

## **Soldiers building wall separating Sunnis, Shiites**

Three-mile structure in Baghdad is a disputed part of security plan

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BAGHDAD — U.S. soldiers with the 82nd Airborne Division in a Baghdad district are “building a three-mile protective wall on the dividing line between a Sunni enclave and the surrounding Shiite neighborhood,” according to a U.S. military press release issued Wednesday.

Troops with the 407th Brigade Support Battalion began constructing the wall on April 10 and will continue work “almost nightly until the wall is complete,” the release read.

“The area the wall will protect is the largest predominately Sunni neighborhood in East Baghdad. Majority-Shiite neighborhoods surround it on three sides. Like other religiously divided regions in the city, the area has been trapped in a spiral of sectarian violence and retaliation,” according to the release.

In January, when the new Baghdad security plan and troop “surge” were announced, the “gated community” concept was reported by several news agencies as one tactic to be used.

But after a regularly scheduled news briefing in Baghdad on Wednesday, Maj. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV, the top spokesman for coalition forces in Iraq, said he was unaware of efforts to build a wall dividing Shiite and Sunni enclaves in Baghdad and said that such a tactic was not a policy of the Baghdad security plan.

“We have no intent to build gated communities in Baghdad,” Caldwell said Wednesday.

“Our goal is to unify Baghdad, not subdivide it into separate [enclaves].”

The subject of walling-off city districts has been a popular one among some ground troops now manning small combat outposts within city neighborhoods. Recently, commanders attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, said they were investigating the possibility of constructing a security wall around a once-bustling industrial zone in New Baghdad, on the city’s east side. The wall, they said, would help them secure the area and aid in the revitalization of factories and industrial plants there.

However, Caldwell said that the Baghdad plan never envisioned large scale divisions of city districts. At most, he said, barriers would be used to protect city markets that might otherwise fall prey to suicide

bombers, or to block off streets during specific operations. In this latter case, Caldwell said the barriers were removed after the completion of each mission.

"We have been going into neighborhoods and sealing off certain exit and entrance points during initial sweeps," Caldwell said. "Those were temporary measures."

Caldwell, however, said that U.S. and Iraqi forces would continue to erect permanent barriers around city marketplaces. So far, he said, coalition forces had erected more than 3,000 individual sections of concrete blast walls throughout the city since the plan went into effect two months ago. These barriers included both Jersey barriers — short concrete dividers commonly seen on roadways in the United States — and larger 20-foot blast walls that commonly surround bases and living areas.

According to Wednesday's news release from Multi-National Corps-Iraq, "the wall [in Adhamiyah] is one of the centerpieces of a new strategy by coalition and Iraqi forces to break the cycle of sectarian violence. Planners hope the creation of the wall will help restore law and order by providing a way to screen people entering and exiting the neighborhood — allowing residents and people with legitimate business in, while keeping death squads and militia groups out."

A similar effort by U.S. troops in south Baghdad was reported earlier this month by the Wall Street Journal.

"That community [in Adhamiyah] will be completely gated and protected," Lt. Col. Thomas Rogers, 407th Brigade Support Battalion, was quoted as saying in the release. "It's really for the security of all the people of Adhamiyah, not just one side or the other."

According to military officials, the Adhamiyah wall should be completed in the next month.

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