

Military Force and al Qa'ida in Iraq

U.S. operations in al Anbar province provide a useful illustration of when military forces can be appropriate against terrorist groups. While politics and policing may be more effective in most cases, military force can be critical when facing a terrorist group involved in an insurgency. Such groups are often well equipped, well organized, and well motivated, and police acting alone would be quickly overpowered.

This chapter argues that the U.S. military was effective in counter-*ing* al Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI), notably in Iraq's al Anbar province. Though AQI had not been defeated at the time this book was published, its presence in al Anbar was a fraction of what it was at the height of its power in mid-2006. U.S. efforts from 2006 to 2008 illustrated how military forces might be used to counter terrorist groups involved in an insurgency. The United States was able to exploit AQI's growing unpopularity. It helped catalyze an organized opposition to AQI spearheaded by local tribes but supported in large numbers by disaffected fighters from other Sunni insurgent groups. AQI had essentially brought its troubles onto itself through an overly aggressive stance in al Anbar province. In a nutshell, what was a cooperating and networked insurgency prior to 2006 turned into an insurgency dominated by an increasingly confident AQI that was coming into power in the province. Using a variety of methods, AQI began to squeeze out other insurgent groups. Upset and under pressure, members of the latter insurgent groups switched sides against AQI and joined ranks with anti-AQI tribes. AQI was thus largely driven out of al Anbar.