

## U.S. discovers tunnel system near Euphrates River in Iraq

Contributed by Administrator  
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Used to conceal fighters, anti-aircraft systems

BAGHDAD &mdash; Al Qaida used an extensive network of tunnels to conceal insurgents and weapons in Iraq.

The U.S. military found the tunnels along the Euphrates River in central Iraq, Middle East Newsline reported. The tunnels were said to have been used to store weapons, hide fighters and launch attacks against U.S. forces.

Officials said this was the first such tunnel system found in central Iraq. They said U.S. troops also discovered anti-aircraft systems in the tunnels, located northwest of Iskandariyah.

"The tunnels provided access to numerous AQI [Al Qaida in Iraq] fighting positions," the military said on Monday. "Inside the tunnels were several anti-aircraft rounds, leading troops to speculate the tunnels may have served as enemy firing positions for anti-aircraft guns, as well as hiding places for AQI fighters after they launched attacks."

The military said the tunnels were destroyed on Dec. 16 after they were discovered by the U.S. Army's 4th Brigade Combat Team. The tunnels were found after soldiers discovered a nearby cache of improvised explosive device components.

Officials said the military tried to destroy the tunnels with a Hellfire missile fired from a helicopter. When that failed, U.S. fixed-wing aircraft dropped two bombs that collapsed the underground network.

Al Qaida has used the Euphrates River valley as a launching pad for strikes against the U.S.-led coalition in the Anbar, Baghdad and Diyala provinces. U.S. and Iraqi troops have conducted search and destroy missions against Al Qaida during Operation Marne Roundup, launched on Dec. 15.

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