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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

University College

International Affairs

**The Development and Application of the “Petraeus Doctrine”
During the “2007 Iraq Troop Surge”**

by

Luke Arthur McCorkel

A thesis presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts

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The Development and Application of the Petraeus Doctrine in the 2007 Iraq Troop Surge

Luke McCorkel, Washington University in Saint Louis
Master's Thesis

Abstract: In Spring 2007 President Bush ordered additional American troops to Iraq as part of a troop Surge to wage a counter-offensive based on the tactics of the newly developed Petraeus Doctrine. This thesis analyzes the events leading up to and surrounding the Surge and the role of the Petraeus Doctrine the successful defeat of the insurgency and strengthening the Iraqi Government and Security Forces enabling the Americans to being an orderly withdrawal.

The Petraeus Doctrine did play a vital role in the defeat of the insurgency, but it was not the primary cause for the Surge's success and merely took advantage of an emerging situation on the ground that made Baghdad ripe for a counter-insurgency campaign. This situation was the result of a number of factors: a long war that had abandoned idealism for pragmatism and the utter failure of conventional Hard Power that left a military willing to try anything; improved Iraqi Security Forces that were the product of a long-term training program; domestic pressures in the media and Congress that forced the Bush Administration to acknowledge how badly things had deteriorated and have no choice but to do something; the ethnic cleansing of Baghdad that had shifted the violence from neighbor-on-neighbor to neighborhood-on-neighborhood; and an insurgency that had overplayed its hand combined with American domestic politics to make the Americans a more temporary and appealing option than the insurgencies. Ultimately the Petraeus Doctrine played a supporting role in the Surge by taking advantage of conditions on the ground, but did not create it.

Introduction

On December 18, 2011 the last American convoy rolled across the border of Kuwait from Iraq signifying the end of more than eight long years of war. The intent of this thesis is to analyze how a “quick war” of shock, awe and democratization evolved into a long bloody slog that saw the Americans reach the point of pulling out of Iraq in the face of overwhelming violence, only to decide to wage one last ditch gamble in the form of a surge of troops. This surge was about more than just sending in more troops, but was a gamble that the newly developed Petraeus Doctrine based on the concept that Smart Power could offer a new approach and defeat the insurgency. By any account the Surge was widely successful, violence dropped more than 80 percent in just a matter of months and within a year and a half the Iraqi Security Forces would be defeating the insurgents with minimal American support enabling the Americans to shift their focus to advising and assisting the Iraqis while staging a gradual withdrawal from the country.

In the first chapter of the thesis, the period from 2003-2005 will be examined. During this period American errors and lack of an overarching plan allowed the insurgency to grow and take the initiative from the Americans, while their hopes of elections and politics stabilizing the situation on the ground failed. The next chapter will cover 2006 when the country descended into all out civil war and a number pressures conspired to force the Bush Administration to change course, while behind the scenes American commanders tired of the quagmire began to take radical risks that were successful in defeating pockets of the insurgency. Back in the United States

General Petraeus was rewriting American counter-insurgency doctrine based on a Hard and “Soft Power”¹ approach that would eventually be known as “Smart Power”. The third chapter will examine the events of the Surge as the Americans used the Petraeus Doctrine as part of one last-ditch gamble to defeat the insurgency. Chapter four will focus on the post-Surge period where the newly strengthened Iraqi Security Forces began to directly confront the strongest Shi’a militia of Muqtada al-Sadr forced them into the political process, while the Iraqi government negotiated a timetable for a gradual American withdrawal. The conclusion will roll up all of the events and tactics of the Surge and examine the reason for its success. Ultimately this thesis will examine the roll of the Petraeus Doctrine and circumstances surrounding the Surge.

¹ Soft power is the concept that when confronting an enemy often times violence is counterproductive and that the best way to “defeat” an enemy is to show mercy and allow for reconstruction and reconciliation.

Chapter 1: 2003-2005 “How to Win a War, Lose a Victory and Create an Insurgency”

2003- Losing the Peace

Bypassing the Bad Guys and Claiming Victory

On March 20, 2003 lead elements of the American 3rd Infantry Division crossed the border into Iraq; little did they realize that it would be more than seven years and thousands of lives² before the last Americans began the long dusty drive south into Kuwait. The American plan was a daring one, bypassing major urban areas they would head straight to Baghdad to remove Saddam Hussein in hopes that they could get there before he used his mythical Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) or had the opportunity to flee to disappear in the same manner as Osama Bin Laden had. This plan would spare the Iraqi infrastructure from large collateral damage associated with major urban fighting and minimize the time and cost of post-war reconstruction.

By any metric the invasion of Iraq was a major success. During the first week of April American forces had surrounded Baghdad and began to push directly into the city and by April 11th the city had fallen³. On May 2nd President Bush famously declared victory from the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln signaling the end of direct combat operations. For comparison, during the often vaunted

² Tan, Michelle. “Hood BCT Moving From Iraq to Kuwait.” *Army Times*, November 10, 2011.

³ Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*. (New York: Vintage Press, 2007), 498.

German Blitzkrieg of Poland it took German troops 27 days to advance 150 miles to Warsaw⁴, while the Americans advanced 350 miles in 18 days to Baghdad⁵.

During the invasion the Americans expected to be welcomed with open arms in the same way as their forefathers had during the World War 2 campaign to liberate Europe. In contrast the Americans were not widely welcomed as liberators and failed to understand the degree of hatred that 10 years of sanctions and failure to support uprisings (which the Americans had inspired) had incurred. The Iraqi military had also used the decade of peace since the First Gulf War to prepare for an expected second round of fighting. The 1991 Gulf War had seen the utter futility of fighting the Americans toe-to-toe in the open desert, but the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu⁶ had illustrated that large numbers of irregular fighters in an urban area could negate American technology and hurt them enough to force them to withdraw due to domestic political pressures. During the 2003 invasion the Americans found themselves unable to confront the Iraqi military in the desert and countryside, instead they were drawn into a complex urban fight where the enemy would attack, retreat, then re-infiltrate when the Americans had moved on. This was further exacerbated by the American strategy of pushing to Baghdad at all costs with minimal presence. An example is the Battle of Nasiriya in which the Marines fought hard to push the Iraqis out of the city so that forces headed to Baghdad could pass through then withdrawing and leaving token forces guarding the bridges when they had. This left Saddam's

⁴ Mosier, John, *The Blitzkrieg Myth: How Hitler and the Allies Misread the Strategic Realities of World War II* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 91.

⁵ Gordon, *Cobra II*, 419.

⁶ This was the battle immortalized in the movie *Blackhawk Down* where a number of irregular fighters with nothing more than AK-47s and RPGs caused heavy casualties among American elite fighters that led to President Clinton's order to withdraw from Somalia.

Fedayeen irregular fighters free to re-infiltrate and use as a base to attack American logistical convoys There was a further clash with American expectations when the Iraqi soldiers did not surrender, instead they simply changed out of their uniforms and took their guns and went home⁷.

During the Battle of Baghdad the Americans fought a bitter five-day move into the city, only to see the Iraqi military fade away when it became clear that Iraqi Army would eventually lose control of the city. Unfortunately with the disintegration of the Iraqi Army came a disintegration of the rule of law. During the days that followed the infrastructure that the Americans had spent so much effort in preserving was utterly destroyed by massive looting by Iraqi civilians while the Americans passively stood by and watched; lacking the numbers, plans or orders to intervene. The American ambivalence can best be illustrated by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld who famously said that “stuff happens” and compared the looting in Iraq, that was tearing down billions of dollars in infrastructure, to what happens post-soccer game chaos. Rumsfeld even went so far as to joke that television footage of the looting was that of a single looter being broadcast over and over⁸. The looting would lower the Iraqi standard of living and rob Iraqi institutions of state of the tools necessary to resume functioning⁹. The most grave failure of the Americans in the days following the invasion was to protect guard Iraqi Army bases and weapons depots from the

⁷ *Ibid* 567.

⁸ Rich, Frank. “Stuff Happens Again in Baghdad.” *New York Times*, September 24, 2006. Accessed November 14, 2011.

⁹ Peter Slevin, and Dana Priest. “Wolfowitz Concedes Iraq Errors.” *Washington Post*, July 23, 2003. Accessed November 14, 2011.

looting, this flooded Iraq with up to a million tons of weapons, ammunition and explosives that the budding insurgency would use to great effect¹⁰.

The Coalition Provisional Authority Makes a Mess

By late April the Americans had hastily created the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to serve as a caretaker government for Iraq until the Americans could transfer sovereign control to a post-Saddam Iraqi state. From the outset the CPA was undermanned and had massive turnover, a large number of the employees saw employment as a stopgap until they could return to the US to work on the Bush reelection campaign. This led to the CPA having a degree of naiveté catalyzed by the hubris of a quick, cheap victory that bred a dangerous idealism. An example is how the CPA used significant resources to wage an anti-smoking campaign, revamp the Iraqi tax code and rewrite pharmaceutical regulations for hospitals while Baghdad began to burn.

The most egregious and self-defeating actions the CPA took were the first orders that it issued. CPA Order 1 permanently banned any former member of the Ba'ath party from employment in the public sector. Under Saddam membership in the Ba'ath party was required for teachers, military officers, and other mid-level bureaucrats. Experts on post-conflict reconstruction, government and even American military officers vehemently protested this action; instead they called for only removing the “thugs” who had carried out humanitarian rights abuses¹¹.

¹⁰ United States Government Accountability Office. *The Congressional Record—Senate, October 17, 2003*, (Government Accountability Office, 2003) 25091.

¹¹ Bennett, Brian. “Sorting the Bad From The Not So Bad.” *Time Magazine*, May 19, 2003. Accessed November 12, 2011.

CPA Order 2 permanently disbanded the Iraqi Army. During the 1980s the Iraqi Army had proudly defended the homeland from the feared Persians, then fought a Thermopylae-like battle against a coalition of the entire world. The sheer scale and high stakes of the Iran-Iraq War and the First Gulf War fighting had forced the Iraqi Army to be a meritocratic and non-sectarian¹², especially since most of the fighting was in the predominately Shi'a areas. This is in stark contrast to the armies of most authoritarian regimes, which are usually packed with the regimes supporters and used to maintain domestic rule. Most Iraqis were proud of their Army and their Soldiers were proud to have valiantly defended their homes. In a culture that values saving face and honor above all else the Americans had unintentionally sent a major slight to an institution of national pride.

CPA Order 2 was in sharp contrast to prewar propaganda that promised Iraqi Soldiers that if they did not fight the American invasion the Americans would let bygones be bygones, going so far as to ensure that Iraqi Soldiers would receive back pay for any missed pay periods. Naturally Iraqi Soldiers assumed that after the fighting had ebbed they would be called back to the Army. In the chaos surrounding the fall of Baghdad Iraqi Officers in the Ministry of Defense went so far as to stash the payroll records of the entire Army in their homes for safe keeping to help speedy reconstitution of the Army. After CPA Order 2 the American Army would spend the next several years trying to recreate a non-sectarian, stable, and independent Iraqi Army whose unit ironically trace their lineage directly back to the Army the CPA had just disbanded and it would be several years before the Iraqis were an addition instead

¹² This excludes the elite Republican Guard, which was predominantly Sunni and utterly loyal to Saddam.

of a drain on American resources¹³. At the individual level, Soldiers in the Iraqi Army were proud of service to their nation and took CPA Order 2 as an affront to their personal honor and sense of identity. The end result of CPA Order number 2 was to create a class of disaffected young men who were trained, armed, experienced and angry with the Americans.

How Do You Fight An Insurgency?

As the American occupation continued on into the summer and fall of 2003 American military commanders found themselves increasingly fighting a nascent insurgency without overarching policy or doctrine¹⁴. Into this vacuum each division commander was left to develop their own policies and procedures for their area of operations. A debate began within American military circles as to how best quell the insurgency should commanders use overwhelming amounts of force and hard power to directly confront and destroy the insurgency or should they use soft power's to focus on keeping potential insurgents engaged in politics and reconstruction while offering to rehabilitate the insurgents themselves. A case study can be made between General Odierno's 4th Infantry Division in the "Sunni Triangle"¹⁵ which used hard power and General Petraeus's 101st Airborne Division in Mosul

¹³ Thomas E Ricks, *The Gamble: General Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009) 278.

¹⁴ Though the Army and Marine Corps each had counterinsurgency manuals they had not been updated since the early 1980s [Department of the Army. *Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency*. Washington: Department of the Army, 2006.]

¹⁵ This was anchored roughly in the north by Tikrit, the east by Baghdad, the west by Ramadi and was the predominate powerbase of Saddam's regime.

that mostly used soft power, with the other division commanders falling somewhere in the middle.

General Odierno's believed that the reason for the rising insurgency is that the Iraqi Army had not been defeated on the battlefield and did not view itself as such. The solution was to use force and coercion (such as sweeps, raids on civilian homes, and large amounts of firepower) to directly attack the insurgency and leave its members dead or captured. Of particular note was the use of heavily armed presence patrols in Humvees and other armored vehicles; this was a technique that the Americans had used to great success in Kosovo during the previous decade where they were welcomed by the ethnically divided populace to keep tensions from reigniting, but unlike Kosovo the demographics of the Sunni Triangle were largely homogenous. The locals did not need security to prevent violence, but rule of law. These American patrols barreled through Iraqi towns with guns aggressively pointing out at the locals, forcing them off the road, refusing to stop to the point of driving on sidewalks and into oncoming traffic. The Iraqis took these actions as the Americans as occupiers with an attitude of "I'm here, I'm coming through, and there is nothing you can do about it". Instead of being treated as a newly liberated people ready to take their country in a proud new direction in partnership with the American allies, instead the Iraqis felt they were being paternalistically treated as if they had to be protected from themselves¹⁶ and found such treatment offensive and degrading.

The Americans would detain all the male members of household near where they attacked or found weapons without making even a token attempt to investigate who was actually implicated, instead simply dropping them off at Abu Ghraib. This

¹⁶ Ricks, *Fiasco*, 312.

swelled the prisoner population and overwhelmed guards and interrogators, which directly contributed to later abuses. Administrative personnel at the prison were unable to track or report who had been detained to prisoner's families. Iraqis would be detained for simply being at the wrong place at the wrong time and just disappear for months at a time. This built large-scale resentment against the Americans by both those who were detained as well as their families¹⁷.

Critics of General Odierno's hard power charged that the heavy handed tactics were counter-productive and that by aggressively attacking the insurgency he was building support for the insurgents in the community. The critics argued that he should have been attempting to build goodwill in the heart of Saddam's base of power to bring his former supporters into the political process and give them a stake in the post-Saddam Iraqi government. Though later events would prove the critics correct, it was unclear at the time. What was clear is that General Odierno's troops were killing and detaining insurgents, disrupting their cells and finding weapons caches while in the face of rising violence¹⁸.

General David Petraeus's 101st Airborne Division in Mosul chose to take a different approach more focused on Soft Power's political engagement and lessened emphasis on force, but he also faced completely different circumstances. Instead of a Sunni hegemony, Mosul was an area that had been historically Kurdish, but Saddam had expelled the Kurds and replaced them with Sunni Arabs. General Petraeus's basic mission was a race against time to prevent an Arab-Kurdish civil war

¹⁷ Ricks, *Fiasco*, 199.

¹⁸ Gonzales, Daniel , John Hollywood, Jerry M. Sollinger, James McFadden, John DeJarnette, Sarah Harting and Donald Temple. *Networked Forces in Stability Operations: 101st Airborne Division, 3/2 and 1/25 Stryker Brigades in Northern Iraq*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007) 112.

from breaking out. With this mission he understood that violence begets violence and instead decided to build support of the locals and give both sides a stake in the government so they wouldn't feel a need to resort to violence¹⁹. To not alienate the locals General Petraeus put restrictions on his unit's use of violence, allowing it to only be used sparingly and precisely. When his unit wanted to conduct a raid to detain an insurgent it would contact the elite Special Forces to conduct the raid very precisely with their vastly superior equipment and training while conventional forces pulled security and support. For example, in one such raid 23 out of 35 targets were detained with one shot fired²⁰. In return General Petraeus would provide firepower and numbers associated with a conventional unit when the Special Forces requested it for their missions.

General Petraeus pushed to rebuild Mosul as rapidly as possible to give the locals a stake in both reconstruction as well as the new Iraqi state. Not wanting to wait for reconstruction funds from Baghdad or Washington, General Petraeus immediately began to fund reconstruction projects through use of his Commander's Emergency Response Fund (CERP)²¹ and fund from remaining pre-war institutions, at one point even going so far as to assert himself as the new leader in the area to order Iraqi bankers to fund his projects²².

¹⁹ Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, 37.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 39.

²¹ During the entire Iraq War unit commander's were given a discretionary spending fund based on unit size, mission and time period.

²² Gonzales et al. *Networked Forces in Stability Operations*, 129.

Mosul is more than 350 kilometers from Baghdad, which gave General Petraeus the geographical ability to resist the immediate implementation of CPA Orders 1 and 2. Petraeus argued that firing a group of well-connected mid-level bureaucrats would be akin to handing the insurgency a core group of leaders. Before being ordered to disband the Iraqi Army, Petraeus had already been in contact with an Iraqi Officer's association to engage and keep a feel on the pulse within the community of those with the training and leadership to fight. When faced with CPA Order 2 General Petraeus proposed to keep the officers appeased by having a posh retirement ceremony acknowledging the honorable accomplishments of the officers, giving them a medal, then inviting them back into a new organization the next day. General Petraeus warned that the two CPA Orders would lead to the alienation of two important segments of society would lead to unrest and resisted their implementation, but was overruled when head of the CPA Paul Bremer III personally contacted the Pentagon in order to have them directly order Petraeus to implement the orders²³. Unfortunately Petraeus was proved correct when protests started almost immediately and violence began to escalate.

In early 2004 General Petraeus's unit was replaced by another one roughly half its size lacking the forces on the ground to continue his approach nor did the incoming commander have show desire to do so. Subsequently Mosul would explode with the rest of Iraq during the spring 2004.

Ultimately General Petraeus's approaches would prove an interesting experiment in counterinsurgency. Though successful in keeping a lid on Arab-Kurd

²³ Ricks, *Fiasco*, 229.

violence, critics at the time charged that his success was temporary and unsustainable because he was simply buying off the insurgents who were happy to take money and time to organize and would inevitably emerge strengthened at a time and place of their choosing. Instead they argued that he should have taken the focus on rooting out former Ba'athists and fighting the insurgency, while leaving political reconstruction to the civilians²⁴.

Leaving the Cities

Another other major development during 2003 was the withdrawal of American troops onto increasingly large bases on the edges of major cities as the troops withdrew from small primitive outposts they had initially occupied deep in the cities. This allowed for simplified and safer logistics, better command and control, and better living conditions for soldiers. This withdrawal signified the beginnings of an anti-body paradigm²⁵; it was hoped that a smaller American footprint in the cities would result in less violence as well as prove less antagonistic toward local Iraqis. Yet as the Americans were expanding, fortifying and improving their bases without rhetoric of a withdrawal Iraqis saw the beginnings of a permanent presence reeking of neo-colonialism.

Conclusion

Ultimately the narrative of 2003 was one of a textbook perfect lightning invasion, but then lack of post-war direction drove the growth of an insurgency. Lack

²⁴ Woodward, *State of Denial*, 209.

²⁵ The anti-body theory was the official belief that much like anti-bodies in the blood draw the viruses in order to attack them, when the Americans went into an area they were drawing the insurgents into attacks whereby without the American presence they would not have caused violence.

of security in the days following the invasion led to looting that destroyed Iraqi infrastructure and flooded the country with stolen munitions. The CPA issued ill-conceived directives that disenfranchised bureaucrats and dishonored Soldiers driving them into the insurgency and providing the nascent insurgency with its leaders and foot soldiers. Lacking coherent doctrine each American division commander was left to fight his own war as a debate emerged about the effectiveness of hard vs. soft power. Unfortunately 2004 would provide no verdict as the entire country descended into the chaos of insurgency.

2004: Losing and Retaking the Cities

American Goals

In early 2004 the American goals were: complete the withdraw of American troops from the cities, have the CPA transfer political control to the sovereign Iraqi Interim Government and set the stage for parliamentary elections in January, 2005²⁶. Though seemingly simple, the American goals were underlain with major issues. American withdrawal from the cities meant effectively ceding the control to the insurgents whenever the Americans were not actively present which, due to the endemic shortage of enough troops, was far too often. The fewer number of bases meant that it was relatively easy for the insurgents to monitor when the Americans were going to be present so they could lay low and to plan ambushes and IEDs on the predictable routes between bases and cities/neighborhoods. The American goals led to a fundamentally flawed American strategy of using democratic politics to create security and rule of law. Subsequent events would prove the opposite. Comparing

²⁶ *Ibid*, 147.

the CPA's transfer of political authority to the Iraqi Interim Government in 2004 with the American handover of security responsibility of Anbar province to the Iraqi military in 2008 is an example of this. The former had to be accomplished by June 30, 2004, but was done ahead of schedule and in secret to prevent insurgent interruption (which the Americans would have been unable to prevent) in a small ceremony in the heavily fortified Green Zone and was not even announced until Bremer was on a flight back to the United States²⁷. The latter was a lavish, formal public ceremony carried out in the streets after a parade with the Americans not even wearing armor, helmets or carrying weapons, but was done after heavy, costly fighting by an American-Iraqi alliance to defeat the insurgents²⁸.

A Growing Insurgency

By spring 2004 Iraq was ripe for an insurgency. While the Americans had driven a disaffected class of unemployed soldiers and former Ba'athists into the arms of the insurgency while destroying the good will of the Iraqi populace through heavy-handed operations. At the same time the American units that had carried out the invasion were beginning to be rotated out and replaced. Arab culture is one where politics is carried out largely by personal relationships and interactions; so incoming units effectively found their relationships with the Iraqis reset²⁹. Catalyzing the situation was growing animosity and frustration with the failure of a return to prosperity compared with that of Kuwait after the 1991 war. Many Iraqis began to

²⁷ Chandraasekaran. *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone*, 239.

²⁸ Filkins, Dexter "U.S. Hands Off Pacified Anbar, Once Heart of Iraq Insurgency" *The New York Times*, September 1, 2008, Accessed November 24, 2011.

²⁹ Ricks, *Fiasco* 323.

suspect that the Americans were more concerned with neo-colonialism than in helping them recover from the fighting. This meant that by early spring 2004 the insurgents had support, the time to organize and desire to wage full-scale campaign against the insurgency.

Sadr: Round 1

Muqtada al-Sadr was a son of a very popular ayatollah who had been one of few clerics to oppose Saddam, only to be cast into martyrdom with his 1999 assassination by Saddam agents. Following the fall of Baghdad, the neighborhood of Saddam City had been renamed Sadr City in his honor, while his son quietly stepped into the power vacuum and built a political party of young imams and the Jaish al-Mahdi militia of poor, unemployed and disaffected Shi'a youth. Sadr routinely denounced the U.S.; mostly by denouncing it for not supporting the 1991 Shi'a uprising and blaming it for the looting after the fall of Baghdad. Though Sadr's rhetoric was vehemently anti-American, he largely stayed out of military confrontation and focused his militia on skirmishing with the better-established militias that had been trained and armed by Iran during the Iran-Iraq War. The lack of attacks gave American the impression that the Jaish al-Mahdi only possessed small arms, and were unaware of the Jaish al-Mahdi stockpiling RPGs and explosives for IEDs so they largely left Sadr alone to focus on other threats; this left him free to organize his militia and stockpile weapons³⁰.

Things came to a head with Sadr on March 28, 2004, when Bremer ordered Sadr's newspaper "Al Hawza" shut-down, accusing in it of perpetuating lies about the American presence. Within hours protests had erupted throughout the Shi'a areas of

³⁰ Chandraasekaran, Rajiv. *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, 254.

Baghdad and brought life to a standstill. On April 4th an American convoy was ambushed in Sadr City that kicked off a major Jaish al-Mahdi offensive in Sadr City, Najaf, Karbala, Basra and Nasiriya with the Jaish al-Mahdi overrunning virtually all Iraqi Police and Army positions in the cities³¹. The offensive left the Americans reeling in surprise at its unity, coordination and sophistication. An example of this is of how when a large American convoy of armored vehicles left Baquba to move south as reinforcements for forces fighting in Najaf; insurgents used cell phones to relay where the Americans were headed so insurgents in that area could destroy the bridges and plant IEDs³². This made the movement last four times as long as expected and take numerous casualties.

By the end of May both sides were exhausted from weeks of heavy fighting and were ready for a cease-fire. The Americans agreed to respect Sadr's control of Najaf and Sadr City. In return he agreed to get rid of all the Jaish al-Mahdi's heavy weapons and only retain small arms, which did not happen³³. Both sides realized that the cease-fire was nothing more than a temporary lull in the fighting and both sides used it as time to rearm, reequip and rebuild weapons stockpiles.

“Fallujah”

While the Army was fighting Sadr in Baghdad and the South, the Marines found themselves engaged in their most intense urban fighting since Vietnam War in the western Sunni city of Fallujah. When the staff of the 1st Marine Division

³¹ *Ibid*, 263.

³² Ricks. *Fiasco*, 334.

³³ Kozlowski, Francis X. *The Battle of An-Najaf*. (Washington DC: History Division United States Marine Corps, 2009) 44.

began to plan to return to Iraq in late 2003 they devised a mostly soft-power approach based on institutional memory of waging successful anti-insurgency campaigns during the Banana Wars, Haiti and the Philippines. First the Marines would use the “reset” in relations caused by their replacement of the Army as an advantage to reengage with the population while gradually pushing forces into the cities where they would construct small bases to reassert a permanent presence³⁴. This would allow the Marines to establish relations with the locals, reassert the rule of law and provide a secure environment for the reconstruction and reestablishment of the Iraqi institutions of state. Three years later similar tactics would be used during the Surge to retake Baghdad. Unfortunately, events shifted before the tactics could be tried.

On March 31, 2004 Marine plans for a shift in strategy came crashing down when four Blackwater contractors were ambushed in their unarmored SUV³⁵. After being ambushed the Blackwater contractors were burned, dismembered and hung from a bridge by an angry mob. When the media released photos of the bodies hanging from the bridge, the uproar was almost instantaneous, and an indignant Bush Administration ordered an immediate large-scale attack. When General Mattis, the overall commander of forces in Anbar, requested permission to wage a police style operation, so as to avoid destroying an entire city for the actions of a few hundred, he was ordered to immediately attack “with the power of a Marine division”³⁶. He also argued that a spontaneous attack was not militarily sound and would not allow the careful planning and preparation characteristic of most successful large-scale military

³⁵ Ricks, *Fiasco*, 314.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 332.

operations. He his staff would not have the time to infiltrate snipers or carefully construct intelligence estimates. Even worse his forces would not have time to stockpile resources, forcing them to rely on continued resupply by vulnerable convoys on predictable route that would be heavily attacked by insurgents supporting those in the cities forcing unnecessary casualties and equipment losses³⁷.

But General Mattis was overruled and on April 5 American Marines attacked the city in a massive operation; fighting was fierce, large areas of the city damaged or destroyed and many civilians killed. As American forces neared the center of the city they were suddenly ordered to halt by a Bush administration bowing to pressures that were created by images and videos released by the media of the city being destroyed and civilians killed. On April 28 the Marines were ordered to turn over control of the city to the Fallujah Brigade, a unit hastily created by the CIA around a Saddam Era General who had approached the Americans promising to retake the city. It was obvious from the outset that this was simply a move by the Americans to withdraw from the city while trying to save face. Within weeks the entire unit had deserted the city and the insurgents were firmly in control³⁸.

A Second Round of Fighting

As temperatures soared during the early summer all the sides took the opportunity to lick their wounds in preparation for an American counterattack to reassert their presence in preparation for parliamentary elections in early 2005. In early August the Americans attacked the Jaish al-Mahdi in Najaf. After 24 days of

³⁷ *Ibid*, 333.

³⁸ Francis X. Kozlowski *The Battle of An-Najaf*. (Washington DC: History Division United States Marine Corps, 2009), 1.

intense fighting they were only 100 meters from the Imam Ali Mosque, which the Jaish al-Mahdi had been using as their main base³⁹. The Americans had not attacked the mosque directly due to potential wide ranging political ramifications, but as the Americans closed in on the mosque damage, was looking increasingly inevitable even though Jaish al-Mahdi defeat was inevitable. At this point Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, the leading Shi'a cleric in Iraq, stepped in to mediate a ceasefire whereby the Jaish al-Mahdi fighters would surrender their weapons, but allowed to leave the city unmolested. This would leave the Americans with at least nominal control of the city.

In Fallujah both sides spent the summer preparing; the Americans built berms all around the city, dropped leaflets encouraging civilians to leave and stockpiled munitions; while the insurgents fortified their positions, planted hundreds of booby traps and hid hundreds of arms caches. During November the Americans waged the largest conventional operation of the Iraq War. Hundreds died and the city was nearly destroyed, and by mid-December the last pockets of resistance had been mopped up⁴⁰.

Training the Iraqis

During the spring fighting the post-invasion hastily organized Iraqi Security Forces⁴¹ all but collapsed in the face of fighting the insurgency; their training had

³⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

⁴⁰ Edited by: McWilliams, Timothy. *Anbar Awakening: Volume 1: American Perspectives U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009*. (Quantico, Virginia: Marines Corps University Press, 2009), 27.

been poorly coordinated, haphazard and ineffectual. It was so bad that entire units would desert when ordered into combat. The number of Iraqi troops reported as trained or in training dropped from 145 thousand in June to 91 thousand in August⁴². As a result in June 2004, the Americans decided to consolidate all training of Iraqi Security Forces under a single command and assigned put newly promoted Lieutenant General Petraeus in command. Petraeus's vision was that training troops and forming commands takes time so he designed a strategy that took a long-term vision and without promises of a hasty exit. This was one of the first large-scale American strategies predicated on a "long war" and a sign of how the American military was beginning to understand there were no quick answers in Iraq. Instead of cobbling together large numbers of men, calling them a unit, appointing commanders and throwing them into combat, Petraeus's plan was to form a unit at the most basic level (the 50 man platoon) then adopt a led, lead, leave model with gradually larger units. In this way the Iraqi units would have to follow American leadership, then they would take the lead with the Americans acting as front seat passengers. The final step was for them to act independently so the Americans could leave their areas of operation⁴³. As they grew proficient at the platoon level, they would be merged into companies, then battalions, then brigades, then divisions, and then finally an independent Army; at that point the Americans would have trained themselves out of a job.

⁴¹ This includes the Iraqi Army, Iraqi National Police, and Iraqi Federal Police (accountable to the Ministry of the Interior)

⁴² Brookings Institute. *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*. (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, February 2005), 13.

⁴³ Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, 156.

Conclusion of 2004

The result of 2004 in Iraq was that American military commanders and Bush Administration politicians claimed victories because though they had initially lost control of much of the country they had fought major battles resulting in insurgent safe-havens cleared and thousands of insurgents killed. This was the ultimate test of American use of hard power. If they could retain control of the cities during 2005 it would vindicate the hard power approach. During the lead up to the elections the Americans claimed control of the entire country. Unfortunately the reality on the ground was very different and much as in Vietnam the generals and Washington claimed victory while those on the ground found themselves facing more numerous and lethal direct attacks, while IEDs grew more powerful and sophisticated. Troops on the ground and Iraqi civilians alike realized that American control was nominal at best and as soon as a patrol was gone, the insurgents were in control. Meanwhile Iraqi-on-Iraqi violence began as the insurgents used violence as a political tool in coming elections and a nascent civil war began.

There was a small degree of hope, after General Petraeus reformed training of the Iraqi Security Forces, which increasingly began to show up on the battlefield reliably and effectively. Though first only as small units in support roles the Iraqi security forces would slowly but steadily improve and grow, even in the face of a larger, more lethal insurgency⁴⁴. There was a contraction in this success because as the slow and steady process began to bear fruit, Washington was still calling for a quick Iraqization and American withdrawal after the elections, without understanding

⁴⁴ Brookings. *Iraq Index 2005*, 10.

that the very reason the program was successful was because it was founded in a long-war strategy.

2005- Elections and Insurgent “Whack-a-Mole”

In January 2005 the Americans felt they had weakened the insurgency to the point that the elections were viable, so they helped the Interim Iraqi Government organize votes on National Council of Representatives, to write a constitution, and form Provincial Governing Councils. To ensure security the Americans and Iraqi Security Forces took a number of measures: first the Americans deployed a brigade of 3,500 additional Soldiers; carried many military of operations as they possibly could to put pressure on the insurgents; and finally passive security measures, such as banning non-military vehicles from the roads. Though the Americans would be present to help ensure security, during the elections themselves they were banned from going within 500 meters of the polling places. On election day these measures were effective, insurgent attacks were minimal and The International Crisis Group proclaimed the elections fairly held; but ultimately the elections were a failure as a number of key constituencies boycotted the elections and chose not to participate in the political process robbing it of legitimacy and support that a stable Iraqi government would need to participate⁴⁵. One of the key successes of the 2007 Surge would be that it sufficiently weakened these constituencies to the point that the only tools they had left to use were political and if they failed to use them they risked irrelevance.

⁴⁵ International Crisis Group. “Iraq’s Civil War, The Sadrists and The Surge.” *Middle East Report* N 72 (2008).

Muqtada al-Sadr chose not to support and participate in the elections, instead disallowing his organization from political involvement in the Iraqi government so long as the American occupation continued. In addition to reaffirming his anti-Americanism this sent signals that he didn't have to participate in the government to be strong and distancing himself from political fallout if it took an anti-Shi'a stance or collapsed completely⁴⁶. Yet at the same time he hedged his bets by quietly allowing followers to run as independents, meaning that he was a de facto power within the government and the door was open if he chose to participate later.

The elections in the Sunni areas, particularly the province of Anbar, were complete and utter failures. The Iraqi Tribes⁴⁷ and the Al Qaeda in Iraq, called for a boycott of the election, threatening to kill any who voted and observed the polling stations for later retaliatory action with the Americans and Iraqi Security forces powerless to stop them. The resulting lack of Sunni investment in the Iraqi Government helped fuel the summer fighting against what they saw as an illegitimate government and foreign occupiers. But there was a glimmer of hope; as 2005 wore on and the political process began to grind forward in Baghdad the tribes saw it as increasingly fitting the agenda of the Shi'a (and to a lesser degree the Kurds) and tribal leaders began to feel the sting of political disengagement and risk of complete political disempowerment if the Iraqi government were to succeed. By the December elections for parliament these pressures had escalated to the point that the tribes told

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ These are non-state social organization of extended families led by a Sheik. The tribal structure predates the state process and even Mohammad in some cases.

their member to go to the polls, despite Al Qaeda in Iraq threats to the contrary⁴⁸. For the first time since the invasion the tribes had broken with their Islamist allies, even going so far as to openly skirmish with Al Qaeda in Iraq fighters trying to disrupt the elections. Unfortunately the Americans failed to exploit these tensions, though it is unclear if the tribes would have accepted an alliance against Al Qaeda in Iraq at this point, but this break did set an important precedent that tribal interests would come before Islamist ideology.

While Iraqi politicians were trying to write a constitution and form provincial governments, the Americans were trying to keep the insurgency off balance enough for them to do so. The battles of the previous year had shown the insurgents that to expel and then defend the Americans from cities and neighborhoods was suicide because it just allowed them the opportunity to gather resources and firepower for overwhelming attacks. Instead they would attack the Americans until they shifted resources and launched large-scale operations and then slip away to other areas leaving IEDs and snipers. When that area was attacked they would leave to another, rinse and repeat. To the Americans it began to resemble a game of “whack-a-mole” constantly shifting resources to an insurgency that was popping up seemingly everywhere. It was not that one area would shift troops to an area that was bad, everywhere was bad by this point and they were just shifting to areas that were horrible.

Between the 2005 elections the situation in Iraq did not improve, as the Americans tried to make space for the government to allow politics to drive security.

⁴⁸ Michaels, *A Chance in Hell*, 69.

The situation continued to deteriorate, attacks and casualties continued to escalate, while the American Generals promised that the growing number of Iraqi troops would provide an elected government the tools to withdraw large numbers of troops the next year. While not understanding that politics needs security and though there were steadily larger numbers of Iraqi troops they were still very reliant on American leadership and support and it would still be years before they were capable of independent operations at higher echelons of command. Though the Americans were killing and detaining large numbers of insurgents and capturing weapons caches the lack of a large-scale permanent presence meant that as soon as the Americans had returned to their bases the insurgents could freely return. By the beginning of the winter the situation had deteriorated to the point that just as in Vietnam during 1967, in 2005 a General in Iraq could tell you of a looming victory while a private could tell you of a spiraling defeat. Just as the Tet Offensive forced Generals and politicians to unequivocally recognize the reality of the situation, things were beginning to do the same in Iraq.

Chapter 2: 2006- Atrocities, Civil War and Gambles

Early in 2006 the Americans were facing a fourth year of a war which was continuing to spiral out of control with the Americans powerless to stop it. 2006 would be a climactic year in which American atrocities and all-out civil war would force a widespread acknowledgement of how badly the situation had deteriorated. At the same time the Republican defeat during the fall elections would turn both parties in Congress against the Bush Administration and force him to change course or face Congress cutting the purse strings and forcing an end to the war. Yet behind the scenes there was hope. In the northern city of Tal Afar Colonel H.R. McMaster was wrapping up the first successful counterinsurgency campaign of the war based on a radical departure in tactics while in the western province of Anbar the locals were beginning to get tired of Al Qaeda in Iraq's presence which would culminate in an all-out alliance with the Americans in a campaign to take back Anbar from the insurgents.

Haditha Killings

The critical events of 2006 actually began on November 19, 2005 in the town of Haditha located in the western province of Anbar when an IED blew up a Marine Humvee on patrol, killing one and injuring two others. In the immediate aftermath the Marines went on a rampage through three civilian homes that would leave 16 women and children dead in addition to 8 military-age males.⁴⁹ Later the Marines

⁴⁹Tim McGirk. "Collateral Damage or Civilian Massacre in Haditha?" *Time Magazine*, March 19, 2006, accessed December 19, 2011.

would claim that they were shot at but no weapons were ever found. After returning to base the Marines filed an After-Action Report that was forwarded to (their higher) headquarters⁵⁰. Nothing about 8 insurgents (as the military-age males were immediately classified as) and 16 civilians dead struck higher echelons of command as out of the ordinary or unacceptable enough to warrant further investigation.

The events of Haditha did not begin to come to light until Time Magazine reporter Tim McGirk began to investigate after hearing Iraqi rumors of a massacre. In January 2006 Mr. McGirk recorded emotional first hand testimony by witnesses and survivors as well as cell phone photos of the immediate aftermath⁵¹. When McGirk confronted the incoming commander of Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I)⁵² Lieutenant General Chiarelli with the allegations and evidence of the Haditha Massacre he immediately requested a copy of the internal investigation's report. When informed that lower level commanders did not feel it warranted an investigation, he quickly reprimanded them and ordered an investigation⁵³.

In March, 2006 McGirk published an article in which he accused the Marines of committing a massacre in Haditha⁵⁴. This sparked public outrage, and allegations of a cover-up were quick to follow. Yet the American military's handling of the Haditha killings was worse than a cover-up, it was indicative of blatant systemic

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Early in the Iraq War it was recognized that overall command of all aspects of all coalition forces in Iraq was too much for one commander and one staff. So in 2004 the command was split into Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) which had the strategic responsibilities and dealing with Washington D.C. as well as the International community, while Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) was responsible for tactical control of all coalition units within the country and reported to MNF-I.

⁵³ Ricks. *The Gamble*, 7.

⁵⁴ McGirk, *Collateral Damage or Civilian Massacre*.

apathy as to collateral damage and civilian casualties in a country into which they had come in the name of democracy and liberation.

This attitude on the ground of simply trying to survive and kill those who are trying to kill you completely neglected the ideas of mission accomplishment, much less the greater ideals that the American military and political leaders continued to claim. The reality that things were continuing to spiral uncontrollably downward would be further reinforced just three weeks later.

Bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque

The Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, Iraq is the third holiest shrine in Shi'a Islam, its Golden Dome has been a popular place of pilgrimage and worship by Shi'a and Sunni alike for centuries⁵⁵. In the early hours of February 23, 2006 several members of Al Qaeda in Iraq snuck into the Mosque, tied up the guards and planted explosives in the dome. At approximately 6:55 am an explosion rocked the town of Samarra as the dome was completely obliterated from Samarra's skyline⁵⁶. News of this attack quickly spread throughout the country with almost instant reactions. The Iraqi government declared that the only enemy of the Iraqis was terrorism and implemented a curfew in Baghdad while the Iraqi and American militaries were put on high alert and prepared for Iraqi on Iraqi violence. As one officer put it "the day [the Samarra shrine] blew up every last one of us said it was the beginning of civil war in Iraq."⁵⁷ Shi'a clerics called on their followers not to attack Sunni Mosques and

⁵⁵ Jason Burke. *The 9/11 Wars*. (New York: Penguin, 2011) 239.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 239.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 240.

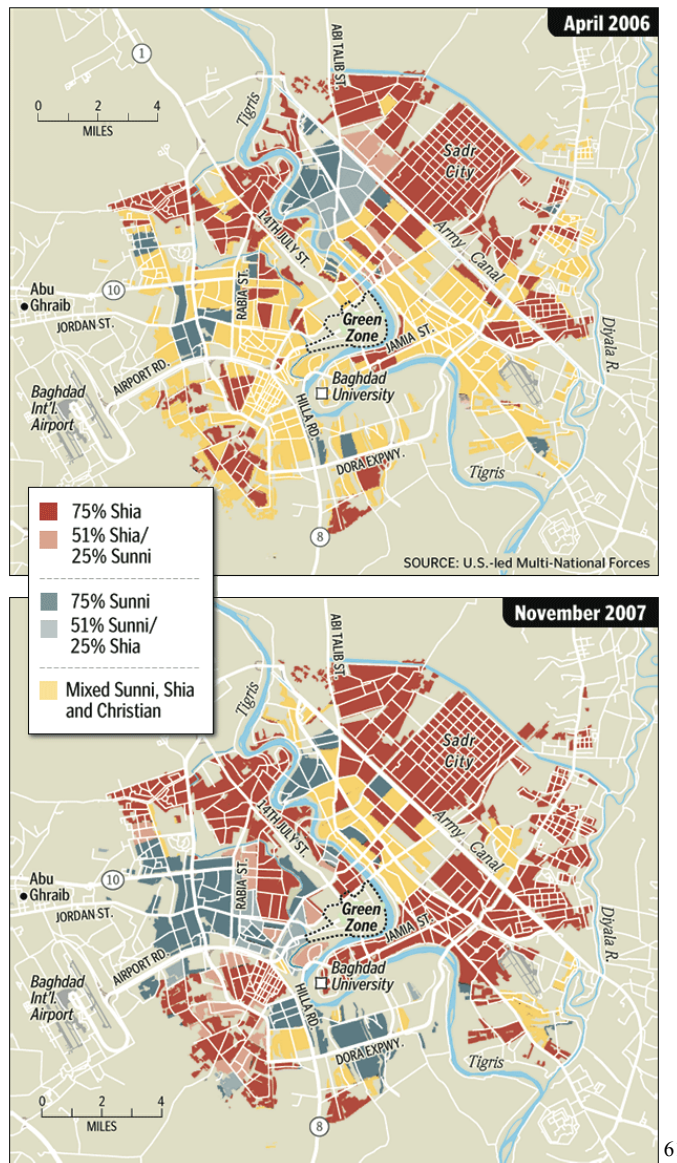
for the tribes to protect mosques. Muqtada Al-Sadr took it a step further and called on his militia to protect all mosques⁵⁸. The actions of non-governmental actors were indicative of how irrelevant the Iraqi government and security forces had become and that they lacked even a pretention of control or ability to project power. The actions of the extra-governmental forces were plays for power and influence within the Iraqi society.

Despite calls for restraint, within hours Shia militiamen and Sunni insurgents were actively attacking each other and Iraqi civilians. In the following five days more than 30 mosques were attacked with 1,000 – 1,500 Iraqis being killed every-day⁵⁹. Per the norm the Pentagon and White House downplayed the violence and asserted that only 300-400 civilians were being killed and that journalist accounts were exaggerations. But as Wikileaks documents show, those on the ground were reporting that same explosion of violence.⁶⁰ In the weeks and months following, Shi'a-Sunni fighting in Baghdad began to take the form of neighborhood ethnic cleansing, and those not killed were intimidated to leave. The Sunnis were on the losing end of the fighting with their numbers in Baghdad cut in half as they were pushed out of mixed neighborhoods and into their strong-holds by Sadr's better armed and organized Jaish Al-Mahdi. The result was a Beirut-like division of Baghdad that left a once mixed city as firmly divided between Shi'a and Sunni neighborhoods as shown in this map.

⁵⁸ *Ibid* 241.

⁵⁹ Ellen Knickmeyer. "Blood on Our Hands," *Foreign Policy Magazine*, October 25, 2010, accessed December 22, 2012.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.



By the end of 2006 the number of civilians killed in Iraq had nearly doubled, from 15, 491 in 2005 to 28, 255 in 2006, the vast majority after the Al-Askari bombing with an additional 1.2 million Iraqis being forced to flee their homes⁶². At

⁶¹ Washington Post, December 2007.

⁶² Brookings Institute. *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*. Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, November 2011

this point the violence had begun to shift from neighbor on neighbor to that of neighborhood on neighborhood. This would prove vital to the success of the Surge in 2007 because the Americans could stem sectarian violence by isolating neighborhoods.

The Americans now found themselves surrounded by an orgy of violence and faced with a number of missions and stretched thin by having to stand up and train Iraqi forces while simultaneously fighting the Sunni insurgents, the Shi'a militias, and also having to try and keep both sides from attacking each other's civilians. All the while they faced rhetoric from higher up that things are improving, that implementing rule-of-law is not the job of the American military and expecting orders to further consolidate bases in preparation for a large-scale draw down⁶³. Despite herculean efforts to quell the violence, Americans found themselves increasingly on the sidelines of an all out Iraqi civil war while also fighting a vicious insurgency.

In a last ditch effort to stop the violence and defeat the insurgency the Americans moved 3,700 reinforcements from Mosul to Baghdad and planned two large operations supported by the Iraqi Army to "clear, hold, build" neighborhoods of Baghdad. In this strategy the Americans would first enter a neighborhood then depart leaving the Iraqis to "hold" it and provide security for a "build" phase⁶⁴. The assumption was that a long American presence would have an "anti-body" like effect that provoked further attacks and catalyzed the violence⁶⁵.

⁶³ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 47.

⁶⁴ Iraq Study Group (U.S.) James Addison Baker, Lee Hamilton, and Lawrence S. Eagleburger. 2006 The Iraq Study Group report. Accessed January 5, 2012,

⁶⁵ Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, 243.

Operations Together Forward I and II lasted from late June to late August, and the Americans proved very capable of killing insurgents, but the Iraqi military was still too inept to take a leading role⁶⁶. The porous and chaotic layout of Baghdad enabled the insurgents to leave a neighborhood that was being cleared and rarely confront the overwhelming firepower of the Americans, instead leaving IEDs and snipers to inflict casualties and disrupt operations. When the Americans left the Iraqis to “hold”, insurgents would re-infiltrate and counter-attack; the Iraqis that were not killed or deserted found themselves unable to retain control of the area⁶⁷. By the end of the summer the failure of Operations Together Forward I and II to quell the violence was apparent. Ultimately the lessons of Together Forward I and II were the nail in the coffin that proved the inability of the American and Iraqi militaries to stop the violence in Baghdad using a conventional approach. Instead of quelling the violence, it actually increased by more than 43 percent between the summer and October 2006⁶⁸.

Anbar Is Lost

The homogenous population of the Western province of Anbar meant that the entire population was mobilized in support of the insurgency, which was further strengthened by the maturation of the radical Islamic movement. After the American invasion fundamentalist insurgent fighters had begun to trickle in from Jordan and

⁶⁶ Iraq Study Group (U.S.) James Addison Baker, Lee Hamilton, and Lawrence S. Eagleburger. 2006 The Iraq Study Group report. Accessed January 5, 2012.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Syria bringing warm bodies and external funding.⁶⁹ In October 2004, while faced with an expected large-scale American assault Abu Musab al-Zarqawi declared his radical Islamic organization Al Qaeda in Iraq so as to tap into external resources to help his organization rebuild and regroup after the presumably costly battle⁷⁰. Though the fundamentalist foreign-fighters took a role in the defense of the cities, most of their operations were the infrequent, but large-scale suicide bombings that killed hundreds of civilians. By 2006 Al Qaeda in Iraq had formed what was effectively a second insurgency within Anbar that was separate from the Sunni-Iraqi insurgency, with the goal of establishing a fundamentalist Islamic state, manned largely by foreign fighters, and funded by the external radical Islamic community⁷¹.

By 2006 the insurgents had de facto control of most of Anbar with many cities and towns having areas in to which the Americans did not go because they would take heavy casualties and have to abdicate due to lack of the troops and bases necessary to maintain a permanent presence leaving the insurgents in complete control of these safe-havens⁷². The situation was so dire that in August 2006 the top Marine intelligence officer in Anbar filed a classified intelligence report (which was almost immediately leaked to the press) in which he asserted that: the Americans could not project long-term security outside the immediate perimeter of their own bases...the Iraqi central government had all but collapsed; that there was an effective

⁶⁹ Peter L. Berger. *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between America and Al-Qaeda*. (New York: Free Press, 2011), 167.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 166.

⁷¹ Burke. *The 9/11* 249.

⁷² Ricks. *The Gamble*. 64.

military stalemate; and that for all intents and purposes Anbar province was lost to the Americans with the insurgents and Al Qaeda in Iraq in complete control⁷³.

Effect of American Mid-Term Elections

By early 2006 the Bush Administration and the Republican Party found themselves in an election year with a full-scale war that was undeniably spiraling out of control and no end in sight. For the first time in the Bush Administration many members of Congress who had unquestionably toed the party line began to break ranks in increasing numbers for their own political survival. In March 2006 Representative Frank Wolf, who had consistently voted with the president, broke ranks for the first time by attaching a rider to a spending bill that would create the Iraq Study Group.⁷⁴

The Iraq Study Group was to be a bi-partisan group of well respected, well known Americans with a long history of public service taking a look at the Iraq war with “a fresh set of eyes so as to provide “outside-the-box” options for a way forward in Iraq”⁷⁵. The implied intent was to find a way to end the Iraq War without the large-scale stigma of a Vietnam-like defeat. This led to domestic assumptions in America and Iraq that the American presence was coming to an end sooner rather than later.

⁷³ Ricks, Thomas, “Situation Called in West Iraq,” *Washington Post*, September 11, 2006. Accessed January 3, 2012.

⁷⁴ Tim Barrett. “Congress Forms Panel to Study Iraq War,” *CNN*, March 15, 2006 accessed January 3, 2012.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Things Begin to Shift

A Different Way in Tal Afar

In early 2005 after only 10 months home from their first year-long deployment, the American 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment⁷⁶ was given notice that they were being sent back to Iraq⁷⁷. During their first tour the unit had been rapidly shifted from place to place as commanders requested its heavy firepower and armored vehicles as reinforcements in areas where insurgent activity was picking up, then have to leave to another area only to have to return weeks or months later to refight the same battles in the same places and take ever more casualties⁷⁸. This resulted in a hardened veteran cadre of leaders within the unit having seen the failure of hard power use to defeat the insurgency. Now the unit was to have one area of responsibility in the town of Tal Afar in the far northwest of Iraq and a new commander with new ideas. The commander was Colonel H.R McMaster who had received the Silver Star during the First Gulf War; earned a Ph. D from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, with a thesis titled “Dereliction of Duty” about how during the Vietnam War the failure of senior military commanders in the field to challenge the those at the Pentagon directly contributed to the loss of the war⁷⁹.

⁷⁶ Despite the name modern Cavalry Regiments are heavily armed units consisting of Abrams tanks accompanied by Bradley Fighting Vehicles carrying infantrymen.

⁷⁷ David R. McCone, Wilbur J. Scott and George R. Mastroianni. “The 3r ACR in Tal’ Afar: Challenges and Adaptations,” *Strategic Studies Institute* (2008), 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

By the time the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment was headed back to Iraq it was a unit with a core of veterans disillusioned about both the progress of the war and the futility in how it was being fought, with a commander with a proven combat record and pedigree based on the need to push back against those in the rear and that was being sent far from headquarters prying eyes. This would prove a perfect storm to take risks and fight the war a different way. Ultimately The Battle of Tal Afar would prove to be the first successful counterinsurgency campaign of the Iraq War.

As with much of the country, Tal Afar had been heavily occupied in the days following the invasion, but by 2005 only 150 Americans were left in a town of 80,000. The town was in complete chaos, with the Sunni and Turkomen minorities fighting both each other and the Shia majority that had traditionally ruled while Al Qaeda in Iraq was using it as a sanctuary to funnel weapons to Mosul⁸⁰. In June 2005 3,500 Americans along with 1,500 Iraqi Soldiers began to arrive at a base outside of Tal Afar in preparation for the coming battle. Instead of immediately waging a Fallujah-style attack, the Americans began to build enormous sand berms around the city and construct checkpoints on the roads in and out of the city⁸¹ in order to stop the insurgents from freely moving in and out of the city. At the same time the American leadership met with local leaders to build relationships and begin splitting them from the insurgency⁸². Colonel McMaster made it clear that he knew many of the leaders

⁷⁹ George Packer. "The Lesson of Tal Afar." *The New Yorker*, April 10, 2006, accessed December 28, 2011.

⁸⁰ McCone, et. al. "The 3rd ACR in Tal' Afar," 2.

⁸¹ Bill Roggio. "Operation Restoring Rights in Tal Afar," *The Long War Journal*, September 5, 2005, accessed December 22, 2011.

⁸² Packer, "The Lesson of Tal Afar".

had ties to the insurgency, but that the past was the past and his troops were not going to attack or detain anyone who was not actively attacking the military, the Iraqi government or the civilian populace.

By September the Americans had completely sealed off the city and began to push into the city's neighborhoods and establish a series of combat outposts⁸³ deep within the Iraqi neighborhoods and to project a permanent presence and force the insurgents into a battle. Once a combat outpost had been established they would patrol and stress protecting the population and reestablishing rule of law and putting pressure on the insurgents. To appease the locals the Americans would co-locate themselves with Iraqi Soldiers so as to put a local face on the operations. The Americans also tried different tactics. Instead of knocking down doors in violent raids they would knock on the door before searching them then pay for any damage caused. This helped mitigate any anger that the raid had caused⁸⁴. By the end of September there were 29 combat outposts in Tal Afar meaning that the Americans were now a de facto part of the local dynamic and were now a force to be reckoned with⁸⁵. In the short term violence went up as the Americans moved into insurgent strong holds and the insurgents found themselves unable to escape. It was just a matter of time before the Americans closed in, to they chose to stand and fight. As the Americans used hard power to detain and kill the insurgents within the now segregated city, the population found that with the reestablishment of the rule of law,

⁸³ combat outposts are a type of small Spartan base with between 50-200 troops rotating out giving the military the ability to have a small number of troops in a large number of areas.

⁸⁴ Packer. "Lessons from Tal Afar."

⁸⁵ McCone, et. al. "The 3rd ACR in Tal' Afar," 16.

and supporting the Americans was in their best interests as opposed to the insurgents who seemed to be dedicated to maintaining the sectarian violence⁸⁶. As security improved the Americans worked with local leaders to bring in reconstruction projects that raised the standard of living and drained support from the insurgency as markets reopened and basic services returned to normal.

These unconventional uses of hard power and force to draw out the insurgents while also focusing on using soft power to break the civilians from the insurgents and build support for the presence of the Americans would prove the first use of Smart Power. Smart Power is a carrot and stick approach using hard power's firepower and direct attacks while also focusing on reconstruction and engagement of the local population so that they drop support for the insurgency. When Colonel McMaster's unit left in February 2006 the number of attacks had dropped from 170 per month to less than 20⁸⁷ and effectively destroyed Tal Afar as an insurgent safe have. Though the smart power approach was successful in Tal Afar, the city had only 170,000 inhabitants and was only 28 square kilometers. It was unclear if the smart power approach could be replicated (elsewhere) in the larger cities with a much more robust and entrenched insurgent support network.

The Battle of Ramadi

In February 2006 Colonel Sean MacFarland's First Brigade First Armored Division briefly replaced Colonel McMaster's regiment, but was almost

⁸⁶*Ibid*, 12.

⁸⁷ Jay B. Backer, "Tal Afar 2005: Laying the Counterinsurgency Groundwork," *Army Magazine*, June, 2009 67. Accessed January 5, 2012.

immediately sent south to Ramadi⁸⁸. Ramadi is the capital of Anbar province that sits on the main highway between Baghdad and the Jordanian/Syrian borders and was a major insurgent supply route. By early 2006 the Americans had all but abandoned large swaths of the city, not setting foot in many neighborhoods for months. This left an insurgent stronghold where Al Qaeda in Iraq was free to establish a headquarters and implement Sharia law. The insurgents even controlled the hospital, openly treating their own and killing patients they deemed un-loyal.

Colonel MacFarland's orders were simple "Fix Ramadi. But don't destroy it. Don't pull a Fallujah⁸⁹". Taking into account the success of Smart power use in Tal Afar⁹⁰ and realizing that the last three units in Ramadi had lost roughly 100 soldiers and his unit would as well, MacFarland decided to gamble that the results of Tal Afar could be replicated in the larger city with a much more intense, entrenched insurgency and that simply patrolling from the large bases was bound to fail and waste his troops lives⁹¹.

Due to the sheer size of a city like Ramadi, building a Tal Afar-like berm was deemed unfeasible. Instead the Americans quietly began to drop large concrete barriers on many of the roads in and out of the city while expanding and fortifying checkpoints on the remaining roads in expectation of an increase of traffic and

⁸⁸ Jim Michaels. "An Army Colonel's Gamble Pays Off in Iraq," *USA Today*, May 1, 2007, accessed December 17, 2011.

⁸⁹ Ricks. *The Gamble*. 61.

⁹⁰ Though MacFarland's unit was only in Tal Afar a few weeks, he had been in close contact with McMaster and watching the events of Tal Afar closely in preparation for his unit's deployment, even going so far as to visit on a "Leader's Recon."

⁹¹ Ricks. *The Gamble*. 61.

attacks⁹². These barriers could not prevent insurgents smuggling weapons in on foot, but they could stop heavy weapons and car-bombs. In late June the Americans began push their into the city by focusing on isolating individual neighborhoods with the concrete barriers and then building combat outposts⁹³. Throughout the summer the Americans methodically advanced neighborhood by neighborhood reestablishing their presence and control deeper and deeper into the city.

The Insurgency in Anbar

The insurgency in Anbar province was actually two individual insurgencies with separate members, goals and motivation. The first insurgency was the tribal insurgency made up of Sunni Iraqis who saw the Americans as occupiers reeking of colonization and the Iraqi government as an American puppet. These tribes were principally organized along historical family relationships and numbered from tens to thousands (and fit into the macro-tribal structure of the broader Levant that with macro-tribes numbering well into the millions^{94,95}) having existed in Anbar for hundreds if not thousands of years with some tribes even predating Islam⁹⁶. In an area of the world where governments come and go, the tribe was forever and provided structure during time of what would otherwise be chaos. Saddam had tried

⁹² Ricks. *The Gamble* 63.

⁹³ Smith, Niel and Sean MacFarland. "Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point," *Military Review* (March-April 2008) 46, accessed January 7, 2012.

⁹⁴ The tribal structure of the Middle East is very complex and based on family relationships the lowest level being the immediate clan based on the extended family and the highest being the macro tribe which was as much a greater tribal alliance as it was based on ancient family relationships.

⁹⁵ Sam Stolzoff. *The Iraqi Tribal System, A Reference for Social Scientists, Analysts, and Tribal Engagement*. (Minneapolis: Two Harbors Press, 2009) 27.

⁹⁶ Michael E. Silverman. *Awakening Victory: How Iraqi Tribes and American Troops Reclaimed al Anbar Province and Defeated al Qaeda in Iraq*. (Havertown, Pa: Casemate Publishers, 2011).

to suppress the tribes prior to 1991, but was unsuccessful in doing so. After the First Gulf War weakened Saddam, the tribes began to quietly rise up against the Baathist regime and were brutally suppressed. But as sanctions increasingly weakened Saddam's rule during the 1990s he began to pay the tribes so as to stabilize his rule over Anbar and even allowed them to acquire weapons with the expectation that they would defend Anbar the event of an American or Iranian invasion freeing up troops for use elsewhere⁹⁷. After the Americans invaded the tribes liberated many of the rural areas and small towns of Anbar expectation of working with the Americans as partners. But such a partnership clashed with the American image of Iraq as a secular liberal democracy⁹⁸.

The radical Islamists united under umbrella of Al Qaeda in Iraq were the other major insurgency within Anbar. These were the young radicalized Muslims who came to Iraq to fight the infidel Americans with the goal of creating a new Caliphate⁹⁹ based on a strict interpretation of Sharia law⁵⁶. The external radical pan-Islamic community funded Al Qaeda in Iraq. It largely stayed out of the minor day-to-day attacks on the Americans, instead carrying out the spectacular suicide attacks against the Americans, the Iraqi government, and the Shia, whom they viewed as apostates deserving of death hoping to start a civil war in which they could be exterminated¹⁰⁰.

As the war went on the tribes found themselves weakened by fighting the Americans, hurt financially by the stop the fighting put on the local economy, and

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 71.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 71.

⁹⁹ A Caliphate is the idea of a unified Muslim community ruled by Sharia.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 167.

lacking strong leadership because leaders of the more powerful tribes fled to the safety and confront of other Arab states¹⁰¹. As the tribes grew weaker the externally funded Al Qaeda in Iraq grew stronger and expanded its position¹⁰². By mid-2006 Al Qaeda in Iraq had further weakened the tribes by taking over the most lucrative smuggling routes and setting up checkpoints on the roads as forms of unofficial taxation (traditional sources of tribal revenue)¹⁰³. The foreign fighters also began to force local women to marry them, going against the tradition of cousin marriage to retain wealth within the tribe¹⁰⁴. When the American presence and influence vanished in wide swaths of Ramadi, Al Qaeda in Iraq began to forcefully institute Sharia-law; things such as smoking, drinking and television were banned on pain of death in a society where these had been widespread and in a culture that had never seen such a version of Islam¹⁰⁵. To make matters worse the insurgents began a campaign of intimidation that was bloody even by Anbar's standards. The worst was in August, when Al Qaeda in Iraq assassinated a sheik and hid his body for three days contrary to Islamic tradition¹⁰⁶. It was becoming increasingly clear to the tribes that Al Qaeda in Iraq planned on maintaining a long-term presence in Iraq at the same time that the American domestic debate was making it clear that they were intent on leaving.

¹⁰¹ McCary, John. "The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives." *The Washington Quarterly* 32 (2009): 44.

¹⁰² *Ibid.* 46.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 48.

¹⁰⁴ Burke. *The 9/11 Wars*. 249.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 249.

¹⁰⁶ Ricks. *The Gamble*. 66.

The end result of all of this was that the tribes were now seething with anger at the Al Qaeda in Iraq. Not only were they foreign, but they were now operating outside the rules of the game that had governed Anbar for millennia and clearly did not plan on being partners with the tribes and forcing a new way of life on traditional Iraqi culture. As the American advanced into Ramadi during the summer of 2006 they increasingly found dead foreign fighters with anti-Al Qaeda in Iraq slogans that were signs of a beginning blood feud by the tribes against Al Qaeda. The American Outposts and permanent presence meant that they were increasingly taking a pseudo-tribal role and could work within traditional politics against Al Qaeda in Iraq.

Anbar Awakes

In early September a group of 25 Sheiks from rural areas outlying Ramadi led by Sheik Sattar Abu Risha approached the Americans about a possible alliance against the insurgents. Colonel MacFarland immediately agreed to quietly meet with tribal leaders to begin negotiations¹⁰⁷. On September 9, 2006 Sheik Satter and his allies announced the beginning of the Anbar Awakening, any sheik looking to break with Al Qaeda in Iraq could join the Anbar Salvation Council and receive financial and military support regardless of any past actions¹⁰⁸.

The most immediate problem for the Americans was how to legitimize the newly aligned tribal fighters. Large scale incorporation into the Iraqi Security Forces would face logistical problems and political obstinacy from the Shi'a controlled government in Baghdad (that would not be eager to see a large increase in the Sunni

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Lubin. "Ramadi from the Caliphate to Capitalism," *Proceedings Magazine* Vol. 134/4/1/1262 (2008), accessed on January 17, 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Von Zielbauer, Khalid Al-Ansary and Ali Adeeb. "Iraqi Tribes Join Forces to Fight Insurgents," *The New York Times*, September 17, 2006, accessed on January 15, 2012.

demographic of the Iraqi Security Forces). The interim solution was to create the Sons of Anbar (later Sons of Iraq), which was a group of “concerned local citizens” committed to protecting their communities. The Sons of Anbar were to be paid and armed by the Americans until such a time that they could be incorporated into the Iraqi Security Forces¹⁰⁹¹¹⁰. These forces were ad hoc and hated by the Iraqi government in Baghdad who accused MacFarland of simply paying off and arming the insurgents so that they would stop attacking the Americans who could then withdraw. At first MacFarland was unable to even get logistical support from his own higher headquarters and found his unit arming the Sons of Iraq with weapons that had been captured from the insurgents¹¹¹.

The Anbar Awakening was a massive gamble by both sides. The sheiks knew that their tribes were now direct targets of the Al Qaeda in Iraq (Satter was actually assassinated by a car-bomb in 2007¹¹²) and if the Awakening failed to unite the tribes or the Americans left prematurely and Al Qaeda in Iraq was not defeated, the tribes would face massive retaliatory attacks causing heavy casualties and drastic weakening. The Awakening was also the product of a single American brigade commander. There was a very real possibility of the tribes finding themselves abandoned if MacFarland’s higher ups, who had not been consulted, ordered him to stop working with former insurgents, or if his replacement the next year did not buy

¹⁰⁹ Greg Bruno. “Finding a Place for the ‘Sons of Iraq,’” *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 9, 2009, accessed January 17, 2012.

¹¹⁰ Jim Michaels. *A Chance in Hell: The Men Who Triumphed Over Iraq’s Deadliest City and Turned the Tide of War*. (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2010) 174.

¹¹¹Ricks. *The Gamble* 67.

¹¹² Alissa J. Rubin. “Sunni Sheik Who Backed US in Iraq is Killed,” *New York Times*, September 14, 2007, accessed on January 10, 2012.

into his radical strategy. The Americans risked creating, arming and strengthening former insurgents that had been attacking them literally just weeks before and could turn against them as quickly as they had turned against the insurgents.

The fall and winter of 2006 continued to be a hard and bloody fight for the Americans and Sons of Anbar as both sides worked to prove their fealty to the alliance in the face of Al Qaeda in Iraq attacks. As the Americans advanced and expanded their presence in Ramadi, they proved to the tribes to be a much more benign presence than Al Qaeda in Iraq and a powerful ally¹¹³. A watershed moment came on November 25, 2006 when the Abu Soda tribe declared neutrality and that Al Qaeda in Iraq was not longer going to be allowed to smuggle weapons and car bombs through their territory. In retaliation Al Qaeda in Iraq fighters waged an all out attack. Within hours they had killed many of the tribe members and burned houses while the surviving members found themselves holed up in one remaining compound. In desperation one of its members swam across a canal and rushed to a nearby farm to call a local American battalion commander's interpreter¹¹⁴. When the Americans received the call they quickly dispatched aircraft to the area to slow the insurgent advance, at one point having the tribesmen wave towels above their heads to signify who was who. While back at the base troops about to go on a mission were redirected to relieve the Abu Sodas and within hours the Americans had arrived, driving off Al Qaeda in Iraq and begging construction of a combat outpost to protect against future attacks. All of this was done without approval of MacFarland because

¹¹³ Ricks. *The Gamble*. 65.

¹¹⁴ Most unit commanders had their interpreter's cellphone number given out as a means to both screen their calls as well as provide an anonymous way for Iraqis to contact them.

he was in Baghdad and unavailable, but upon his return he praised the initiative of his staff and subordinate commanders¹¹⁵. This is a sign of how those on the ground had embraced the new tactics and were seeing their success on the ground first hand. In just two days the Americans had gone from having an area that was hostile and a major supply route for the insurgency to one that was now solidly on their side¹¹⁶.

The American support of the Abu Soda tribe proved to be a watershed moment by providing proof of their promise to support any tribe willing to turn against Al Qaeda in Iraq. In the aftermath, the Awakening was to spread like wildfire through the province. In January 2007 MacFarland's battered brigade left Anbar to redeploy back to the United States; the unit's accomplishments were many. In just six months they had: established an American presence in virtually all of the areas surrounding Ramadi and 70% of the city proper by construction of 18 combat outposts¹¹⁷, negotiated a tribal alliance that firmly broke the local population from the insurgency, but most importantly illustrated that new bold tactics were capable of defeating the insurgency¹¹⁸. All of these accomplishments set the stage for MacFarland's replacements to wage one last major offensive and decisively defeat Al Qaeda in Iraq. By the summer, attacks had plunged from an average of 20 per day in January to only one or two a week in May and by August 2007 the city had gone more than 80 days without an attack.

¹¹⁵ Bill Roggio. "Anbar: The Abu Soda Tribe vs. Al Qaeda," *The Long War Journal*, November 26, 2006, accessed January 7, 2011.

¹¹⁶ Michaels. *A Chance in Hell*. 98.

¹¹⁷ Jim Michaels. "An Army Colonel's Gamble Pays Off in Iraq," *USA Today*, May 1, 2007.

¹¹⁸ Michaels, *A Chance in Hell*, 198.

The “Petraeus Doctrine”

In late 2005 General Petraeus returned from his tour of duty overseeing the training of the Iraqi Security Forces. At the time it appeared he had largely failed to make any progress. In hindsight it would become apparent that progress was being made because small units were gaining competency; it was just a bottom-up process because the smaller units that made up the larger ones had to become competent before the higher and more complex levels of command could be established¹¹⁹.

Petraeus’s next command was to be the Army Combined Arms Center in Fort Levenworth, a command with numerous subordinate units, but most importantly Army’s Training and Doctrine Command. While many of his peers stayed in combat commands and continued to lead troops in the field, he was being sent out to pasture as far from the war as he could be¹²⁰. Not content to sit on the sidelines, in late 2005 Petraeus announced at a luncheon that he was going to revise American counter-insurgency doctrine by writing a new Army/Marine Corps counterinsurgency field manual¹²¹¹²².

What would eventually be called the Petraeus Doctrine emphasized the emerging idea of Smart Power as the basis for waging counterinsurgency by synthesizing the use of precision hard power’s force and coercion with that of soft

¹¹⁹ Robinson, Linda. *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a War Out of Iraq*. (Jackson, TN: PublicAffairs, 2008) 76.

¹²⁰ Jaffe, Greg. *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010) 217.

¹²¹ *Ibid*,

¹²² Field manuals are the official means to delineate and disseminate uniform doctrine throughout the services.

power's engagement and co-option to take a new approach. The Petraeus Doctrine emphasized that while soldiers should never hesitate to use force they needed to be cognizant that killing a minor foot-soldier and collateral damage could actually strengthen the insurgency and firmly turn the locals against the Americans. Petraeus added a large degree of Soft Power to the new doctrine by having a new focus building support for the Americans within the local civilian community. A civilian community supportive of the Americans would facilitate defeating the insurgents because they would be denied sanctuary and logistical support¹²³. In order to protect the population the Americans needed to move into civilian communities to provide round-the-clock security; gain familiarity with the local dynamic as well as meet, negotiate and partner with local leaders against the insurgency. The Petraeus Doctrine stressed cultural relativism and that the Americans should not make assumptions as to what was good or bad, right or wrong. This asserted the importance of not assuming an attitude of cultural superiority and trying to force change on the locals, instead working within traditional local customs to build alliances and support. An unprecedented level of cultural awareness training soon began; Iraq refugees were hired as actors to portray civilians during combat training and experts were hired to brief deploying troops. This was manifested in Iraq by acknowledging the importance of the tribes and working with them and the government to defeat the insurgency. Finally the Petraeus Doctrine stressed the importance of reconciling with former enemies despite past transgressions (especially with those who had killed Americans). This was also manifested in Iraq by quietly doing away with de-Baathification and putting pressure on the Iraqi government to follow suit. This put

¹²³ Burke. *The 9/11 Wars*. 266.

the new doctrine directly at odds with Bush's neo-conservative image of Iraq as a Western-style democracy run by those who had never been a Baathist or involved with the insurgency¹²⁴. Thus the shift to Smart Power was also a shift from the idealism that had caused so many of the blunders of the early war to a doctrine firmly rooted in Realpolitik.

By early 2006 Petraeus and his team had compiled a rough draft of the field manual and decided to host a large conference of more than 150 experts, ranging from anthropologists to human rights experts to military and civilian intelligence analysts, to conduct comprehensive outside review of it¹²⁵. This was a completely unorthodox approach to creating doctrine than made the new Field Manual 3-24 unique and complex. Ironically enough the conference on how to change the way in which the Iraq War was being fought began on the same day as the Al-Askari mosque bombing that kicked off the full-blown civil war. The Manual itself would be available to troops in the field in unofficial form in June 2006 with the final publication as official Army and Marine Corps doctrine in December¹²⁶.

Going All In

The fall 2006 elections were effectively a referendum on the Republican leadership and ended in a massive defeat for the Republican Party losing the majority in both the Senate and House of Representatives¹²⁷. In the wake of the election

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 266.

¹²⁵ Bergen. *The Longest War.* 277.

¹²⁶ Department of the Army. *FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5: Counterinsurgency.* Washington: 2006.

¹²⁷ CNN, "Bush Takes Blame for GOP Election Losses," *CNN*, November 8, 2006, accessed on April 9, 2012.

President Bush announced the resignation of the controversial Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and nominated the former head of CIA and current President of Texas A&M University Robert Gates as his replacement.

With the events of 2006 coming to a close President Bush faced an incoming Congress hostile to his Iraq policies on both sides of the aisle that forced him to either change course in Iraq or risk Congress ending the war through use of the purse strings. In December 2006 the Iraq Study Group published their assessment that the situation in Iraq had completely deteriorated and was getting worse. With recommendations of how to change the course in Iraq by the Iraq Study Group, policy think tanks (such as the Rand Corporation and American Enterprise Institute) and lobbying by retired Generals, President Bush was faced with 4 possible courses of action: shift focus from the counter-insurgency to counter-terrorism by holing up in fortified bases and strictly attacking terrorists who could threaten the United States directly, such as Al Qaeda in Iraq; shift focus to counter-terrorism and training the Iraqi Security Forces in the hopes that they could eventually defeat the insurgency; or send in reinforcements for a last counter-offensive using the Petraeus Doctrine.¹²⁸

On January 11, 2007 President Bush announced during a prime-time speech that he was sending 20,000 additional American troops to Iraq to wage a counter-offensive to quell the insurgency and stop the violence in Baghdad in hopes that if the center were stabilized security would radiate outwards to the rest of the country. At the same time President Bush warned of a tough battle and that casualties would increase as the Americans went back into the neighborhoods, but that ultimately it would be worth it to prevent an American defeat and a collapse of the greater Middle

¹²⁸ Bergen. *The Longest War*. 278.

East¹²⁹. In the days ahead the form of the Surge would be devised and a new Secretary of Defense (Robert Gates) and a new commander on the ground (General Petraeus) using a new tactics (the Petraeus Doctrine) would attempt one last gamble to stop sectarian fighting and defeat the insurgency.

¹²⁹ George W. Bush, "Address to Nation on US Policy in Iraq, January 10, 2007," *The New York Times*, January 11, 2007. Accessed January 20, 2012.

Chapter 3: 2007- All In

Too Little, Too Late?

Once the Surge had been announced change came at a brisk pace. Within days Petraeus had gathered the support staff that would assist him in carrying out the Surge, perform ongoing analysis, and serve as a sounding board for how to better tune the Surge once it began. Of particular note is that General Odierno, whose unit had seen the most extreme use of hard power, was the commander of Multi-National Corps-Iraq and going to be responsible for carrying out the tactical side of the Surge on the ground. He can be seen as representative of how the Army and Marine Corps had seen the failure of hard power and were now ready to try a fundamentally new approach. The rest of the staff was an eclectic mixture of counter-insurgency experts, Rhodes Scholars, and veteran combat leaders who had graduated at the top of their West Point classes¹³⁰, most having earned Ph. Ds while on sabbatical from the Army and probably the most educated group to ever advise a general in the field. When Petraeus and his staff began to tour Baghdad they were shocked as to how badly the situation had deteriorated, with once thriving neighborhoods now virtual ghost towns, streets empty and shops shuttered because people were afraid to make even the smallest trips from home for fear of being one of the two to three thousand civilians dying every month¹³¹. The situation was so dire that Petraeus and his staff did not

¹³⁰ Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq*. (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 133.

¹³¹ William A. Knowlton Jr., *The Surge General Petraeus and the Turnaround in Iraq*. (Washington D.C.: National Defense University, 2010), 4.

expect to succeed; most on his team gave their chances of success at 10-15% and even the optimists 40 percent¹³².

Petraeus understood that time was not on his side; the Americans lacked the political will, military ability and domestic support to sustain the Surge for long. In early September General Petraeus was scheduled to testify in front of Congress as to progress of the Surge. If he was unable to report that the violence had peaked and the Iraqis were increasingly taking a leading role in the fight, he would almost certainly be ordered to initiate a withdrawal of American military forces to Kuwait¹³³.

During the Surge half of the active Army and one third of the Marine Corps would be deployed, intensely training to deploy or recovering from a deployment. The Surge marked the beginning of the third 12-18 month deployment for many Army units that marched to Baghdad in 2003, while the Marines had been deploying for seven months, home for five to eight and then sent back. This created a situation in which many individual soldiers and Marines found themselves having spent more time in Iraq than at home in the previous years, and they would continue to do so until grievously wounded or killed¹³⁴. Divorce rates skyrocketed and retention rates plummeted as the best and brightest left for a bustling civilian economy. An indication of this is how the Army and Marine Corps re-enlistment budget went from \$174 million in 2003 to more than \$1 billion in 2007¹³⁵. Those that remained faced

¹³² Ricks, *The Gamble*, 153.

¹³³ *Ibid*, 230.

¹³⁴ Gordon Lubold, "Key US Army Ranks Begin to Thin," *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 2, 2007, accessed February 3, 2012.

¹³⁵ Fredrick Kaplan, "Dumber and Dumber: The Army Lowers Recruitment Standards...Again," *Slate Magazine*, January 24, 2008, accessed February 7, 2012.

skyrocketing rates of PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injuries, which helped drive the suicide rate up more than 80 percent¹³⁶. At the same time standards for those coming into the military plummeted, an example is how the number of recruits with high school diplomas dropped from 94 percent in 2003 to 70.1 percent in 2007 while those requiring criminal background and medical waivers had more than tripled¹³⁷. The Surge would push a weary, bloodied force facing declining standards nearly to the breaking point (if it was not already there). Numerically it would be unfeasible to replace the Surge units without damaging the ability of the American military to project ground combatant force elsewhere in the world (especially Iran and North Korea) while the war in Afghanistan was beginning to heat up¹³⁸. The end result was that even if the Americans had the will to replace the Surge troops, they did not have the ability to do so.

The Strategy

In preparation for the coming counter-offensive Petraeus's Chief of Staff Major General Fastabend's¹³⁹ wrote a 20 page long essay "Tell Me How This Ends: It's Fourth and Long, Go Deep"; wherein he called for six radical departure points from how the Americans had been waging war and proved a Smart Power based

¹³⁶ Carrie Gann, "Suicides, Mental Health Woes Since Start of Iraq War, Study Finds," *ABC News*, March 8, 2012, accessed April 9, 2012.

¹³⁷ Steve Inskeep and Tom Bowman, "Army Documents Show Lower Recruiting Standards," *National Public Radio*, April 17, 2008, accessed on February 22, 2012.

¹³⁸ Amy Belasco, *Troop Levels in the Afgan and Iraq Wars*, (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2009), 15.

¹³⁹ This staff was extremely critical of how the war had been fought up to this point, with Thomas Ricks going so far as to characterize them as more so that most of the anti-war movement. This essay is a sign of their rejection of the mainstream military strategy and was opposed by many within the institution, to include Petraeus's direct superior. Had the Surge failed it would have ended most of his military advisors' and even in success has had negative ramifications for some, such as H.R. McMaster who was controversially held up for promotion to Brigadier and then Major General.

blueprint in all but name. By outlining and analyzing these points can be used as a framework for best understanding the overall strategy of the Surge.

Fastabend's first point was to work with former insurgents whenever possible and to kill or capture those who refused to be brought into the fold. Shi'a militias that agreed to stop supporting the insurgency and stop attacking other Iraqis would be reframed as neighborhood watches¹⁴⁰ that were partners in securing their neighborhoods. The Americans would try to convince the Sunnis to break with Al Qaeda in Iraq, whom the Shi'a perceived as the ones who had been attacking their neighborhoods, in return for security and reconstruction¹⁴¹. General Fastabend even went so far as suggesting that troops parole low level Iraqis they detained to their Sheik on his word that they would not commit further transgressions. In this way the Americans worked within the framework of Iraqi culture by taking advantage of traditions of honor to neutralize these low level insurgents without making more enemies. General Fastabend even proposed to take it a step further and have large-scale detainee releases, but General Petraeus turned this down as too radical¹⁴².

The next step was to reassert the American attitude toward the Iraqi government. Since the American handover of sovereignty in 2004 the Americans had treated the Iraqi government as an equal and tended to stay out of Iraqi government affairs and had to keep it appeased, especially Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Maliki, even as it was increasingly become a tool of the radicalized Shi'a. Fastabend called for the

¹⁴⁰ At first these were called the Concerned Local Citizens and latter incorporated into the Sons of Anbar, which was then renamed the Sons of Iraq.

¹⁴¹ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 158.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 157.

Americans to abandon this policy of appeasement, instead to pressure the Iraqi government even to the point of angering Maliki¹⁴³. If the Surge was to succeed the Americans would have to ensure that the Sunnis would be allowed to form and participate in neighborhood watches, even though the Shi'a government was not keen on training, arming, and organizing former Sunni insurgents. If the Americans failed to do so it would ensure continued Sunni violence because they would turn to the insurgency for protection from the Shi'a militias that had infiltrated the local security forces and were ethnically cleansing Baghdad. But most importantly the Americans had to stop the systematic use of Iraqi government institutions harm the Sunnis by the Shi'a, such as when the finance ministry closed banks in some Sunni neighborhoods and they were forced to keep large amounts of cash at home where it was susceptible to the militias because it was too dangerous to trek across the city¹⁴⁴. The Americans needed to use their role of the more equal partner in the U.S.-Iraq relationship to push the Iraqi government to act impartially against their own citizens if it was to have any degree of legitimacy.

General Fastabend also realized that Sunni-Shi'a reconciliation had been tried and spectacularly failed at the national level and there was little hope of revival. Instead it should be tried anew at the local level. This had a chance of success because the Sunni and Shi'a have a long history of peaceful coexistence. Before the American invasion, Baghdad had been a predominantly mixed city with centuries of intermarriage and peaceful cooperation. Unlike other sectarian conflicts Sunni-Shi'a differences had historically been overshadowed by traditional Persian threat against

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 159.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

the Arabs. Prior to the war a person living in Baghdad would have said I am an Arab before I am Sunni/Shi'a before I am Iraqi¹⁴⁵. In the wake of the invasion the Americans assumed that these divisions were much deeper than they were and blatantly favored the Shi'a majority (especially because they did not strongly resist the Americans in the way the Sunni tribes had) creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. This situation was further worsened by Iran training, funding and encouraging the growth of hardline militias that they had created to oppose Saddam's forces during the Iran-Iraq War¹⁴⁶. As the War got worse and the Americans were unable to provide security support, locals were forced to turn to these militias for it. By encouraging local reconciliation the Americans would be bypassing the hardline leaders and pandering to the large, moderate populations that remembered that less than five years earlier they had members of the opposing sect as friends, whereas in the current climate to make opposing friends was to risk summary execution by radicals¹⁴⁷.

The next area that General Fastabend addressed was how the economic aid was being used. Up to this point the mindset behind the aid was that it was to be spent on large expensive reconstruction projects aimed at rebuilding shattered infrastructure and once the standard of living had rebounded civilian support for the insurgency would collapse. These projects were contracted to large western firms with non-Iraqi employees, meaning that most of the money spent did not stay within

¹⁴⁵ Riverbend, *Baghdad Burning Two*, (Feminist Press at the City Museum of New York: 2006), 185.

¹⁴⁶ Mark Kukis, "Signs of Iran's Hand in Iraq," *Time Magazine*, March 18, 2008, accessed February 22, 2008.

¹⁴⁷ Riverbend, *Baghdad Burning Two*, 78.

the community¹⁴⁸. These projects proved to be a major target for the insurgents to attack and required a large footprint, especially by the private security contractors that Iraqis so despised. The new way of thinking was that aid was to be used for local economic development needed to focus on creating jobs for the Iraqis first and physical projects second. By offering the locals jobs they would have an alternative to the insurgency for economic survival. The end result would be economics that pushed security instead of physical reconstruction.

The fifth point that General Fastabend made was that there were no fast answers. Though time was tight the Americans would have to avoid temptations to wage a hasty campaign, instead acting with steady prudence. The Americans would use the nine traditional administrative districts¹⁴⁹ as a template for security zones, and they would focus on securing one zone before moving on to another, starting with the ones where the insurgency was less well-entrenched. The decision was made specifically not to move into Sadr City because the Americans did not want a large-scale confrontation with Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaish al-Mahdi, which tightly controlled the area. The other reason was due to Sadr's political power within the Iraqi government, it was unclear if it could survive a boycott or withdrawal by all of Sadr's supporters¹⁵⁰. Fastabend also emphasized that once the Americans went into the

¹⁴⁸ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 30.

¹⁴⁹ Prior to the American invasion these were strictly used as administrative centers for the delivery of municipal services to Baghdad's 89 neighborhoods. After the American invasion they were used as a means of electing the Baghdad City Council.

¹⁵⁰ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 158.

security zones they had to remain until the Iraqi Security Forces were truly ready and capable to retain control and provide non-sectarian rule of law¹⁵¹.

The final point that Fastabend advocated was a timetable for withdrawal. A timetable for withdrawal would build the image of the Surge wherein the Americans would ally with the Iraq Security Forces to temporarily move into virtually every facet of Iraqi life as temporary assistance to defeat the insurgency. This was especially key to keeping the Surge from having an image of just an intensification of the occupation. While the Americans disagreed with Iraqi calls for a quick withdrawal in another misunderstanding they differed on what exactly “quick” meant. When Al-Sadr was asked what he viewed as a quick withdrawal he replied that he would like to see the Surge forces gone by 2012¹⁵². When the American commanders heard this they viewed it as almost comical because they would be lucky to have the extra forces for a year. Yet at the same time a timetable risked giving the insurgents the impression that they could simply wait out the Surge. The end result was a compromise whereby the Sadrists were promised that the Americans would not withdraw, but substantially lower their forces and negotiate a timetable for a full withdrawal in 2008¹⁵³.

The Americans

Almost immediately after the announcement of the Surge the American military began to deploy twenty-thousand troops comprising five brigades and their support elements while most of the troops in Iraq had their tours extended. This

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 159.

¹⁵² *Ibid*.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 160.

would give General Petraeus twenty brigade-size forces (plus assorted foreign forces) in country. Even with the additional reinforcements Petraeus would not have nearly the 1 soldier for every 20 inhabitants. Even by focusing the reinforcements into Baghdad and Baghdad Belts¹⁵⁴ there would only be roughly ninety-one thousand when his doctrine would call for roughly one hundred twenty thousand. Six brigades were slated to go directly into the city to fight the insurgents in Baghdad with the others to the Belts¹⁵⁵. The Baghdad Belts are the less densely populated suburban, agricultural and industrial areas that surround the city, which proved to be safe-havens for the insurgents to take a break from fighting in Baghdad to regroup and refit while also providing logistical support for those fighting in the City.

The Iraqis

The Iraqi Army of 2007 was a drastic improvement. In the end was a product of the methodical, long-term bottom up training program that the Americans had instituted in the wake of the disasters of 2004. The number of Iraqi Security Forces by the beginning of the Surge had grown twenty percent since the year before and would continue to grow another twenty five percent by the end of the Surge¹⁵⁶. For the first time since the American invasion the Iraqi Army¹⁵⁷ was capable of operations at the brigade and division level, though they were still at the “led” phase of the “led, lead, leave” training mantra and reliant on the Americans for logistical

¹⁵⁴Department of the Army. *FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5: Counterinsurgency*. Washington: 2006.

¹⁵⁵“Baghdad Belts,” *Institute For the Study of War*, accessed on March 20, 2012

¹⁵⁶ DJ Elliott, “The Real Surge,” *The Long War Journal*, November 23, 2007, accessed on March 19, 2012.

¹⁵⁷ The Iraqis consider the pre and post-invasion Armies to be one in the same, with most divisions tracing their lineage back to the Kingdom of Iraq in the 1940s.

and leadership support, but would prove a major asset for the Americans, especially in retaining control of the cities after the Americans did the heavy lifting of defeating the insurgency.

In Baghdad the Shi'a militias had heavily infiltrated the Iraqi and were complicit in allowing, if not perpetuating, attacks against the civilian population¹⁵⁸. The new General in charge of the training of the Iraqi Security Forces decided on a radical course of action to acknowledge the militia's infiltration purged the Iraqi Police of compromised members weakening militia influence at the expense of having fewer, but more loyal Police¹⁵⁹. Commanders now felt less compelled to act in the sectarian interests of the militias, raising public opinion of the legitimacy of the Iraqi Police and resulting in what was a strengthened, less sectarian, and more loyal Iraqi Police Force¹⁶⁰.

Opening Moves

On February 10, 2007 General Petraeus officially took command of all American forces in Iraq and only three days later paratroopers of the Army's 82nd Airborne Division loaded up in their armored vehicles and left their big base in Baghdad to push into the Sunni neighborhood of Doura, officially marking the beginning of Operation Fardh al-Qanoon (Imposing Order) and the Surge¹⁶¹. As the spring and early summer wore on the Americans advanced into neighborhood after neighborhood and as predicted it was a grueling bitter slog with fierce insurgent

¹⁵⁸ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 198.

¹⁵⁹ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 198.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ "Operation Fardh al-Qanoon," *The Institute for Understanding War*, accessed on March 19, 2012.

resistance. Soon a predictable cycle began to assert itself. In the dark of night the Americans would send in snipers to watch over an intended combat outpost, then Combat Engineers would clear a route of IEDs for a column of American vehicles to move into their new base and begin fortifying it. Once a combat outpost had been built, the Americans would isolate the neighborhood by emplacing eight-foot concrete barriers (or in one case having engineers weaken a bridge so it could only accommodate foot traffic) and build heavily fortified checkpoints on the remaining points of entry and exit. When the situation allowed they would establish a census of Iraqi civilians in the neighborhood by requiring that they submit to retinal scans and fingerprints. The Americans would do the same to those coming through the checkpoints into and out of the neighborhood as well as those in proximity to attacks (especially IED attacks). By monitoring the coming and goings of those in the neighborhoods the Americans were better able to track those who belonged and those who didn't, as well as those involved in suspicious activities, such as foreigners who were near multiple IED attacks. Though the insurgents could still smuggle personal, small weapons and ammunition over the concrete barriers, they found it much harder to move the homemade explosives, rockets and car-bombs used in large attacks against civilians and capable of destroying American bases¹⁶².

The intensity of the fighting was hard on the Iraqi Army, but they performed better than in the past when entire units would go AWOL when they found out they were being sent to fight the insurgents. Unfortunately in some situations the insurgents were still able to intimidate Iraqi Army into brokering local ceasefires.

¹⁶² Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search For a Way Out of Iraq*, (Jackson, TN: Public Affairs, 2008), 189

Though Iraqi Army units were supposed to have only 25 percent of their unit on leave at a time¹⁶³ many units found themselves missing 40 percent of their troops. With Iraqi Army units rotating in and out of Baghdad every 90 days before being sent back to the (safer) areas where they were permanently stationed, many Iraqi commanders were more worried about ensuring their units didn't get too chewed up and bickering with each other for the troops coming out of training¹⁶⁴. Yet as the Surge wore on and the insurgents were beaten back and security re-established the morale of the Iraqi Army went up, desertion rates went down, newer units gained combat experience, and ultimately the quality and numbers of the Iraqi Security Forces continued to rise. To combat the issues caused by the rotations, permanent divisions were stood in Baghdad and most newly produced battalions were sent there¹⁶⁵.

Insurgent Reactions

Insurgent reactions were rapid and fierce. They understood that Americans were now going to be a long term presence and with their new tactics it would just be a matter of time before they were identified to be detained (or killed) and their weapons caches confiscated, so violence went up in the neighborhoods as the insurgents waged all-out attacks to prevent the Americans from establishing a footholds in the neighborhoods. The new combat outposts were usually attacked within 24 hours and American actions fiercely resisted until the local insurgents could be turned, killed or captured. These attacks displayed new tactics and weapons; the

¹⁶³ Unlike American units the Iraqis were permanently deployed so they would take a week of leave to go home every 90 days.

¹⁶⁴ Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, 136.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

insurgents began wearing bulletproof armor, suicide car-bombs were heavily armored with steel surrounding a that could only be stopped by vehicle mounted heavy machine guns or anti-tank rockets. The insurgents had also had weeks or even months to prepare for an eventual American return; Americans advancing into the neighborhoods found themselves attacked by insurgents from fortified bunkers and hard to detect deeply buried IEDs with enough explosive power to throw a 68 ton tank high into the air¹⁶⁶. The insurgents would also deploy snipers against troops emplacing the concrete barriers, fortifying their combat outposts and building check points. This necessitated that even cranes be armored, making the work long, hazardous and demanding.

The insurgents also tried to undermine the partnerships between the Iraqi Security Forces and the Americans by intimidating the Iraq Security Forces into brokering cease-fires by assassinating their commanders or staging massive bombings. An example is when an Iraqi Army unit was initially pushing into the neighborhood of Tarmiyah the insurgents used an IED to blow up their Commander's vehicle in such a massive explosion that his troops were literally unable to put his body back together. In the immediate aftermath the insurgents and the Iraqi Army negotiated a cease-fire and the Americans were unable to convince that unit to go on joint patrols for the rest of the time it was deployed there¹⁶⁷.

To compound their attacks and add to the lethality of their car and suicide bombers against civilians, the insurgents began adding chlorine, effectively making

¹⁶⁶ Chris McNab and Hunter Keeter, *Guns, Tanks, and Dirty Bombs*, (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 92.

¹⁶⁷ Ricks, *The Gamble* 172.

an improvised weapon of mass destruction. Though the introduction of the gas did not kill large numbers, it did cause large number of injuries (such as respiratory problems) to bystanders and first responders. A secondary effect was that authorities clamped down on the possession and transportation of chlorine which led directly to minor outbreaks of cholera in the north and south¹⁶⁸.

Overall the insurgents fought back against the American with far more tenacity than expected. By late-May the Americans had only been able to reassert control over one-third of Baghdad and internal reports said the insurgents had fought them to a standstill forcing the Americans to push back their time-table for reasserting over the city from July to September¹⁶⁹. This had the immediate effect of further weakening support for the Surge in Washington D.C. with members of Congress calling for a cessation and immediate withdrawal. It also created the possibility that when General Petraeus reported to Congress in September he would have to report failure and begin preparations for a withdrawal.

Al Askari Again

On June 13, 2007 Sunni militants were once again able to sneak into the Al Askari mosque, this time destroying two minarets. The government's reaction was to immediately declare curfews in Samarra and Baghdad, in hopes of keeping the Shi'a from retaliating against Sunni civilians as had happened the year before¹⁷⁰. Al Sistani called for three days of mourning, a few Sadrists in the government withdrew in

¹⁶⁸ Kratovac Kratarina, "Cholera Spreads to Iraq's Southernmost City, Officials Concerned About the Shortage of Chlorine," *The Associated Press*, September 22, 2007. Accessed February 9, 2012.

¹⁶⁹ David S. Cloud and Damien Cave, "Commanders Say Push in Baghdad Is Short of Goal," *The New York Times*, June 4, 2007, accessed February 8, 2012.

¹⁷⁰ John F. Burns, "Efforts to Avert Sectarian Reprisals After Shrine Attack," *New York Times*, June 14, 2007, accessed on February 22, 2012.

protest, but most importantly Muqtada al-Sadr called for restraint and that the Sunnis could not be blamed while organizing protests, but not deploying the Jaish al-Mahdi to “protect” the mosques as he had the year before¹⁷¹.

As civilians, politicians, and soldiers held their breaths to see if the situation would further deteriorate they were stunned with sounds of silence with only minor retaliatory attacks that quickly petered out. Sadr’s calls reined in the Jaish al-Mahdi, the neighborhood watches refrained from turning on each other, and the Iraqi Security Forces maintained security.

The Sons of Iraq

. Similar to Anbar, Al-Qaeda in Iraq had alienated the local Sunni populations through enforcement of radical Islam in culture that had never seen it before¹⁷². The Sunnis also began to wonder why those who profess to be such good pious Muslims were carrying out massive bombings of civilian targets that killed hundreds of ordinary Muslims. In late May and early June the Sons of Anbar movement was begun to spread from Anbar country into the rest of the country. The Americans were thrilled and renamed it the Sons of Iraq. This provided a model for creation and legitimization of neighborhood watches. While the local Sunnis saw Sons of Iraq as a way to rid themselves of the radicals receiving protection of the Shi’a militias. This largely Sunni organization (though it would eventually incorporate 25 thousand Shi’a tired of exploitation by corrupt militias) was intended to man checkpoints and guard infrastructure from the Shi’a militias for ten dollars a day. All a potential recruit had

¹⁷¹ Roggio, Bill, “Minarets of Samarra’s al-Askaria Mosque Destroyed; al Qaeda Prime Suspect,” *The Long War Journal*,” June 13, 2007, accessed March 18, 2012.

¹⁷² Peter L. Bergen, *The Longest War*, (New York: Free Press, 2011),270

to do was declare allegiance to the government of Iraq and renounce the violence of the insurgency. To insulate it from cooption and corruption by the Shi'a government the Sons of Iraq received their funding from local American commanders using their Commander's Emergency Relief Program¹⁷³¹⁷⁴.

Battle of the Belts

By early June the Americans controlled roughly one-third of Baghdad and though the going was much slower than the Americans had planned for, the new tactics were proving successful and for the first time since the invasion the Americans found that once they cleared an area of the insurgency it stayed clear¹⁷⁵. With the arrival of the last of the Surge brigades the Americans could finally push into the Baghdad Belts and begin to root out the insurgency as it was driven from Baghdad¹⁷⁶.

On June 16, 2007 the Americans launched Operation Phantom Thunder, which was the first in a series of operations in the Belts. Unlike operations in the city the Americans were not able to isolate the more geographically spread out areas, but they took other measures to restrict the insurgent's freedom of movement. A less cluttered airspace meant that it was possible to keep almost constant unmanned drone surveillance on the major roads¹⁷⁷. The Americans also took advantage of the water-

¹⁷³ Every American unit commander who "owned" an area of responsibility was given a set amount of money that they could spend as they saw fit.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble*, 204.

¹⁷⁵ Michael Duffy, "The Surge At Year One," *Time Magazine*, January 31, 2008, accessed February 18, 2012.

¹⁷⁶ John J. Kruzal, "Elements of Final 'Surge' Brigade Begin Arriving in Iraq," *American Forces Press Service*, May 30, 2007, accessed on February 19, 2012.

¹⁷⁷ Dale Andrade, *Surging South of Baghdad: The 3D Infantry Division and Task Force Marne in Iraq, 2007-2008* (Washington D.C.: US Army Center of Military History, 2010), 173.

ways to launch attacks as well as to restrict insurgents from crossing the river at will and having checkpoints near bridges¹⁷⁸.

By mid-August the Americans had established Sons of Iraq networks throughout the Belts, and forced insurgents fleeing Baghdad to flee further from the capital where they were less welcome and less familiar with the local area's geography, politics, and people as well as standing out like a sore thumb from the locals. On August 18, 2007 President Bush summed up ongoing operations in the Belts during his weekly radio address:

In recent months, American and Iraqi forces have struck powerful blows against al Qaeda terrorists and violent extremists in Anbar and other provinces. In recent days, our troops and Iraqi allies launched a new offensive...we are carrying out targeted operations against terrorists and extremists fleeing Baghdad and other key cities -- to prevent them from returning or setting up new bases of operation. The terrorists remain dangerous and brutal, as we saw this week when they massacred more than 200 innocent Yezidis, a small religious minority in northwestern Iraq...and our troops are going to go after the murderers behind this horrific attack.¹⁷⁹

“Sadr”

In the years since the Sadr's initial formation of the Jaish al-Mahdi it had suffering heavy casualties fighting the Americans while also rapidly growing. This meant that much original leadership whose sole goal was to end the American occupation and had so effectively fought in 2004 had been diluted. By 2007 the organization of loosely allied militias had become mafia-like with leaders increasingly independent, more focused on personal wealth and power and Jaish al-Mahdi in name

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 125.

¹⁷⁹ George W. Bush, “President’s Radio Address: August 18, 2007,” Washington D.C.: U.S. Office of the Press Secretary, 2007, accessed on January 25, 2012.

only¹⁸⁰. During the sectarian violence Jaish al-Mahdi militias had protected Shi'a civilians¹⁸¹ while also spawning the death squads responsible for the ethnic cleansing that allowed expansion of its realm of control. As Sadr lost centralized control many of the Jaish al-Mahdi affiliated militias began to extort and exploit the very locals they were supposed to protect. The ethnic cleansing also meant that in the mixed neighborhoods where the locals supported the Jaish al-Mahdi out of fear of their Sunni neighbors those neighbors were now gone. To the locals the militia "guards" within the neighborhoods increasingly looked like common thugs¹⁸².

As the Americans advanced into Baghdad the areas that they cleared began to recover; jobs were created, markets reopened and the Iraqi standard of living began to go back up. This meant that the neighborhoods surrounding Sadr City began to recover from the fighting while Sadr City continued to be a slum where few ventured, but it was the population's own guardians who kept the reconstruction out.

On the same day that General Petraeus took command in Baghdad, Muqtada al-Sadr left Iraq for Iran to wait out the Surge and see how it played out¹⁸³. On May 25, 2007 Sadr reemerged at a mosque in Kufa to give a sermon wherein he called for himself to be an arbitrator of Sunni-Shi'a reconciliation along nationalistic lines, forbid the Jaish al-Mahdi from attacking Sunnis and denounced the continued American occupation. This was basically a call to reign in the death squads, which

¹⁸⁰ Marisa Cochrane, "The Fragmentation of the Sadrist Movement," Iraq Report 12, *Institute for The Study of War*, January 2009, accessed on February 8, 2012.

¹⁸¹ The Institute for Understanding War "Jaysh al-Mahdi" accessed on February 8, 2012. <http://www.understandingwar.org/jaysh-al-mahdi>

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Charles Crain, "How Sadr Plans to Ride Out the Surge," *Time Magazine*, February 2, 2007, accessed February 14, 2012.

were increasingly unnecessary because they had already served their purpose ethnically cleansing most of Baghdad thus cementing the Shi'a powerbase. He was also unsure of the outcome of an American withdrawal in the event that the Surge failed. If he did not begin engaging with the Sunni he could very easily find the Jaish Al-Mahdi facing: a Sunni bloc united under the Anbar Awakening, the Iraqi government and Security Forces, other Shi'a groups with better ties to Iran while also under siege from American Special Operations and drones.

On the evening of August 27th elements of the Jaish Al-Mahdi got into a battle with Badr Organization-affiliated¹⁸⁴ Iraqi Security Forces guarding the Imam Ali Shrine in Karbala during a Shi'a pilgrimage. Reprisal fighting continued throughout the next day, ending with more than 50 deaths and more than 200 wounded, most of them Shi'a civilian pilgrims¹⁸⁵. The entire situation further damaged the image of the Jaish al-Mahdi and caused a great loss of face to Sadr himself.

The end result of all of these events is that Sadr and the Jaish al-Mahdi began to be viewed by ordinary Shi'a as being on the wrong side of history, which threatened to undermine Sadr's political support. As a result, on August 28th Sadr declared a unilateral six-month ceasefire by the Jaish al-Mahdi. This would allow him to consolidate his power to reorganize the Jaish al-Mahdi and get rid of factions outside his direct control. This was actually helped along indirectly by the Americans because those he did not control would continue to fight and be killed by the

¹⁸⁴ The Badr Organization was the reincarnation of the Saddam era Badr-brigade which had been formed during the Iran-Iraq War. This organization was less anti-American and a major rival to the JAM in the north and south of the country, but not in Baghdad.

¹⁸⁵ Charles Crain, "Iraq Militias Fighting for Supremacy," *Time Magazine*, August 29, 2007, accessed February 16, 2012.

Americans¹⁸⁶. Sadr could also take advantage of a cease-fire by redeploying forces from Baghdad to Basra to expand his influence into the power vacuum being created by British troops gradually withdrawing from the city to an airport base outside of it¹⁸⁷.

“General Petraeus Goes to Washington”

Though the heavy fighting continued in Baghdad through the long, hot summer of 2007 it had already peaked; the number of attacks against civilians had actually peaked in December 2006. The number of Americans killed in action peaked in May 2007 and would decline by more than fifty percent by the time the last of the combat outposts was set up in July¹⁸⁸. According to Thomas Ricks, though the Americans had faced a hard frustrating bloody slog to move back into Baghdad, by late June and early July there was a feeling of cautious optimism and that the Americans had accomplished the nearly impossible task of regaining strategic initiative¹⁸⁹¹⁹⁰ from the insurgents. As the American and Iraqi soldiers moved to establish new combat outposts they would travel through neighborhoods where the Surge had already proved successful, further raising morale and optimism about the success of the Surge.

¹⁸⁶ Bill Roggio, “Sadr Calls for Mahdi Army Ceasefire,” *The Long War Journal*, August 29, 2007, accessed on February 26, 2012.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 240.

¹⁸⁹ Strategic initiative in War is getting the other side to react to your actions and not vice versa. Once it is lost it is virtually impossible to regain.

¹⁹⁰ Ricks, *The Gamble*, 237.

In this environment General Petraeus was preparing his September report to Congress in a cautiously optimistic report¹⁹¹. After opening pleasantries Petraeus begins the report by saying that though his Chain of Command had seen the report, the President, Congress, and the Pentagon had not and the report was the uncensored reality of what he thought had happened on the ground in Baghdad. He then asserted that though the summer had been a brutal fight against tough enemies, “the military objectives of the surge are, in large measure, being met.”¹⁹² Petraeus then went into how the violence went up as the Americans directly confronted the insurgency by moving into Baghdad, but it had now peaked and was slowly decreasing. To illustrate one way in which the Americans were much more confrontational with the insurgents, he points out that by August 2007 his forces had discovered fifty percent more arms caches than in all of 2006. Petraeus then asserted that his forces had knocked Al Qaeda in Iraq off balance and taken away their sanctuaries and gained the initiative (presumably through killing/capturing its members and denying them resupply), but that it was far from defeated and could easily come back given the chance¹⁹³.

Petraeus then said that his forces had disrupted Shi’a extremists, especially those linked to Hezbollah and Iran¹⁹⁴, warning that if the Americans did not continue

¹⁹¹ David Petraeus, “Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq,” Congressional Testimony, Washington D.C. September 10-11, 2007.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

to keep pressure on there was a risk of these militias evolving into an extremist Hezbollah-like state within a state¹⁹⁵.

He then addressed the issue of the Iraqi Security Forces. First Petraeus reported that there were roughly 140 Iraqi Army battalions¹⁹⁶ of which 95 were in the “lead” phase of “led, lead, leave”; meaning that they were capable of taking the lead in the fighting with the Americans in a support role. He pointed out that this was a major accomplishment, especially because they had improved while also engaged in heavy fighting and making major progress toward tenable security. Petraeus also pointed out that the Iraqis were less and less dependent on direct American military aid, and that for the second year in a row they had spent more on their military equipment than the Americans. This was also a hint to American military industrial complex lobbyists that Iraq had the potential to become a major customer¹⁹⁷ and build their quiet support for a continued American presence.

Petraeus then went on to outline the following recommendations for the future of American involvement with Iraq¹⁹⁸:

- military aspects of the surge have achieved progress and generated momentum;
- Iraqi Security Forces have continued to grow and have slowly been shouldering more of the security burden in Iraq;
- a mission focus on either population security or transition alone will not be adequate to achieve our objectives;
- success against Al Qaeda-Iraq and Iranian-supported militia extremists requires conventional forces as well as special operations forces; and
- the security and local political situations will enable us to draw down the surge forces.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Iraqi battalions were roughly 750-1000 men.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

In conclusion General Petraeus addressed the future of the American military forces in Iraq. He asserted that by the summer of 2008 American forces would be drawn down to pre-Surge levels and that there was potential to draw down even more, but he refused to say at what rate or when he envisioned a complete American withdrawal. He also said that the main American mission should not yet be shifted to transitioning operations to the Iraqis and counter-terrorism because past experience had shown the dangers of prematurely transition mission to the Iraqis and that it could lead to a complete unraveling of hard fought gains of the previous months.¹⁹⁹

Ultimately General Petraeus's report was a sign of how the last ditch gamble that was the Surge had been a success, albeit a brutal, bloody and precarious one. Unlike earlier reports to Congress this report was backed by hard data, whose collection methodology had been certified by the American intelligence community. His underlying message was as much a warning about how it was a success and not a victory and that it was still to been seen if the Americans and the Iraqis were able to solidify victory.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Chapter 4: 2008- An Iraqi War

The Surge Begins to Wind Down

By late November 2007 the violence in Baghdad had continued to fall and the Americans wrested control of virtually all of Baghdad, except for Sadr City, with refugees beginning to return home and things continuing to improve. On November 24, 2007 military officials announced the departure of the first Surge brigades and that the last would leave in July 2008²⁰⁰. Yet even though the Surge was winding down the Americans would remain committed to continued combat operations and withdrawing from the hard-won Combat Outposts until the insurgency was gone for good and Iraqi Security Forces were ready to take control.

Basra: A Mess, but an Iraqi One

While the Americans were Surging in Baghdad, in the southern city of Basra the British military had been gradually handing over responsibility for security and their bases to the local Iraqi Security Forces in preparation for a complete withdrawal from the city²⁰¹. These Iraqi Security Forces were largely allied with the Badr Organization and unlike the Jaish al-Mahdi the Badr Organization's militia was largely devoted to protecting the Shi'a population and usually refrained from attacking the Iraqi government or the Coalition military. Unfortunately the Iraqi

²⁰⁰ Luis Martinez and Jonathan Karl, "Baghdad Quieter as Surge Brigades Leave," *ABC News*, July 8, 2008, accessed on March 19, 2012.

²⁰¹ Anthony Cordesman and Jose Ramos, *Sadr and the Mahdi Army: Evolution, Capabilities and a New Direction*, (Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2008), 18.

Security Forces were not strong enough to retain control of the city and rival Shi'a militias began to move in, especially the Jaish al-Mahdi.

On March 21, 2008 Iraqi Prime Minister Nour al-Maliki met with Ambassador Crocker to inform him that on March 24 the Iraqi Army was going to unilaterally²⁰² launch a major operation against the militias in Basra. When Operation Saulat al-Fursan (Charge of the Knights) was launched it was unrefined at best. Instead of a slow methodical squeeze that characterized the successful operations of 2006 and 2007, it was a Fallujah-like direct assault into the city and faced massive resistance. Almost immediately the Iraqis had to send additional units as reinforcements and requested American support, but unlike earlier battles they didn't need large conventional support-only advisors and air support²⁰³. By March 30 the Jaish al-Mahdi had halted the Iraqi Army advance, but Sadr realized that the newly emboldened Iraqi Army would just continue to grow in strength and continued resistance would risk the large-scale destruction of his forces (and influence) in the south. Instead he announced a cease-fire whereby his forces would lay down their weapons and allow the Iraqi Army to move into the city in return for amnesty for his fighters²⁰⁴. By the end of May the Iraqi Army would have reasserted control over the entire city.

Sadr City

²⁰² Presumably this would include the embedded American advisors.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ James Glanz, "Iraq Seems Calmer After Cleric Halts Fight," *The New York Times*, April 1, 2008, accessed March 19, 2012.

In retaliation for the initial Iraqi Army movements against Basra, on March 23 the Jaish al-Mahdi in Sadr City began to fire large numbers of rockets and mortars into the Green Zone (which was the heart of the Iraqi government) while overrunning Iraqi Security Forces checkpoints on the outskirts of the neighborhood²⁰⁵. This forced the Americans and Iraqi Security Forces to react, whilst before they had been content to leave the isolated neighborhood alone. With the Iraqi Army focused on operations in Basra the Americans wanted to limit their advance into Sadr City because it was the most anti-American place in all of Iraq and there was little chance of convincing the civilians to break with the Jaish al-Mahdi. Instead the Americans began their advance from the south and only advanced about a third of the way into the neighborhood, halting at the major thoroughfare of Quds Street, north of which the Jaish al-Mahdi's mortars and rockets would be out of range of the Green Zone²⁰⁶. Meanwhile other American and Iraq units would conduct minor attacks on the other sides of Sadr City to retake the captured checkpoints and ensure Sadr City remained isolated. Meanwhile intense raids by Special Operations and missile strikes from drones aggressively attacked the Jaish al-Mahdi leaders and militant networks. The Jaish al-Mahdi intensely resisted American movements with almost constant IED, sniper and RPG attacks; when the Americans had reached Quds Street the Jaish al-Mahdi continued to infiltrate through American lines to attack the Green Zone. In reaction the Americans began to construct a 4.7-kilometer long wall made up of twelve-foot tall concrete barriers. This caused one last-ditch by hundreds of Jaish al-

²⁰⁵ David E. Johnson, M. Wade Markel and Brian Shannon, *The 2008 Battle of Sadr City*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2011), 4.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 6.

Mahdi fighters to stop its construction, over the following three weeks the Americans were successful in constructing the wall while also killing an estimated 700 Jaish al-Mahdi fighters²⁰⁷.

By early May it was obvious that the Jaish al-Mahdi was incapable of stopping the Americans and Iraqi Security Forces and much like Basra continued fighting would just end in the destruction of his forces, so he quietly accepted Iranian attempts to negotiate a ceasefire between his supporters and the Iraqi government, but left the Americans out. The conditions of the ceasefire were that north of Quds street the only permanent presence would be that of the Iraqi Security Forces, though the Americans would be allowed to send in temporary support if the Iraqi Security Forces ran into trouble; there would be no abuse or unwarranted arrest of Jaish al-Mahdi members; there would be no abuse of Iraqi civilians; and that the al-Quds wall would eventually be removed²⁰⁸.

The Jaish al-Mahdi is Reorganized

The moves against the Jaish al-Mahdi in Basra and Baghdad were by a newly emboldened Shi'a led Iraqi government and newly strengthened Iraqi Security Forces. Before the Surge they were unable to confront Sadr due to fears that it would bring down the government and the Iraqi Security Forces suffered from corruption, desertions and incompetency. Now the Iraqi Government was willing and able to directly confront the Sadr, and the Iraqi Security Forces were able to plan and implement operations with decreasing American support to confront and defeat the

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 8.

²⁰⁸ Cordesman, et al., *Sadr and the Mahdi Army: Evolution, Capabilities and a New Direction*, 21.

Jaish al-Mahdi and that they would continue to do so. This meant that the Jaish al-Mahdi was now a liability instead of an asset to his power.

So on June 13, 2008 Sadr announced that he was splitting the Jaish al-Mahdi into two wings. The larger of these wings was the Politics and Social Services Group that was to wage cultural jihad against “the Western ideology and liberate the minds from domination and globalization.” This wing would also take a Hezbollah-like role of building popular support by providing essential basic services that the Iraqi government was unable to. Though the Politics and Social Services Group would not run candidates in the direct elections, they would have a degree of influence by supporting independents within it²⁰⁹.

The second wing of the reorganized Jaish al-Mahdi was the one that would retain weapons as “The Special Companies”. To provide clarification on July 30 Sadr spelled out the rules for this wing in a letter to his supporters which are:

- Do not target civilians.
- Do not target the government, even if it is (unfair) for some. That is not permitted.
- If the government stands by the occupiers against the resistance in the field of battle, the resistance must limit its damage as much as possible and according to what is necessary.
- Limit weapons to the hands of the specialized resistance, and none others.
- Military action of the resistance should not be harmful to the people.
- Absolutely avoid military actions in cities.
- Preserve the centrality of command in receiving military orders from its known marjaia, because its dispersion will cause great damage and the greatest blight.
- It is not permitted to carry weapons – only for the specialized resistance. Everyone else will be specialized in (cultural jihad). Obey the terms and regulations that have been recently issued.
- Those who want to join the honorable Iraqi resistance have to commit to the terms made by the known leadership in order to join. Naturally (these) cannot be revealed, for the most important basis of resistance is preserving secrecy by all means.
- Do not damage the people’s services, like electricity, water and others.
- Do not use the governmental properties, or involve them in resistance actions, where there is no permission from the legitimate marjaia [Shi’a religious leaders]. That is stressed after the current government claims it is (politically) trying to drive the occupier out.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 28.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 29.

These policies were a radical departure from the earlier actions of the Jaish al-Mahdi wherein it supported death squads, attacked the Iraqi government, and used civilian areas for cover when attacking the Americans. The end result was that the Surge and Spring 2008 fighting had forced the Jaish al-Mahdi to disarm and at least tacitly participate in the government. Though the Jaish al-Mahdi was still vehemently anti-American, attacks would be limited to their bases and supply routes.

The “Status of Forces Agreement” and the Beginning of the End

As the security situation stabilized in the early summer and it became increasingly apparent that the Iraqi government and military were capable of standing on their own it opened the door for a graduated American withdrawal that could leave a stable Iraq. Talks of an official Status of Forces agreement began in January, but kicked off in earnest after the Spring 2008 fighting. The agreement itself was contentious, especially because the Americans refused to sign an agreement whereby US troops were subject to Iraqi Law²¹¹. Ultimately pressure of the impending expiration of the 2003 United Nations Mandate (which had been extended) that would have forced the Americans to leave by December 31, 2008 drove the Iraqi government to negotiate an agreement. This was also a sign of how all the parties were unsure of victory in a potential civil war and understood that they probably couldn't prevent one without American assistance.

The Status of Forces Agreement was ultimately signed on November 16, 2008 and ratified by the American Congress and Iraqi Parliament soon after. The

²¹¹ Campbell Robertson and Stephen Farrell, “Pact, Approved in Iraq, Sets Time for U.S. Pullout,” *The New York Times*, November 16, 2008, accessed March 19, 2012.

agreement set a timetable for a gradual withdrawal from Iraq both in terms of missions and troops. The primary focus of the mission would gradually continue to shift away from direct combat operations to that of advice and assistance. Permanent American forces would have to be out of the cities by June 29, 2009, after which point they would have to have Iraqi Security Force escort to enter them (with exceptions), with a total troop withdrawal no later than December 31, 2011²¹². Later, President Obama would add to this timetable announcing that all combat troops would be withdrawn by August 31, 2010²¹³ meaning that the sole remaining mission of the Americans would be to advise and assist the Iraqis.

Ultimately the Status of Forces Agreement would be the document that guided the eventual American drawdown in a measured, practical and methodical way. The SOFA also left open the possibility, even expectation by many, of a successor treaty whereby the Americans were invited to stay but in more limited numbers with a more focused mission.

²¹² “Agreement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq On the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq,” November 17, 2012.

²¹³ Obama, Barack, “Responsibly Ending the War in Iraq,” Speech to Marines, Camp Lejeune, NC, February 27, 2009.

Conclusion

The “Petraeus Doctrine”

When General Petraeus decided to rewrite American counter-insurgency doctrine in 2005 few would have predicted that just over two years later he would be testifying to Congress as to having used it as the basis for a successful counter-offensive. The Petraeus Doctrine’s strategies and tactics offered a radical alternative to the American uses of hard power to try and kill their way out of an insurgency, by synthesizing a use of Soft Power to focus on breaking civilian support and offering rehabilitation for former insurgents while also using precision Hard Power to kill or capture those how continued to resist. Though the Petraeus Doctrine was a tool for the ultimate success of the Surge it did not shape the environment necessary for its success, but took advantage of a series of events that had caused the environment and attitudes on the ground to be conducive for its success.

Lessons of the Early War

In the immediate wake of the invasion there was no cohesive American counter-insurgency doctrine and as the insurgency began to grow in the months following the invasion commanders increasingly had to devise their own strategies. Most of the commander’s strategies were somewhere between General Odierno’s use of Hard Power to close with and destroy the insurgents and that of General Petraeus’s use of Soft Power to encourage Iraqis to abandon the insurgency in the name of engagement and reconstruction.

As the years went on the Americans found themselves using more and more hard power to kill increasing number of insurgents while the insurgency continued to grow in strength and influence. Eventually the Americans began to believe that they were causing the violence and acting as “antibodies” within the community so after clearing an area of the insurgency (and not defeating it) the Americans would hand over control responsibility for holding the ground as rapidly as possible to the Iraqi Security Forces; time and time again the insurgents re-infiltrated and reasserted control by attacking, sieging and intimidating the Iraqi Security Forces. The culmination of the failure of conventional use of Hard Power climaxed during the spectacular failure of Operations Together Forward I and II, during which violence actually increased. By the time the Petraeus Doctrine was introduced the debate was not about what approach to take to defeat the insurgency, but whether it was even possible.

A Long War

Early in the Iraq War, a number of mistakes alienated the Iraqis and pushed them directly into the hands of the insurgency. Idealistic civilians flocked to Baghdad in hopes of helping to build a liberal democracy firmly rooted in Western tradition. By 2006 the failure of nation building was apparent, the Iraqi “democracy” was now Shi’a controlled and more accountable to radical Shi’a clerics than citizens of Iraq. These failures meant that the focus shifted to putting pressure on the Iraqi government to be mostly not corrupt and just stable enough to allow the Americans to save face, declare victory, and pull out. As idealistic rhetoric faded so did the view of many of Iraqis that the ultimate goal of the Americans was neocolonialism.

The American military remembered the quick, cheap, grand victory of the Gulf War and deploying soldiers looked forward to recreating its success, real world application of what they spent entire careers training to do (namely employing hard power) and receiving their coveted combat awards. While veteran American soldiers found themselves in a Groundhog's Day-like situation of multiple combat tours, being sent back to fight the same battles, in the same places, all in the face of a rising casualty count all the while watching the Army and Marine Corps deteriorate in front of them. Incoming commanders began to take risks with radical tactics, such as Colonel McMaster's strategy in Tal Afar and actions such as Colonel MacFarland's outright alliance with former insurgents.

When the Petraeus Doctrine went into effect in the winter of 2006 the Iraq War was moving into its fourth year. Political idealism of liberal democracy had been abandoned in favor of pragmatically building an Iraqi government that was just strong enough to not collapse in the face of an American withdrawal. American soldiers paid for the failure of their early war tactics to defeat the insurgency, commanders were risking everything on radical new approaches just to try something different, because the old approaches were certain to fail. When the Petraeus Doctrine went into effect it did so in a Force that was beaten, weary and desperate to try anything just to not lose.

The Iraqi Security Forces

On May 16, 2003 with Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number Two dissolved the large, stable, mostly non-sectarian Iraqi Army. For the next five years they would try to recreate just that. The Americans now found themselves having to

build a complex institution in the face of rising combat. Early war attempts to do so in haste failed completely with the widespread incompetence and desertions in the Spring 2004 fighting. When General Petraeus returned to Iraq in June 2004 to overhaul the training of the Iraqi Security Forces he implemented a methodical bottom up approach and though it would ultimately be successful, it would be years before the Iraqi Security Forces were an asset instead of a drain on American resources. By the time of the Surge, these forces were strong enough to be an asset to the Americans during joint operations, instead of the drain they had been earlier. By the end of the Surge the Iraqi Security Forces were large enough and trained enough to conduct operations completely independently of the Americans. Before 2006 it is doubtful that Surge operations could have been successful because the Iraqi Army just hadn't had enough time to gain the size and competency to assume responsibility for security.

Al-Askari and Haditha

The civil war that was sparked by the Al-Askari Mosque bombing and the Haditha Killings were other vital steps on the road to Surge. These events' portrayal in the media put massive pressures, especially after Republican defeats in the mid-term elections, on the Bush Administration to acknowledge that the war was being lost and to change course. This would embolden the Bush Administration to order one last gamble that guaranteed an increased loss of blood and treasure, but was the only hope for the ability to declare anything resembling victory.

Baghdad is Ethnically Cleansed

By the spring of 2007 Shi'a death squads had had more than a year to successful carry out a program of brutally ethnically cleansing Baghdad. In 2003 most of Baghdad was a mixed city where Sunni and Shia had been living side by side for centuries, by late 2006 it was divided between Shi'a and Sunni (who had been driven into their historical strongholds and found their numbers in Baghdad cut in half) neighborhoods. This meant the violence had shifted to neighborhood on neighborhood from neighbor on neighbor and meant that the Americans could isolate the neighborhoods as a means of reducing sectarian fighting leaving them only having to fight the insurgents and not keep Sunni and Shi'a apart.

The Insurgents Overplay their Hand

Within the Shi'a neighborhoods the locals now had less fear of their neighbors and the militias within their neighborhoods began to look less like protectors and more like common thugs more concerned with money and power than protecting the locals or driving the Americans out. Within Sunni areas Al-Qaeda in Iraq was losing local support by implementing Sharia in a culture that had never seen it, attacking fellow Muslims while claiming to be pious Muslims, and failing to protect the Sunni from the Shi'a death squads. This meant that during 2006 the insurgents overplayed their hand and locals would support the Iraqi government and tolerate Americans in neighborhoods because their desire for security from Al Qaeda in Iraq or the Jaish al-Mahdi overrode cultural xenophobia. This further strengthened Iraqi perceptions American domestic politics would force an eventual withdrawal.

Successes of the Surge

The Surge was successful in achieving its military goals. Using Smart Power the Americans successfully isolated and advanced into neighborhoods in Baghdad, break the insurgency from the locals, and then kill or capture insurgents that could not be brought back into society. Rule of law was restored and Baghdad began to reconstruct infrastructure damaged from years of fighting. During the fall of 2007 the insurgency had been sufficiently weakened and the Iraqi Security Forces strengthened to the point that the balance of power had definitively shifted so that the Americans could begin to shut down their combat outposts and withdraw their forces. As the insurgency was defeated there was much less radical Sunni and Shi'a pressure on the Iraqi Security Forces and the Iraqi government resulting in increased legitimacy and stability.

Sadr

By the spring and summer of 2008 the Iraqi Security Forces felt themselves strong enough to attack Sadr's Jaish al-Mahdi directly. This was a very telling move by the Shi'a led government, only a year before to do so could have brought down the government. Now a confrontation would strengthen it. Though the Battles of Basra and Sadr city did not destroy the Jaish al-Mahdi (it actually fought them to a standstill) it illustrated that continued violent resistance against the government risked its complete destruction. When Sadr reorganized the Jaish al Mahdi in June 2008 it was into a predominate political organization and indicative of how the fighting had forced even the most powerful organization to abandon violence for politics.

The Petraeus Doctrine as a Success

Ultimately the Surge was a success; as the insurgents were defeated violence in Baghdad dropped, the Iraqi Security Forces proved capable of maintaining security and the Americans were able to leave. Central to this was the Smart Power of the Petraeus Doctrine and though it drove the success of the Surge, it was simply the cook who baked it. The ingredients were: a long war that had abandoned idealism for pragmatism and the utter failure of conventional Hard Power that left a military willing to try anything; improved Iraqi Security Forces that were the product of a long-term training program; domestic pressures in the media and Congress that forced the Bush Administration to acknowledge how badly things had deteriorated and have no choice but to do something; the ethnic cleansing of Baghdad that had shifted the violence from neighbor-on-neighbor to neighborhood-on-neighborhood; and an insurgency that had overplayed its hand combined with American domestic politics to make the Americans a more temporary and appealing option than the insurgencies.

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