

# **The Fallujah Objectives: What Meaningful "Victory" Really Means**

11/07/04

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There is no question that the battle of Fallujah must first be one in military terms. Americans and Iraqis will die in the process, there will be military and civilian casualties and collateral damage, and all of the immediate realities of war will affect the outcome. Winning the military action, however, is only part of the story. As in Vietnam, if the Interim Iraqi government cannot win the political battle, a US victory in the military battle will be irrelevant.

The political battle of Fallujah will be fought out over a period of months, not days or weeks. It will be a political battle and one that goes far beyond the bound of Fallujah itself. Essentially, it will be a struggle to bring enough control over the Sunni Arab driven aspects of the insurgency in Iraq to achieve the following seven objectives:

1. Conduct the battle in a political context where a Coalition and Interim Government victory does not become a convincing image of martyrdom in Iraqi Sunni and Arab eyes, and where civilian casualties and collateral damage do not create convincing images of another Jenin or massive use of excessive force.
2. Establish enough security and control to deny Sunni insurgents and terrorists any major sanctuary and "no go" area in Fallujah, Al Anbar Province, and Iraq. Not only defeat the insurgents that stay in Fallujah, but prevent their dispersal or simply going under cover to the extent that they cannot control any major populated area both during the day and night.
3. Demonstrate enough credibility on the part of Iraqi military and security forces so that they play a major role in the battle, can rapidly be the most visible security presence in the area after the major fighting, erase the impression of failure left by the performance of Interim Government forces in April 2004, and provide a credible picture to the Iraqi people, the region, and the world that government forces can -- in time -- take over a fully sovereign role from Coalition forces and lead to Coalition withdrawal.
4. Establish enough security so that Iraqi Interim Government security forces and administrators can function in Fallujah and key cities and towns in Al Anbar Province.
5. Establish enough Iraqi Interim Government control over Fallujah and Al Anbar Province to give the government a major increase in legitimacy and make polling and elections possible in the area.

6. Push a significant number of Arab Sunnis in to participating in the political process and election to avoid creating a Shi'ite Arab-Kurdish dominated Iraq.

7. Create conditions where the US and Interim Iraqi Government can create an effective aid process in Fallujah and Al Anbar Province, offer jobs and hope, and offer incentives to Sunni Arabs to join in the Interim Government as a functioning and tolerated entity.

It must be stressed that the US, Coalition, and Interim Iraqi Government do not need to achieve all of these objectives immediately or in the first few weeks after the battle. Any political "victory" will almost certainly mean at least partial failure in some objectives between now and the end of January -- when the election is scheduled. Significant success in all seven objectives will almost certainly take until a full election is scheduled at the end of 2005 or in early 2006.

It will have to occur in the context of a major political battle over Iraq's constitution and the development of some form of federalism that offers Arab Sunnis an acceptable form of federalism. It will require the evolution of an Iraqi government that is not seen simply as a more preferable occupier than the Coalition. From this perspective, an American-led military victory -- no matter how convincing in military terms -- is really only the prelude to an Iraqi-led political struggle. If the US and Coalition still dominate in the fighting in Fallujah, the Interim Iraqi Government will have to dominate in every other phase.

It will also be almost impossible to avoid massive hostile political coverage in key Arab media during any intense periods of fighting. High technology urban warfare is simply all too visible, and inevitably creates civilian casualties and collateral damage. Insurgent action is often virtually invisible, its role in creating civilian casualties and collateral damage is almost impossible to monitor and verify at the time, and civilian casualties and collateral damage have been distorted and routinely used as political weapons in Iraq since the first day of the Gulf War.

The insurgents know how to dig in and locate in both military terms and in terms of deliberately creating images of attacks on religious facilities, collateral damage, and civilian deaths and wounded. Hospitals and mosques have become deliberate political weapons. These negative images can be moderated, but scarcely can be minimized or avoided.

Similarly, insurgents' will probably have significant ability to disperse, hide weapons, and reconcentrate. Significant cadres may have already left. Insurgents native to Fallujah may just hide their weapons and blend in. (So far, local HUMINT has been terrible in accurately identifying those who do so.) Other insurgents can exfiltrate as civilians, not matter what screening processes the US establishes. It seems doubtful that any combination of the current US and Iraqi troop strength and sensors can fully secure the perimeter of Fallujah, although US forces seem to have done all they can do.

It is also already clear that the insurgents are taking the battle outside Fallujah. The

attacks in Samarra have dramatized two things: First, that the insurgents are already taking the battle outside Fallujah and demonstrating that a Coalition-Interim Government victory in Fallujah will not be a victory in Al Anbar.

Second, and most seriously, that the Iraqi Interim Government's performance in Samarra is a warning that it is may well be unready to win any meaningful degree of political victory in even the most narrow sense of local stability operations. As in Najaf and Sadr City, it has not yet shown it is capable of rapidly establishing security, aid, and governance in the areas where Coalition led forces win military victories. By most outside reports, its performance in these areas over the last few months has been as bad as the military performance of its forces in April -- if not worse. It establishes a presence, not governance. It lacks the military security forces to establish real security. It makes promises of aid it does not deliver. It cannot expand its efforts to deal with semi-secure areas like Ar Ramadi.

The US may be able to ameliorate this situation in Fallujah by rushing in massive amounts of aid and civil-military programs. Coalition-led action, however, is still occupation, not Iraqi governance. Every the US and Coalition take the lead in any action -- military or aid -- this to some extent undercuts that ability to win the political dimension of the war. When the Iraqi Interim Government fails in stability operations and the aid process, it moves towards self-defeat.

As a result, the Interim Government's performance in these areas in the aftermath of Fallujah will be even more of a litmus test of whether it ever can succeed in winning all seven of the political objectives listed earlier than the performance of Iraqi military and security forces in the battle. No one in the US, the Coalition, and the Interim Government can afford to forget this for a moment in the heat of the fighting. If they do, the most decisive possible defeat of those insurgents who do choose to fight will simply become a pointless, bloody mess.