

9OCT2008

The Clearing of the Madai'n: Interview with Sheikh Qais Shather Khamis al Jabouri

Prior to 2003 Salman Pak was a very important place for the people of Baghdad. That was where they went for recreation: to Kesra or the Salman al Farsi Mosque. The nature of the residents was also special. They are very generous and helpful. Farmers would let tourists use their property for picnicking and to get shade while walking on hot days. The Salman al Farsi Mosque is a Sunni Mosque. The tradition is that a boy's first haircut is done at the mosque because Salman served as the barber for the Prophet. All the tribes in Salman Pak, the Dulaymi, the Jabouri, the Zwaidy, the Janabi, are all Sunni. There are also Shia tribes: the Shamori (**editor's note:** the Shamori are a mixed tribe with some Sunni and some Shia members), some of the Zwaidy. The problem between the Sunnis and the Shia are not a problem. After 1950 people started moving from the South looking for work. These newer tribes, the Udawi, Utbi, Lami, and others, all relocated to Mada'in Qada within the past fifty years. Originally many of them worked as laborers. After the relocation they became better educated and ultimately moved up to better occupations. These tribes are almost all Shia in Mada'in. We have all lived together peacefully for fifty years. The Shia have their mosques and the Sunnis have theirs. But we would pray in each other's mosques. My mother, from the Utbi tribe, is a Shia. My father is Sunni. My sister in law, also an Utbi, is Shia too.

After 2003 some Iranian intelligence officers worked very hard. They cleverly planned to manipulate these things (religious differences). Two years ago the Iranians and their proxies controlled 80% of Iraq and CF only controlled 20%. Iranian intelligence succeeded because CF had no idea about Iraqi history. CF didn't listen to good friends, rather they mistakenly listened to the bad ones. From 2003 to mid 2005 there was no army or police to control the streets. Bremer listened to bad advice. How was he going to rule? There was no police control personnel for two years, just a few checkpoints. When they started to make a government, and when that government started to make security agencies, Iranian intelligence and the parties run by them, sent their people to join. Without a recommendation from one of these parties you couldn't join the new security forces.

The Iraqi intelligence services are almost completely clean – there is no support for the Iranians in them. So the Iranians may understand that they are the US Army's second target. They perceive a potential attack. So they have manipulated things in Iraq to keep the US as busy as possible for as long as possible. They need time. Some reports say they'll finish their bomb in 2012, some in 2015. But they need time, so they're trying to keep the US busy in Iraq. They intend to sacrifice the last Iraqis for this. They are in the area, they are a rich country, and they are in a better position than the US to act. Sometimes they even use the US's garbage.

When AQI had trouble with the US, Iran started using them. They say they're Sunni, but they work for Iran. Many times we have found new Iranian weapons in the hands of AQI

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between 2005 and 2007. You never see AQI attack the Shia militia or the Shia militia attack AQI. Instead they both attack the people. I wish they attacked each other. We understand the situation in the country and in Mada'in and we try to explain it to honest Iraqis in GOI and to the US. The first time we explained the lack of control by CF and the actions of Iran was in 2005 and 2006. They looked like we told them a joke. The first one to trust me and understand what I mean was a lieutenant. He was a very smart officer. After that, month by month, CF has come to better understand the situation and realize its mistakes being made on bad information. This was what was making CF view all Iraqis as the enemy.

There was a lot of bad behavior from the NP, who were mostly led by militia members. We would find corpses of those who were arrested by the NP. People do try to respect official forces, but when you find their victims you stop trusting them and start fighting them. This created big cover for bad extremists. When we had twenty-five or fifty extremists in Salman Pak, CF's response pushed the population towards them. This creates a thousand terrorists. The real start to fixing things was when the 3HBCT/3ID Commander tried to work with the people and fix things. I met with him and explained the situation for him. He had a very open mind. I told him that if you're going to deal with the people to fix the situation we will gladly work with you.

At this time there was no agreement from GOI, but this is about our and our children's lives. So I, Mahmoud Jablowi, and others started working to build trust with CF. Many meetings were held with tribal leaders. Sometimes we would bring them to our houses or to Combat Outpost Cashe South to meet with the 3HBCT/3ID Commander, 3/1 Cavalry Commander, and the 1/15 Infantry Commander. In the past when CF would try to clean an area they'd bring some ISF with them. Once they'd clear, however, there was no hold or build. So we got them to try something new: clear, hold, and build (**editor's note:** I have rendered Qais's explanation into the current COIN phraseology). We started in Arifiyah; once we cleared it we kept control by building checkpoints. We worked with the local company commander. The next step was to clear Tuwaitha, which was a nest of AQI. Mahmoud Jablowi, his brothers, and men, joined by the local CF Company, and fought AQI. It took three weeks of real fighting to clean it. During the first week we fought alone, though the company commander did send some help. It was in the second week that CF joined in. Mahmoud Jablowi would always send men to clear roads ahead of CF vehicles so they could safely come through. At this time AQI used very large IEDs. Mahmoud Jablowi and his men fought shoulder to shoulder with the CF Company during the last two weeks of the fighting. At the end of three weeks Jablowi had lost two brothers, three close cousins, and fifteen men were wounded.

After that we went north to Qarghuliya. Abu Ammash (**editor's note:** Abu Ammash is a cousin of Sheikh Qais, as well as also being a sheikh within the Jabouri tribe. His brother Sami Abas is the General Sheikh of the Jabouri's in Mada'in Qada) started the clearing there. It is a big area and there are both Sunni and Shia. And it is close to Baqubah and was a transit way for AQI. Abu Ammash brought all the tribes together, both Sunni and Shia – the Jabouri, Difafa, Zwaydi. They cleared the area and then put up checkpoints. At this time there was no support from CF. Yes, CF can attack and give help that way,

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but we didn't get any weapons or bullets. So some of our people sold their sheep to buy weapons.

We then turned towards Salman Pak. We started in Wardiyah and Jaara. So Mahmoud Jablowi went and helped as these are close to Tuwaitha. They cleared the militia out and held the area. Then they kept moving south. Jablowi helped each village to clear and hold and then moved on to the next one. Some wanted Jablowi to keep going down to Salman Pak, but he and I refused. It was better for the local leaders to do it. So we chose Sheikh Ali al Dulaymi in the Bawi area and we helped him. Then we moved to Salman Pak. In al Zelek and Qadassiyah we tapped Sheikh Safa. We sent some of our men from Tuwaitha (**editor's note:** Sheikh Qais actually referred to his men here, and in several other places, as soldiers) and they fought AQI for twenty days. Once checkpoints were set up, his men went home. After CF built COP Cahill and Salman Pak was cleared and held we moved on to Steya, Dureya, and Khanasa. We sent some of our people and CF sent a company down to Steya where a patrol base was built. We visited the company commander and worked with him there. Two of our men were wounded in Khanasa and the 3HBCT/3ID Commander sent them to CF hospitals for treatment.

Sheikh Latif and Karim al Batawi led their people in Khanasa. And so did Sheikh Mansour al Shamori in Khanasa 2. Unfortunately Sheikh Mkhabr al Dulaymi was arrested by the NP during the planning phase of the clearing operation. The arrest was based on bad information. He was released three months ago and his son was killed by AQI.

The last places we cleared were Nahrawan and Waheda. Sayeed Khadum, in Nahrawan, is a good man. Initially he refused to join with us in SOI. After he saw what we did, though, he went to friends and family and started SOI. In Qaziliyah Sheikh Hussein Fiza helped us. And in Waheda Sheikh Latif Hamed.

Now there is no fight and Salman Pak is safe. We have a good situation, but it needs stability and further control. No place is 100% safe, but it's safe like the places in Baghdad, maybe even safer, because we (SOI) have control. If something happens in Salman Pak, we know about it because we have SOI in all parts of the city. The year before SOI, the news reported about 600 accidental deaths. Only half were really accidental. Since the start of SOI we are down to no more than ten to fifteen accidents. At the same time we've had two ISF brigades in Salman Pak and things had been getting worse. Security was achieved because of the cooperation and the fight of the SOI and tribes.

The SOI working with CF destroyed the plans of Iranian Intelligence. It is for that reason that they (Iranian Intelligence) ordered their people in GOI to attack SOI. Two months ago Jalal al Din Asirir, a member of the National Council, gave a speech on TV where he said: "let the SOI count their days, they are finished." And because of American rules, the US counts everything in dollars – how much? They are trying to make the GOI responsible for the SOI.

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I think that the Prime Ministerial decision #118 is good if they (GOI) are serious about transitioning the SOI. We do have some problems and/or questions. What will happen to the SOI leaders (**editor's note:** currently there is no provision to transition the SOI leadership to GOI control)? I am also not happy when they count the SOI with the militia. If that is the case then let them treat SOI like they treat the BADR militia. Some of these guys are illiterate, but now they are ISF officers. Most SOI leaders are former (army) officers. Bad people are now targeting SOI leaders and members. They bring them to the courts through the use of false evidence and bad witnesses. There are many cases like this. This is also revenge for SOI destroying some big plans. There is an agreement between LTG Austin and Muhammed Salman the chair of the reconciliation committee. It gives many answers to SOI questions, but we still need to know what will happen to the leaders. And we need to know that the GOI is serious about section 11 of PM decision 118 – nothing goes to court unless a reconciliation council is convened, evidence is examined, and a finding of fact determines that there really is a case. It is important for CF and the US not to forget its friends and that it stays close with them.

The first time they tried to kill me was when Mahmoud Jablowi and I tried to talk to the sheikhs. I was ambushed the week before we started up SOI – they had five machine guns. Two of my brothers were injured and CF medavaced them. I, and several friends, were wounded. They tried to blow Mahmoud Jablowi and I up a lot; twice in Dureya and once in Salman Pak. So we started changing our routes when driving. Mahmoud Jablowi's arm was injured in the fighting (**editor's note:** Mahmoud Jablowi was wounded in the right arm, as a result he has what appears to be permanent nerve damage in his right wrist and hand and is forced to wear a brace). Three people were killed at a checkpoint in Arafiyah because of a suicide bomber. One was lost in Tuwaitha and one in Jaara. When I find that people are complaining I tell them that we are still fighting. That they should be patient because you can't fix four bad years in one year.

The Sunni/Shia fight is about politics, specifically about the plans of Iranian Intelligence. They kept the Iraqi exiles for twenty to thirty years and trained them. You can't expect them, just for coming back and shaking hands with us, to become like Americans or to serve Iraq and Iraqis. Some aren't even Iraqi, they're Iranian citizens. These people are used by Iranian Intelligence to keep the US busy in Iraq. The real start to the dispute was the blowing up of the mosques in Samarra. Samarra has been a Sunni area for over a thousand years. The mosques had been there for 800 years. They had never been attacked before, so why now? Even if we talk about AQI, they want everyone to think that they're Sunni extremists. But why film the attack? To make everyone think there was a civil war in Iraq. And this happened until good people rose up and fought back. And they couldn't have done all of this without help from the government. When criminals are chased by the police they stop, when helped they keep doing it over and over again.

My idea to fix things is that we must start clearing from the top to the bottom and the bottom to the top. Good government with bad people in governmental and security positions doesn't work – no one will obey good orders. Bad government with good

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people in the ministries and the ISF also will not work. When good people receive bad orders they only have two choices: obey them or refuse and be brought to court.