democratic party last spring, in the weeks after it regained control of the House and Senate, has fizzled out.” According to Steele, whatever effect the President’s “surge” strategy had in Iraq, “it has clearly worked in Washington.” Anti-war Democrats are in retreat, and the “Bush strategy of entrenching the Iraq occupation still further and handing the mess to his successor is proceeding virtually unopposed.”

Steele cited a recent article in *Foreign Affairs* by **Hillary Clinton**, who pledged to maintain U.S. troops in Iraq indefinitely to train and equip Iraqi forces, “as well as keeping ‘specialized units’ to protect the trainers and confront **Al Qaeda.**” **Barack Obama**, Steele noted, “told the *New York Times* last month that he would need **16 months** after taking office to withdraw all U.S. combat troops from Iraq, and would retain a residual force on an open-ended basis ‘to counter terrorism.’” Although his position might be marginally better than Clinton’s, “neither candidate is willing to propose a total U.S. troop withdrawal, as the U.S. agreed in **Vietnam** in **1973** when it finally resolved to end its disastrous involvement there.” This new “softness” by the Democrats, Steele wrote, “flows in part from the reduction in U.S. combat deaths.” There is a perception, he added, that “the back of the Iraqi resistance has been broken. Now the Iraqi government is trumpeting the fact that thousands of Iraqi refugees are coming home as further proof of a turning security tide.”

However, the columnist asserted that none of these indicators are “firm.” He noted, “The figures for returning refugees are contested, with the Iraqi government counting anyone who crosses into Iraq even though many had only gone abroad on short visits and were never refugees. Many genuine refugees leave **Syria** in desperation because their money or visas have run out, not because they feel safe in going back.” Steele spoke with families returning home from **Damascus** last week, and noted that the found only **Shiites**.” An Iraqi **Sunni** told him later, “Of course Sunnis are afraid to

go. The buses are provided by the Shiite-led Iraqi government and Iraqi police will check them at the border.” Steele added that this comment “underlined the continuing depth of sectarian suspicions. Sunnis assume the Iraqi police, who are mainly Shiites, are either in league with Shiite militias and death squads or will behave just as badly.”

The sectarian concern is also evident in the **Awakening movement**. Steele wrote, “Although Sunni tribal leaders are taking U.S. arms and cash, ostensibly to confront Al Qaeda, they see value in getting organized to protect their suburbs from Shiite raids. The Americans may be temporarily helping to reduce violence, but their tactics help to build up Sunni militias for possible attacks on Shiites in the future.” Steel opined that, “[o]nce again the Americans are looking for a military solution to what is essentially a political problem.” Without national reconciliation, the underlying issues remain unresolved. Moreover, the Iraqi resistance is “undimmed,” he added. Steele wrote, that he was “told by a senior resistance spokesman in Damascus” that “many nationalist groups have reduced their attacks in western Baghdad and parts of Anbar province while regrouping and retraining.”

**Bottom line:** Steele provided a harsh critique of the progress of the surge in Iraq, and argued that “reconciliation which attempts to exclude people who have sacrificed so much in the struggle against foreign occupation [Iraqi resistance leaders] has no chance of succeeding.” The pre-condition to a successful reconciliation process would involve a “clear declaration by Washington that it is going altogether, with no bases or ‘residual forces’ left behind.” Only then, he concluded, will Iraqis come to the negotiating table seriously, and work out a future that does not leave an “elephant in the room.”

### III. Evening News

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Once again, there was no Iraq-related coverage on this evening’s **ABC World News** with **Charles Gibson**. However, **NBC Nightly News** did contain a segment on the improved security situation southeast of **Baghdad**. First, Williams noted the bombings that killed **25** people today in **Diyala** province. (see MOC Flashpoints) The report indicated that in the town of **al-Haswa** southeast of Baghdad, there is “peace finally,” and the area is “one of the many places where we can see the situation improve drastically.” NBC News went on a walking tour with **Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch**, the regional U.S. commander, who felt more optimistic about the security situation in al-Haswa, and said that, “For you and I to walk through the streets and take the time to talk to people is something that couldn’t have happened two months ago.” Before, the **Shiite** militia loyal to **Muqtada al-Sadr** attacked U.S. troops on a daily basis. However, the recent fighting and Sadr’s call for a ceasefire have brought relative calm to the town. Now, Iraqis want jobs, and want their youth to work. With **80%** unemployment, some are worried that insurgents will entice their youth to work for them, and are asserting that jobs create security. MG Lynch emphasized that the Iraqi government must come forward and help or such demands will fall on the shoulders of **Capt. Walker**, who is described as the symbolic “new mayor of al-Haswa.”

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