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**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**CAUSES OF IMPROVEMENT IN THE SECURITY  
ENVIRONMENT OF IRAQ, 2006–2009**

by

Seth A. Wheeler

December 2009

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

David Tucker  
Hy Rothstein

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**CAUSES OF IMPROVEMENT IN THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT OF IRAQ,  
2006–2009**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN DEFENSE ANALYSIS: IRREGULAR WARFARE**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## ABSTRACT

Popular consensus exists that the 2007 surge of U.S. forces in Iraq led to an improved security environment. The surge was designed to reduce violence and improve security by protecting the Iraqi population—a change in strategy. According to the consensus, the security environment improved due to the surge, measured by the decreasing number of attacks.

For this thesis, the security environment consists of the number of attacks *and* their lethality, supported by data from the Congressional Research Service. This thesis compares the timelines of the surge forces with the numbers of attacks, with the lethality of those attacks, and with factors other than the surge that may have improved the security environment. This thesis argues that the surge and associated strategy may have hastened improvement to the security environment, but they were neither necessary nor sufficient for the improvements in the security environment.

Several theories and conflict models offer insight into how improvement in the security environment occurred: through efforts that countered insurgent sanctuary and social support, and consequently decreased the lethality of insurgent attacks. This analysis reveals that the political efforts of the Iraqi government and grass roots movements were the necessary and sufficient conditions for improvement.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A popular consensus exists among United States Army leadership and civilian policy makers that the 2007 surge of United States forces in Iraq led to the improved security environment in that country. The surge was designed to reduce violence and improve security by protecting the Iraqi population in Baghdad; the emphasis on protecting the population from insurgent violence was considered a change in strategy. According to the consensus, as a result of the United States' military efforts to protect the Iraqi population from violence in Baghdad—and the increase in the total number of U.S. Troops operating from decentralized outposts to reinforce Iraqi efforts that were part of this strategy—the security environment steadily improved as measured by the decreasing number of attacks on Coalition Forces and Iraqi civilians.

In order to address the validity of the consensus view, this thesis will analyze the security environment and stability in Iraq using data from the Congressional Research Service. Although the consensus view has been supported by correlating the increasing number of surge forces with decreasing numbers of attack, for the purposes of this thesis, the security environment will be defined as consisting of the total number of attacks *and* their lethality. For reasons that will become clear, the lethality of attacks is a better measure of the security environment than merely the numbers of attacks because the lethality of attacks reveals factors, other than the surge, that may also have led to an improvement in the security environment.

This thesis will compare the timelines of the arrival of the surge forces with the numbers of attacks, the lethality of those attacks, and with factors other than the surge that may have improved the security environment—such as Iraqi political efforts. In contrast to the consensus view on why the surge worked, this thesis will argue that the surge forces and associated strategy may have hastened improvement to the security environment, but they were neither necessary nor sufficient for the significant improvements observed in the security

environment. Various theories and conflict models suggest that the United States was in a less favorable position to achieve success in Iraq than proponents of the consensus view contend. Applying these theories and models to the Iraq conflict offer insight into how an improvement in the security environment occurred: specifically, through efforts that countered insurgent sanctuary and social support, and consequently decreased the lethality of insurgent attacks. This analysis reveals that other factors, primarily the political efforts of the Iraqi Provincial and Central governments, and grass roots movements were the necessary and sufficient conditions for improvement in the security environment.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance, mentorship, and endless patience of Doctor David Tucker. This thesis would not have been possible without his guidance and direction.

The author is also indebted to the professors and staff in the Defense Analysis Department at the Naval Postgraduate School, whose expertise is boundless and humble.

Finally, the author is deeply grateful for the perspective of peers, whose insight and expertise greatly enhanced the learning environment.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

A popular consensus exists among United States Army leadership and civilian policy makers that the 2007 surge of United States forces in Iraq led to the improved security environment in that country. The surge was designed to reduce violence and improve security by protecting the Iraqi population in Baghdad; the emphasis on protecting the population from insurgent violence was considered a change in strategy. According to the consensus, as a result of the United States' military efforts to protect the Iraqi population from violence in Baghdad—and the increase in the total number of U.S. Troops operating from decentralized outposts to reinforce Iraqi efforts that were part of this strategy—the security environment steadily improved as measured by the decreasing number of attacks on Coalition Forces and Iraqi civilians. Due to the apparent correlation between the deployment of the Surge Forces and the decrease in the numbers of attacks, prominent figures and authors such as President George W. Bush,<sup>1</sup> Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld,<sup>2</sup> Bob Woodward,<sup>3</sup> Thomas Ricks,<sup>4</sup> Peter Mansoor,<sup>5</sup> John Nagl,<sup>6</sup> and others have argued that the surge was the mechanism by which improvement in the security environment in Iraq was achieved. Ricks explains the success of the surge through interviews with American Military personnel in his book *The Gamble*, while Bob Woodward does

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<sup>1</sup> President George W. Bush, "The Surge in Iraq Worked," in *The LA Times Countdown to Crawford*, July 31, 2008, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/presidentbush/2008/07/iraq-win> (accessed September 16, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, "One Surge does not Fit All," in *The New York Times*, November 23, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/23/opinion/23rumsfeld.html>? (accessed September 16, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Mansoor, "How the Surge Worked," in *The Washington Post*, August 10, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/opinion/columns/index.html> (accessed September 16, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> John Nagl, "We Can't Win these Wars on Our Own," in *The Washington Post*, March 9, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/0> (accessed September 16, 2009).

the same with White House, Department of Defense, and Department of State personnel in his account, *The War Within*. Kimberly Kagan supports similar conclusions in her book *The Surge: A Military History*.<sup>7</sup>

In order to address the validity of the consensus view, this thesis will analyze the security environment and stability in Iraq using data from the Congressional Research Service. Although the consensus view has been supported by correlating the increasing number of surge forces with decreasing numbers of attack, for the purposes of this thesis, the security environment will be defined as consisting of the total number of attacks *and* their lethality. For reasons that will become clear, the lethality of attacks is a better measure of the security environment than merely the numbers of attacks because the lethality of attacks reveals factors, other than the surge, that may also have led to an improvement in the security environment.

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<sup>7</sup> Kimberly Kagan, *The Surge: A Military History* (New York: Encounter books, 2008).

political efforts of the Iraqi Provincial and Central governments, and grass roots movements were the necessary *and* sufficient conditions for improvement in the security environment.

In order to understand arguments about the surge and what improved security in Iraq, it is necessary to briefly review what we know about the insurgency. Following that review, the thesis will outline the U.S. military's approach to the conflict prior to the surge, and continue with an analysis of surge efforts based on measures of insurgent effectiveness—numbers of attacks versus lethality of attacks. Assuming the soundness of this argument, the conclusion of the thesis extrapolates lessons from Iraq and considers future application of similar methods in new areas of conflict.

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## **II. THE INSURGENCY AND PRE-SURGE MILITARY RESPONSE**

The insurgency in Iraq consisted of three separate but overlapping conflicts: the Sunni insurgency against the central government consisting of former Ba'athists; Al-Qaeda's violent network attempting to establish a foothold in a new venue in western/northern Iraq; and the sectarian violence perpetuated by existing ethnic tensions between Shia and Sunni militia groups or factions.<sup>8</sup> Each of these groups employed similar tactics: “attacks on Americans, sabotage, attacks on Iraqis who supported the new political order, and occasional spectacular terrorist acts.”<sup>9</sup> The targets of all three of these groups were the various city, provincial and central levels of government, and the groups’ goals included “overthrowing the political order within a given territory, using a combination of subversion, terrorism, guerilla warfare, and propaganda.”<sup>10</sup> Each group was successful at integrating into the population and controlling territorial sanctuaries through intimidation, coercion, and violence, but also by establishing mechanisms of control over the population such as self-imposed governance and the rationing of resources.

### **A. MECHANISMS OF INSURGENT CONTROL OVER THE POPULATION**

In al Anbar Province and the Jazeera Desert, Al Qaeda primarily used violence and intimidation to coerce the population into providing sanctuary and support. In southern Iraq, the Shia Militias used violence and rationing of essential services. In Baghdad, the Shia Militias used violence and rationing, and backed these efforts with political support from Shia government officials or Security Forces officers. For example, the ethnic violence perpetrated by Shia and Sunni factions was exacerbated by existing tensions, but the actual short-

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<sup>8</sup> Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 92

<sup>9</sup> Steven Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008): 152.

<sup>10</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 12.

term goal of mid-level insurgents and power brokers within tribal areas and districts was to grab land and essential services/resources; the result of which became an expanded power base of insurgent and militia leaders in the absence of legitimate governance. The rationing of essential services by the insurgents to the population centers created dependency on the insurgents and provided a mechanism of control over the population beyond simple intimidation. At best, these violent efforts were often ignored by Shia, or else facilitated by the very government agencies and security forces responsible for the area. In fact, many insurgent groups established their own miniature “kingdoms” of sanctuary around the country to “create or protect sectarian enclaves, divert economic resources, and impose their own respective political and religious agendas.”<sup>11</sup> The population often provided passive support to insurgents out of necessity for essential services provided by insurgents, and was not the product of intimidation alone. For example, although insurgent leaders would force people from their homes through intimidation and the use of force, the insurgents employed resource control mechanisms to influence the remaining citizens; including rationing black-market gasoline and liquid propane gas, controlling electrical substations and irrigation pumps, employing traffic control points, closing banks, limiting hospital visits and medical care, and influencing Judges and politicians. In exchange for the limited provision of these essential services, Iraqis were coerced into allowing insurgents to operate in their area, effectively creating the sanctuary and social support necessary for the continued success of the insurgents.<sup>12</sup> Any ejection of insurgents from a neighborhood by U.S. forces did not erase a citizen's need for essential services, originally provided by the insurgents and subsequently unavailable through the national and provincial governments. Iraqis often needed the insurgent and militia organizations to remain in order to provide necessities unavailable through legitimate means.

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<sup>11</sup> Steven Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008): 174.

<sup>12</sup> The discussion of insurgent sanctuary and social support will be addressed in more detail in later chapters.

Furthermore, these groups often sabotaged the infrastructure not directly controlled by militias and insurgents, targeting oil pipelines, water systems, electric substations, and key bridges, in an effort to discredit the ability of U.S. forces to provide for the Iraqis. Insurgents understood that “a country’s rulers—the Americans in this case—were blamed for the lack of water, electricity, and fuel even when the insurgents themselves were responsible.”<sup>13</sup> The ability of the insurgents and militias to control or disrupt infrastructure was so pervasive that many Iraqis believed that the U.S. “failure to [protect infrastructure] was intended to punish or dishonor them.”<sup>14</sup>

As the insurgents organized and adapted into larger and more effective groups from 2003 through 2006, the United States struggled to overcome their effects on the Allied U.S./Iraqi political apparatus.

## **B. THE U.S. MILITARY—COMPOSITION, DISPOSITION, AND APPROACH**

In order to understand how the United States Military approached the conflict in Iraq, we must first understand the design, function, and fundamental tasks of the military. For the surge's change in strategy and increased troop numbers to have been the cause of improvement in the security environment, a military that was designed for traditional warfare and failed to improve the security environment by employing conventional methods prior to 2007, would have to have undergone an unprecedented transformation<sup>15</sup> in a very short time, begging the question of whether a change did in fact occur.

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<sup>13</sup> Steven Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008): 147.

<sup>14</sup> Steven Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008): 146.

Anthony H. Cordesman, and Arleigh A. Burke, “The Changing Situation in Iraq: A Progress Report,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (2009): <http://www.csis.org/burke/reports/> (accessed May 20, 2009): 2.

Michael E. O'Hanlon, and Jason H. Campbell, *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, February 19, 2009 (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, [2009]), <http://www.brookings.edu/> (accessed April 19, 2009): 23.

<sup>15</sup> On the difficulties of transforming under fire, see Stephen Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991).

The U.S. military was wholly unprepared for the stabilization/reconstruction and counterinsurgency missions. Leading up to the conflict in Iraq, U.S. military training, technology, culture, and mission were focused on a set of objectives and principles different from counterinsurgency, and efforts at innovation for improvement were limited by a rigid set of institutional norms stemming from the post-Gulf War period. The reliance on technology to gain superiority over a qualitatively inferior enemy was the hallmark of the American “military-technology revolution,” or later the “revolution in military affairs.”<sup>16</sup> This revolution clearly highlighted the reliance on speed, audacity, and dominant firepower with precision strike ability and low friendly casualty figures (congruent with the outcome of the Gulf War). The American revolution of military capability did not include “political subtlety and cultural understanding”<sup>17</sup> and in fact, ignored these aspects of warfare by deferring such engagements to politicians and diplomats, as part of a grand strategy employing all the elements of statecraft.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the Government of Iraq's demands for U.S. political assistance in Baghdad and advisory assistance to provincial governments overwhelmed the wholly inadequate political-advisory capacity of the military. Such advisory tasks included the establishment of a Constitutional Democracy, election of public officials, economic policy generation, etc. The U.S. focused instead on defeating armed threats against the Allied U.S. and Iraqi government. The military and civilian leaders were not prepared to address the security, political, and later economic issues stemming from the actions of the insurgents and militias. The U.S. Military's historical and deliberate separation from political involvement, economic engagement, and the population inside a host-nation, because of its emphasis on enemy-centric warfare, imposed limitations on its

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<sup>16</sup> Steven Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008): 47.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>18</sup> Instruments of Statecraft refer to Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic foreign policy measures employed to accomplish a strategic objective. Also known as the Elements of National Power.

ability to translate battlefield success into the accomplishment of a strategic objective—to rebuild Iraq from the ground up.<sup>19</sup>

In the prelude to the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, U.S. politicians and statesmen concurred with the division of labor between the military and other government agencies, as demonstrated by foreign policy advisor<sup>20</sup> Condoleezza Rice's statement in early 2000:

[The military] is lethal, and it is meant to be. It is not a civilian police force. It is not a political referee. And it is most certainly not designed to build a civilian society. Military force is best used to support clear political goals, whether limited, such as expelling Saddam from Kuwait, or comprehensive, such as demanding the unconditional surrender of Japan and Germany during World War II.<sup>21</sup>

Fundamentally, the military was designed to “prevent bad things rather than engineer desired results, a negative force rather than a positive one.”<sup>22</sup> The U.S. military found itself in 2003 with tasks that it was not designed to do, and certain political decisions did not enable the military’s efforts. For example, in order to protect the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq from former Ba'athists and to prevent a military coup against the U.S. governing body in Iraq, Ambassador Paul Bremer disbanded the Iraqi military. However, a large population of unemployed and angry men with military skills contributed to a situation worse than a security vacuum: a nation ripe for insurgency.

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<sup>19</sup> The stated objective in Iraq was “regime change,” but later included rebuilding the Iraqi Security Forces, establishing a Constitutional Democracy, ensuring viable economic policies, and solving deep-rooted ethnic differences among the religious factions in Iraq.

<sup>20</sup> Rice was the foreign policy advisor to Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush during speech.

Condoleezza Rice, “Promoting the national interest,” *Foreign Affairs*, 79, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 2000), [http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~jwestern/ir319/condoleezza\\_rice.htm](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/~jwestern/ir319/condoleezza_rice.htm) (accessed May 28, 2009).

Steven Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008): 47.

### C. “A WAY OF BATTLE”

Throughout the Iraq conflict, the U.S. Military focused on a strategy to improve the security environment by attacking and limiting insurgent personnel and resources in each of the insurgent groups.<sup>23</sup> Military units employed a combination of lethal (raids, air strikes, small kill teams) and non-lethal means (infrastructure projects such as schools and wells). However, until 2007 most military operations were conducted from centralized bases against low-level insurgent operators, and predominantly focused on active defensive measures,<sup>24</sup> such as counter-Improvised Explosive Device and counter-rocket missions or cache recovery. For example, many missions consisted of “movement to contact” patrols where U.S. forces would drive through an area reported to contain insurgents and wait for the enemy to initiate contact with bombs or small arms fire, and then retaliate.<sup>25</sup> Military forces were often compromised by insurgent early-warning networks long before the forces’ arrival in their target areas, thus increasing the risk to the force and the risk to the success of the mission. A report from the U.S. Headquarters in Iraq dated August 25, 2006, indicates that during the second phase of Operation Together Forward II, an operation carried out before the surge, 33,009 buildings had been cleared and 70 insurgents detained.<sup>26</sup> This means that 0.002 insurgents were captured for every building cleared.

As aggressive military raids and searches of Iraqi homes based on little or no intelligence continued through 2007, many Iraqi citizens could not help but view such efforts as both insulting and as evidence of gross incompetence on the part of the combined U.S. and Iraqi government.<sup>27</sup> The cost of such raids included a further loss of population support for military efforts, and an increased

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<sup>23</sup> Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008): 130.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009): 12.

<sup>26</sup> Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008): 105.

<sup>27</sup> Steven Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008): 156

active or passive support for the insurgents, without much gained in terms of actual insurgents captured. The detention of insurgents produced only a limited reduction of insurgent capacity during operations, as many were released shortly after capture due to lack of evidence, or more specifically, a lack of desire by Iraqi judges to sentence Iraqis who attacked Americans: this program was aptly named the “catch and release policy.”<sup>28</sup> Further outlining the continued failure of the Military's pre-surge strategy, a report to the National Command Authority highlighted the initial trend of violence perpetuated by insurgents in 2004 which continued through 2007: “They [insurgents] have a strategy . . . All the measurements – the attack data, the logistics, the financing, external support, freedom of movement, ability to recruit—all these trend lines are going one way—up.”<sup>29</sup>

Having reviewed briefly pre-surge military efforts, we may now look at the surge and the data that supports the consensus viewpoint.

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<sup>28</sup> Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008): 81.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

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### III. THE SURGE

The U.S. military attempted to improve the security environment through a tactical approach toward enemy combatants, without establishing viable political and economic institutions through the early years of the Iraq conflict. As the U.S. domestic political will for the Iraq War effort waned, a conceptually radical strategy was concocted in 2006 to counter the growing security threat in Iraq: a 25,000–soldier troop surge to supplement the 120,000 service members in Iraq. As a result of the deteriorating security environment in Iraq and waning domestic U.S. support for military efforts there, the Secretary of Defense, with support from President George Bush, deemed a change of strategy necessary. A review by the Joint Chiefs of Staff resulted in the deployment of five Army Brigades to Iraq in support of Prime Minister Maliki's 10 Army Brigade “surge of forces” to Baghdad.<sup>30</sup> The Commanding General of Multi-National Forces–Iraq, George Casey was replaced by General David Petraeus in January 2007. The security environment subsequently improved in late 2007 and 2008 while other CRS indicators of improvement trended favorably toward U.S. and Iraqi interests.

#### A. COMPOSITION, DISPOSITION, AND MISSION OF SURGE FORCES

The surge of U.S. forces in 2007 was limited in the numbers of troops available to deploy into the Iraqi theater of operations (approximately five brigades or 20,000 soldiers) and limited in its scope to Baghdad and surrounding areas.<sup>31</sup> The planning considerations for the troop surge included primary factors such as: 25 percent of the population of Iraq was in or near Baghdad, and 30 percent of all violence occurred in the same area.<sup>32</sup> Planning for the surge also

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<sup>30</sup> Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008): 255.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 117, 250.

<sup>32</sup> Data reflects time period of February 2005 through May 2008. Michael E. O'Hanlon and Jason H. Campbell, *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, February 19, 2009 (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, [2009]), <http://www.brookings.edu/> (accessed April 19, 2009).

included the idea that there is a critical troops-to-conflict ratio,<sup>33</sup> and by adding surge forces, the United States could tip the scales of the number of troops toward a favorable force ratio. The surge troops were employed as an economy of force mission intended to gain the maximum anticipated return on security improvements in the largest segment of the country's population center.

As previously noted, authors Thomas Ricks,<sup>34</sup> Bob Woodward,<sup>35</sup> Kimberly Kagan,<sup>36</sup> and others describe some of the factors that are popularly believed to have increased stability in Iraq in 2008, focusing primarily on the military strategy reform.<sup>37</sup> The military strategy implemented by Generals Petraeus and Odierno involved moving large numbers of troops from centralized bases into the population centers, and directing soldiers to protect Iraqi civilians from ethnically motivated political violence. The concept was that by protecting the population, the population would *protect their protectors* by volunteering information to actively disrupt insurgent networks, and Allied efforts would thereby gain popular support.

The surge strategy appeared to reflect counterinsurgency doctrine: continue to reduce insurgent capacity through conventional attacks from outposts, thereby also protecting the population near the outpost from insurgent attack. This decentralized strategy more efficiently separated innocents from insurgents and reduced collateral damage during conventional attacks. The subsequently reduced collateral damage (an insurgent mobilizer) then reduced popular support for the insurgency. The surge consisted of a series of aggregate “clear, hold, build” operations in the city's districts.<sup>38</sup> These efforts were large

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<sup>33</sup> United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, *Field Manual (FM) 3-24 Counter-Insurgency Operations*, <http://www.usgcoin.org/library/doctrine>, (accessed 21 August 2009): para. 1-67.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Kimberly Kagan, *The Surge: A Military History* (New York: Encounter books, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009): 106.

<sup>38</sup> Approximately one-quarter of the population of Iraq resides in Baghdad. The commitment of surge forces to Baghdad was an “economy of force” mission, maximizing U.S. troop strength against the largest population center.

scale operations conducted under the umbrella surge campaign and involved the same conventional attack tactics employed by U.S. forces against insurgents as in previous years, except from decentralized outposts. In fact, Thomas Ricks' interviews indicate that the surge allowed soldiers to interact with the population from their outposts and gain more detailed information for targeting and conventional attacks against insurgents.<sup>39</sup> This preceding analysis indicates that the efforts of the surge troops were not a change in strategy, simply a change in troop disposition and tactics.

## B. SURGE DATA ANALYSIS

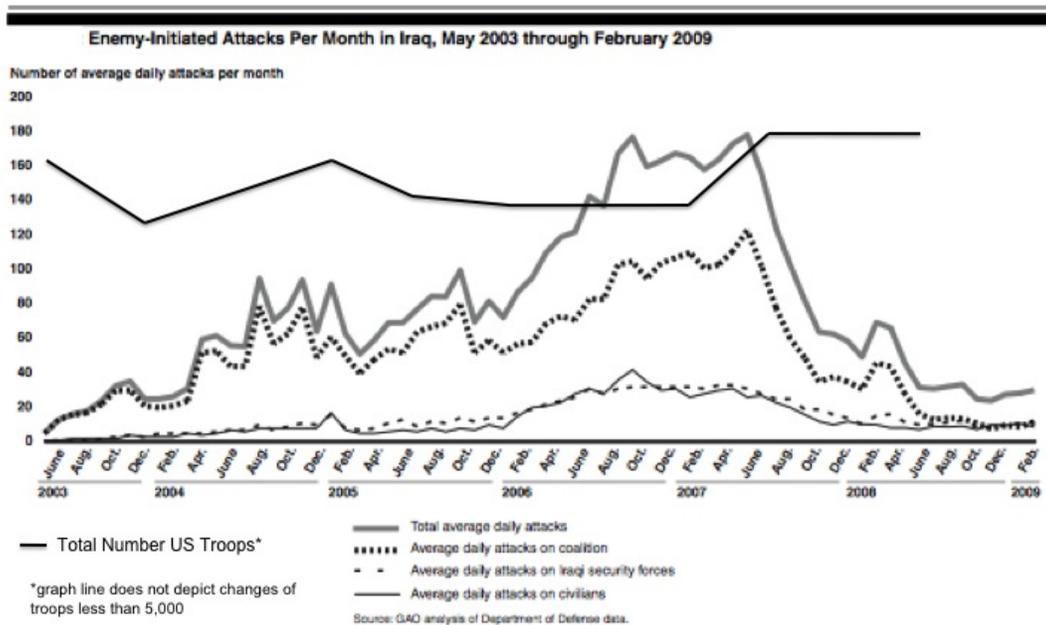


Figure 1. U.S. Personnel (Operations) and Number of Attacks After (Iraqi and Afghanistan: Security, Economic, and Governance Challenges to Rebuilding Efforts Should Be Addressed in U.S. Strategies).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009) 176.

<sup>40</sup> Jacquelyn Williams-Bridgers—Government Accountability Office, “Iraqi and Afghanistan: Security, Economic, and Governance Challenges to Rebuilding Efforts Should Be Addressed in U.S. Strategies,” (Testimony to House of Representatives, March 25, 2009), <http://www.gao.gov/index.html> (accessed May 27, 2009).

If we look at the number of attacks and compare that to the number of troops in Iraq, we see evidence that supports the consensus view. Figure 1 demonstrates the correlation of decreasing attacks against coalition forces, Iraqi Security Forces, and civilians over time compared with the increasing number of United States troops in the conflict. Attacks increase following troop level declines and decrease following troop level increases, just as the doctrinal troops-to-insurgents ratio predicts in the Army's new Counterinsurgency Manual.<sup>41</sup> June–August 2007 appears to be the tipping point, where a critical number of U.S. personnel enabled the improvement to the security environment. This correlation appears to confirm the consensus view that the surge forces were responsible for the decline in attacks and subsequent improvement in the security environment.

As previously noted, Ricks and others conclude that a U.S. troop increase of roughly a 15 percent combined with the decentralized strategy in 2007 led to improved security in 2008. However, as the following analysis of CRS data and lethality of attacks demonstrates, other factors must have contributed to the decline in violence.

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Author generated line of U.S. Troop numbers. Information gathered from Michael E. O'Hanlon and Jason H. Campbell, *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, February 19, 2009 (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, [2009]), <http://www.brookings.edu/> (accessed April 19, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, *Field Manual (FM) 3–24 Counter-Insurgency Operations*, <http://www.usgcoin.org/library/doctrine>, (accessed 21 August 2009): para. 1–67.

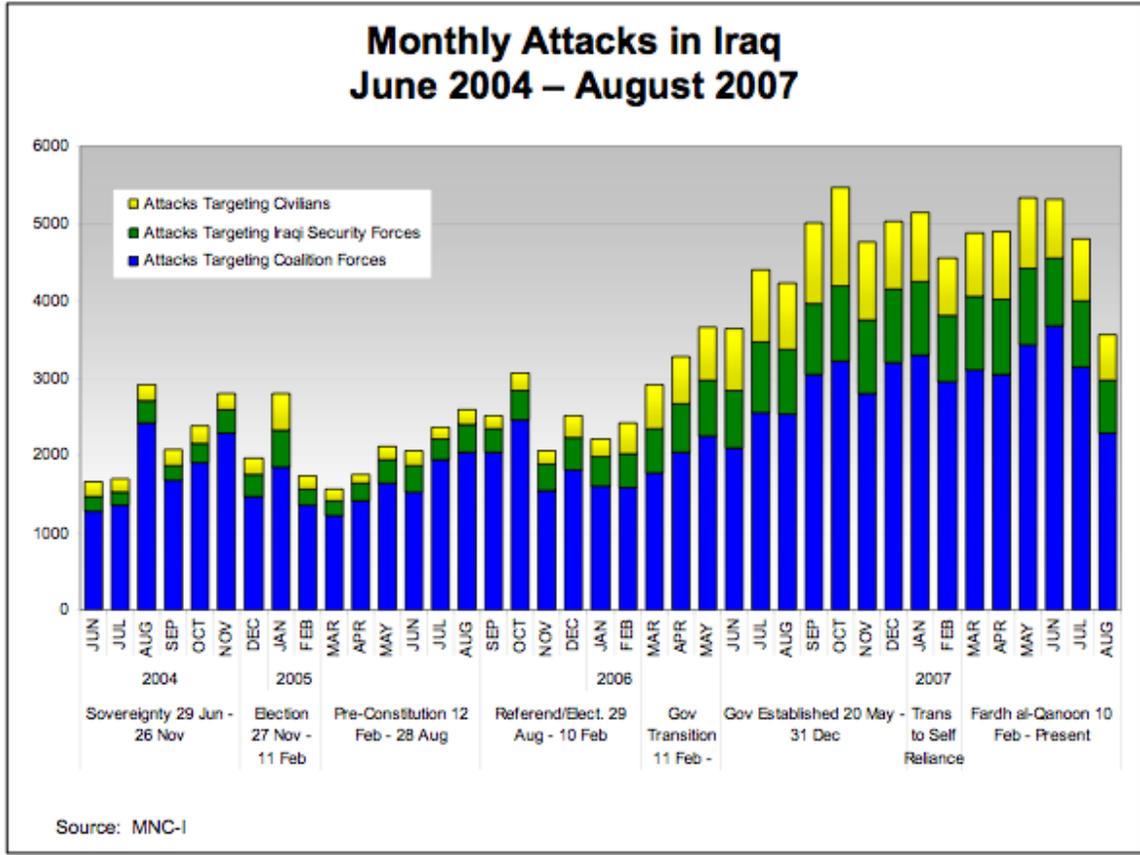


Figure 2. Monthly Attacks in Iraq (Civilians, Iraqi Security Forces, and Allied Forces) From (Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq).<sup>42</sup>

First, “Figure 2–Monthly Attacks in Iraq,” indicates a decline in the number of attacks conducted by insurgents from January 2007 through April of 2007, followed by two months of increased attacks during May and June. The total number of attacks has continuously decreased from these levels through 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq,” *September 2007 Report to Congress*, [http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq\\_Reports/](http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq_Reports/) (accessed 6 March, 2009): 19.

Although data in Figure 2 is included in the average daily attacks in Figure 1, Figure 2's timeline is narrower and depicts a month-by-month look at the number of attacks.<sup>43</sup>

The increase of attacks in May and June of 2007 is most likely due to the arrival of surge forces in Iraq and their subsequent distribution throughout Baghdad as part of the new decentralized strategy: a greater number of troops distributed over a larger area and conducting offensive operations created more targets for the insurgents to attack. This appears the most likely reason for the increase in attacks, however others may exist such as attacks conducted by Maqtada al-Sadr's "Jaysh al-Mahdi" militia. As noted before, observing the timeline in the months well after the surge of forces, it would appear that the surge troops and change in tactics are responsible for the decline of violence that followed their arrival, which, in turn, has led to the popular theory of the surge. However, a look at the detailed timeline of attacks in Figure 2 indicates a decrease in attacks beginning near January 2007, a month earlier than the arrival of the first Brigade of surge troops<sup>44</sup> and months before the full commitment of the five Brigades, which arrived between March and May with full integration into the fight by the end of May. The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, the unit assigned to Baghdad prior to the surge effort, began to decentralize its troop disposition in January 2007.<sup>45</sup> However, the changed disposition of 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division troops and its use of the "protect the population strategy" beginning in January is unlikely to explain the decrease in numbers of attacks in February. It is critical to understand that the gains achieved by surge forces in Baghdad, such as earning support of the local population, took several months to accomplish.<sup>46</sup> It took time

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<sup>43</sup> The data line in Figure 1 does not clearly represent a decline in attacks from January 2007 through April 2007. The reason for this is twofold: the Figure 1 x-axis data points reflect two-month intervals, degrading the clarity of individual months. Secondly, the data line represents average daily attacks, further degrading the trend line's representation of the timeline described here.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009): 165.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

to win the support of the population and for the population to provide information to Allied forces so they could effectively identify and attack insurgents. Offensive surge operations against insurgents gained momentum during the spring of 2007, and insurgent counter-attacks elevated the attack data in May and June, but the surge forces and the change in the disposition of forces cannot explain the months-long downward trend in the number of attacks that began in January 2007.<sup>47</sup>

### **C. ATTACKS, LETHALITY, AND TIMELINES**

A further analysis of casualty rates versus numbers of attacks suggests a different conclusion. By comparing the number of insurgent attacks against Coalition forces and civilians in Figure 2 with the numbers of casualties presented in Figure 3 (SIGACT III reporting) one can see that the number of deaths from insurgent attacks decreased significantly in November–December 2006, while the number of attacks increased. If the number of attacks increased while the number of casualties declined, the effectiveness, or lethality of insurgent attacks decreased. This analysis reveals that the lethality of insurgent attacks against the U.S. Military, Iraqi Security Forces, and civilians eroded significantly beginning in October–November 2006 and sharply in December, never regaining the effectiveness previously demonstrated in 2006. This analysis remains true for CIOC Trends reporting for the December–January 2007 timeframe in Figure 3. The arrival of surge troops and the new disposition of U.S. forces beginning in January 2007 cannot explain the degraded lethality of insurgents beginning in late 2006. The key time period for further analysis of “what worked to improve the security environment” is, therefore, October 2006 to January 2007.

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009): 171.

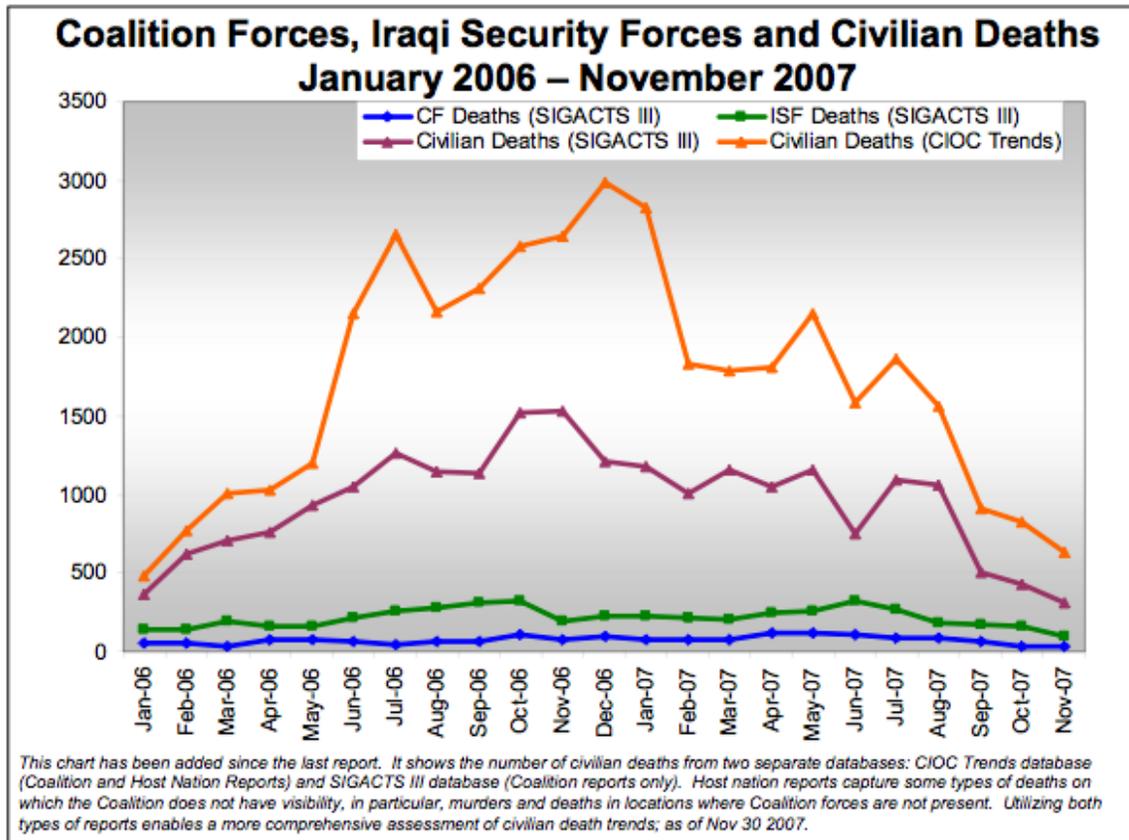


Figure 3. Allied Forces, Iraqi Security Forces, and Civilian Deaths (January 2006–November 2007) From (Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq).<sup>48</sup>

To this point, the lethality data has concerned all areas of Iraq. If we look at lethality in specific areas where U.S. troops were present (SIGACAT III Reporting—the bottom three lines—purple, green, and blue), it indicates that lethality decreased markedly in Coalition forces’ areas beginning in October–November 2006. Although the surge strategy was not implemented on a large scale until February 2007, other units did begin to implement the Baghdad

<sup>48</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq,” *December 2007 Report to Congress*, [http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq\\_Reports/](http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq_Reports/) (accessed March 6, 2009): 1.

SIGACT is an acronym for Significant Activities or Action, describing a prescribed set of reporting requirements for U.S. units in Iraq to their headquarters.

CIOC is an acronym for Combined Intelligence Operations Center, describing the routing of reporting from Combined (predominantly Iraqi, but includes other forces present in theater) unit headquarters to the common database originated.

“protect the population” strategy as early as January 2007. This implementation may have occurred before the arrival and decentralization of surge forces, and even longer before their presence began to take effect, but the decline in lethality in October–November is not explained by changes of U.S. strategy or force disposition in January 2007. Additionally, lethality declined in the areas where U.S. troops were not present in December 2006–January 2007. The top trend line (CIOC Trends reporting—orange color) in Figure 3 is indicative of reports of civilian deaths where Coalition forces were not present, indicating that the surge forces had no direct bearing on the decline in civilian deaths.

The lethality of attacks escalated during September and November 2006 (Figure 3, SIGACT III, where U.S. troops are present), most likely due to the final efforts of Shia Militias and Al Qaeda to seize areas of control in and around Baghdad,<sup>49</sup> and again in December (Figure 4, CIOC Trends, where U.S. troops are not present) in other areas of the country such as al-Anbar Province, where Sunni Tribes continued to fight Al Qaeda.<sup>50</sup> These two brief increases of insurgent lethality indicate the final efforts of insurgents to wage effective warfare on a large scale but the overall trend in lethality in these months prior to the surge is downward., Neither the action of surge forces nor the actions of other forces can explain declining lethality in Iraq from October to January 2007.

#### **D. WHY INSURGENT LETHALITY IS IMPORTANT**

The lethality of insurgent attacks is critical in evaluating insurgent and counterinsurgent efforts for two reasons. First, lethality of attacks is a better measure of insurgent effectiveness than number of attacks. Drive-by shootings do not suggest the same kind of capability as do the same number of technically complicated, carefully hidden, well-timed improvised explosive devices. Second, the more lethal attacks are, the more they have political consequences.

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<sup>49</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq,” *March 2007 Report to Congress*, [http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq\\_Reports/](http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq_Reports/) (accessed March 6, 2009): 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Although any accumulation of attacks has political consequences, the number of human lives lost often increases the political effectiveness of the attack.<sup>51</sup> Loss of life, particularly innocent civilians, demonstrates the inability of the government to act like a government, degrading the legitimacy and effectiveness of the governing bodies. G.L. Lamborn adds to this argument by describing that, “When a government fails at its central tasks of protecting the people and providing effective administration, it will lose public support and risks being replaced by a shadow regime that will assume quasi- governmental powers.”<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, such perceptions of government incompetence do not foster the favor of the governed population, but instead allow insurgents to shift previously neutral citizens toward both active and passive support of their organizations. Attacks producing large numbers of killed and wounded, highly lethal attacks, suggest a high level of insurgent tactical and political capability and effectiveness, even if the overall number of attacks is declining. What makes highly lethal attacks possible is the ability of insurgents to operate under the relative protection of sanctuary with resourcing from social support networks.

Insurgent sanctuaries typically provide a means to conduct training, refit and repair equipment, plan future operations, and recruit new members. The ability of insurgents to gather intelligence, plan future operations, and resource those operations with well-constructed attack material and training over time and within the concealment of sanctuary, speaks to their increased lethality in subsequent attacks. The degree of lethality of insurgent attacks is directly related to their sanctuary and level of population support.<sup>53</sup> Insurgent social support networks among the willing, neutral, or coerced population allows for food and equipment resupply, medical provisions, access to lethal hardware,

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<sup>51</sup> This statement is not an absolute, as the Samarra Mosque bombing in February 2006 ignited ethnic violence and political turmoil to a degree previously unseen.

<sup>52</sup> G.L Lamborn, “The People in Arms: A Practitioner’s Guide to Understanding Insurgency and Dealing with it Effectively,” *Small Wars Journal*, (June 2009): 37.

<sup>53</sup> United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, *Field Manual (FM) 3–24 Counter-Insurgency Operations*, <http://www.usgcoin.org/library/doctrine>, (accessed 21 August 2009): 1–16.

freedom of movement, financial gain, and access to essential services. By not addressing the problem of sanctuary and population support, the Government allows the insurgency the time and ability to recover from short-duration conventional attacks, and thus fails to degrade the insurgency over the long-term.

#### **E. CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES**

The data shows that both the decline in the numbers of attacks and their lethality occurred before the surge in forces and its associated change in tactics could have produced these two effects. In addition, attacks and lethality decreased in areas where no surge forces operated and the change in tactics would not have had time to produce the result credited to them under the consensus viewpoint. Together, these facts suggest that the surge could not have produced the improvement in the security environment. What else might have caused this improvement? If we take lethality of attacks as the best indicator of insurgent capability, then we should look for some change that decreased insurgent sanctuaries and social support that preceded the surge and could have produced the improvement in the security environment that coincided with the surge.

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## **IV. AN ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT**

### **A. IRAQI PROVINCIAL AND CENTRAL GOVERNMENT EFFORTS**

Several critical events initiated by various Iraqi Leaders and occurring in late 2006 through 2007 explain the decline in violence and associated timeline more effectively than the U.S. Surge of forces in 2007. These events include the United States' transfer of sovereignty over the security environment to the Iraqi Government in January 2007; the targeting of irreconcilable insurgents and corrupt politicians by Iraqi Security Forces under the orders of Prime Minister Maliki beginning in late 2006; a political reconciliation program for former Sunni insurgents in January 2007; and the Sunni Awakening led by Anbari tribal leaders to overthrow the Al Qaeda influence in western Iraq in October 2006. Additionally, Maqtada al-Sadr announced a ceasefire between his Jaysh al-Mahdi militia and government forces after the surge in August 2007, later improving the security environment. Prior to Prime Minister Maliki's orders, corrupt politicians, militia leaders, and power-hungry Iraqi security forces facilitated the support of all three insurgencies by the Iraqi population. The International Crisis Group reported the following after a several-year evaluation of Basra that began in 2005.

The [city government's most glaring failure was its] inability to establish a legitimate and functioning provincial apparatus capable of redistributing resources, imposing respect for the rule of law and ensuring a peaceful transition at the local level. Basra's political arena remains in the hands of actors engaged in bloody competition for resources, undermining what is left of governorate institutions and coercively enforcing their rule. The local population has no choice but to seek protection from one of the dominant camps."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> International crisis group, "Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra," <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4914> (accessed April 20, 2009).

This assessment is representative of other major cities and provincial governments in Iraq, including Baghdad, where the central Government of Iraq suffered from the same internal problems.

Many of the Iraqi Security Forces were entrenched in similar politically violent actions at the city, provincial, and national levels: politicians were illegally employing some Iraqi Security Forces units as their private armies to enhance their positions through extreme violence.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, control of essential services by such power brokers also offered them an artificial economic–political base of support from the affected population centers, and legitimate government services could not have been provided until such criminal politicians were removed. Countering these mechanisms of control that insurgents, militia leaders, and corrupt politicians employed over population centers to maintain the sanctuary and support necessary for the continued insurgency was critical to the improvement of the security environment. The United States Government Accountability Office identified the long-term requirement for sustainment of essential services in Iraq as necessary for improvement in the Security Environment as well as longer-term stability. “As U.S reconstruction efforts end, Iraq will need to develop the capacity to spend its resources, particularly on investment that will further economic development and deliver essential services to its people.”<sup>56</sup> However, the Iraqi central government was not in a position to provide governance or support development prior to 2007. As Kilcullen points out, “the [Iraqi] government was a sectarian combatant in the civil war [against the Sunnis] . . . not a politically neutral “honest broker” that governed in the interests of all Iraqis.”<sup>57</sup> In fact, to provide the governance necessary at the central government level and, therefore, provide the conditions necessary for the

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas Ricks, *The Gamble* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009) 238. Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008): 114.

<sup>56</sup> Government Accountability Office, “Iraq: Key Issues for Congressional Oversight,” (report to congressional committees, March 2009) <http://www.gao.gov/index.html> (accessed May 27, 2009): 6.

<sup>57</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 127.

development necessary to improve security, the government would have to “significantly modify its behavior if the whole population were ever to accept it as legitimate.”<sup>58</sup>

Following Prime Minister Maliki's appointment in April 2006, the central government and subordinate politicians did begin to significantly modify their behavior. Prime Minister Maliki worked throughout the remainder of the year toward political engagements among competing factions that aimed at reducing the escalating violence. U.S. civilian and military officials considered this timeframe “transitional,” allowing the new government and elected officials the time and space necessary for policy generation and consensus. Maliki approached solutions to the violence with a project called the National Reconciliation and Dialogue Project: a series of conferences facilitating discussion among prominent and influential political and religious leaders.<sup>59</sup> In August 2006, the first conference “included 500 tribal sheikhs . . . and called for an end to sectarian violence, the disbanding of Militias, a delay in federalism, and a review of de-Ba'athification reform.”<sup>60</sup> The second conference in September was among civil society and political leaders, and concluded with recommendations for future policy considerations.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, a religious leaders conference was held in Mecca, Saudi Arabia in October, and included Shia and Sunni leadership who declared intra-Muslim attacks and suicide bombing a “sin,”<sup>62</sup> thus demonstrating a previously unforeseen solidarity between competing sectarian factions. This series of conferences facilitated political, religious, tribal, and civic discussion among prominent Iraqis while the milestone of a security transition to the Iraqi government loomed the following January.

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<sup>58</sup> Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008): 117.

<sup>59</sup> Congressional Research Service, “Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq,” *November 2006 Report to Congress*, [http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq\\_Reports/](http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq_Reports/) (accessed March 6, 2009): 6.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

In January 2007, the Iraqi government received a greater degree of sovereignty as primary responsibility for the security environment was transferred from Coalition forces to Iraqi security forces under government oversight. Prime Minister Maliki pursued this new responsibility soon after his election by approving operations for select Iraqi Security Forces, such as the Iraqi Special Operation Forces and Provincial police SWAT teams, to serve arrest warrants against other corrupt Iraqi Security Forces' leadership and Iraqi Politicians<sup>63</sup> beginning in late 2006, thereby purging his extensively corrupt central government and police forces of nefarious characters. In doing so, he improved the measure of legitimacy for the Iraqi government while also ensuring that policy generation was less self-serving for the politicians involved and that the Iraqi Security Forces better represented the population which they served.

Prime Minister Maliki supplemented this arrest effort with a political reconciliation program for former insurgent leaders or ranking militia members—primarily those engaged in sectarian violence or those who attacked coalition forces—in order to allow them to “opt out” of the fighting and overcome the exhaustive criminal investigations already overwhelming the investigative-judge type judicial system.<sup>64</sup> Concurrently with the surge and political/Iraqi Security Forces purging in 2007, Prime Minister Maliki ordered an amnesty program,<sup>65</sup> whereby former low-level insurgents were granted amnesty for their criminal actions if they fit within the stringent amnesty protocol.<sup>66</sup> The U.S. Military and the Iraqi government began incorporating reconciled insurgents into security programs such as the “Sons of Iraq”<sup>67</sup> beginning in late 2006, providing a

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<sup>63</sup> Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008): 256.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 179.

<sup>67</sup> Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008): 381.

government income and a second chance for de-radicalized Iraqis. This effort drastically reduced both the number of insurgent fighters and the passive support of them by the population.

Among his initial efforts as Prime Minister, Maliki began planning for a significant overhaul of Baghdad Security in the fall of 2006. He implemented operation Fard al-Qanoon (FAQ), or the “Baghdad Security Plan,” surging three additional Iraqi Army Brigades (50,000–60,000 Iraqi Troops total)<sup>68</sup> into Baghdad in December 2006 to quell the sectarian violence—well prior to the arrival of U.S. surge forces. The “plan divided Baghdad into 10 districts with an Iraqi [Army] Brigade in every district. Iraqi Police and some U.S. and coalition forces would aid them. It included the imposition of military law on Baghdad to keep the Shia militias and the mostly Shia police force from operating by themselves in Sunni Areas.”<sup>69</sup> This effort publically demonstrated the Prime Minister's recognition of the corruption within his primarily Shia police forces, and was considered another olive branch toward the Sunni population.

Although Ricks and other authors note the level of corruption within the political architecture and security apparatus prior to 2007, many Iraqis were later grateful for the presence of reliable Iraqi Security Forces in late 2008.<sup>70</sup> The reason for this change of opinion was a comprehensive overhauling of nefarious Iraqi Security Forces leadership at all levels (primarily among Shia, as the majority of Iraqi Security Forces were Shia employed by the Shia government) and the purging in 2006 and 2007 of corrupt representatives within the government's ministries under the approval of Prime Minister Maliki. By removing corrupt Iraqi Security Forces leadership, Iraqi Security Forces' missions began to degrade insurgent sanctuary and social support. Similar efforts were ongoing at the provincial levels, where Iraqi Security Forces began to target

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<sup>68</sup> Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008): 273.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>70</sup> Michael E. O'Hanlon and Jason H. Campbell, “Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq,” February 19, 2009 (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, [2009]), <http://www.brookings.edu/> (accessed April 19, 2009).

criminal politicians in late 2006 for arrest under the authority of warrants issued by legitimate Iraqi judges and the tacit approval of the Ministry of Interior. The execution of these missions by Iraqis under the authority of the Iraqi Government established credibility and legitimacy for the Government, thereby winning support from the population and reducing support for the insurgents. Although violence initially escalated due to conflict between AQ, Shia populations, and Shiite Iraqi Security Forces, the security environment improved due to the main political effort of the central and provincial governments approving the targeting of all illegitimate actors, including Shia, Sunni, and AQ through employment of “reliable” Iraqi Security Forces. AQ was degraded and what remained was driven out of Baghdad into the northern provinces, and Shia extremists moved away from ethnically contested territories to other temporary sanctuary in the Thawra district of Baghdad, or Sadr City. These combined efforts eliminated a number of corrupt power brokers who denied the larger population centers legitimate governmental essential services, eliminated some measure of violent intimidation and coercion, and enabled Iraqis to support the Iraqi Security Forces' targeting of insurgents, thus degrading the previously untouchable insurgent sanctuaries.

The timeline for the decrease in lethality of attacks supports these findings. As previously noted, the Maliki-generated August 2006 conference involving 500 multi-ethnic Sheikhs set the conditions for decreasing sectarian violence, disbanding militias, and reviewing of the unpopular de-Ba'athification program—the first public indication of government legitimacy. The September conference supplemented the ethnic dialogue with political and policy considerations for the new provincial and central governments, and a delay in any consideration for a future federated state (Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish self-governed territories). Simultaneously with Prime Minister Maliki's political initiatives in September 2006, the influential Sunni Sheikh “Abu Risha” Sattar declared a tribal rebellion (the Awakening) against Al Qaeda in western Iraq's

Anbar Province,<sup>71</sup> which was followed by unforeseen solidarity among other Sunni tribes. The religious conference in Mecca, Saudi Arabia condemning intra-Muslim violence reinforced growing convictions among Iraqi leaders that they were facing impending responsibility for the future of their country.

With regard to improvement in the security environment, it is worth mentioning that Maqtada Al-Sadr, the politically savvy head of the Mahdi Militia, declared a ceasefire within his ranks in late August of 2007.<sup>72</sup> The decline in insurgent lethality (CIOC Trends and SIGACTS III) is noted in Figure 4 between the months of August and September, and this serendipitous result is most likely due to Sadr's quest for a political future in Iraq versus a militant one.

The timeline of efforts to degrade sanctuary and social support of the insurgents and the timeline of decreased lethality of attacks and eventually the numbers of attacks suggests that Iraqi political efforts accomplished in under a year what the United States military attacking insurgents could not accomplish over four years. Although regularly overlooked by observers of the conflict, the data suggests that the strategies implemented by the Iraqis were the mechanisms of improvement in the security environment, having degraded the sanctuary and support networks of the insurgent organizations and ultimately their physical capacity and resources.

This conclusion may appear more plausible when compared with the idea that the surge produced improvement in the security environment, and thus the military that was trained and equipped for a technology-based, culturally insensitive symmetric conflict was overhauled under insurgent fire and became a premier counterinsurgent and host nation legitimating force in just a few months during the surge. To add support to the contention that the surge did not produce the effects often attributed to it, it is important to consider what it was

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<sup>71</sup> Bing West, "Counterinsurgency Lessons from Iraq," in *Military Review* LXXXIX, no. 2 (March/April, 2009): 2-12, <http://proquest.com> (accessed April 16, 2009): 3.

<sup>72</sup> Congressional Research Service, "Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq," *December 2007 Report to Congress*, [http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq\\_Reports/](http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq_Reports/) (accessed March 6, 2009): 5.

not, and why the lack of certain factors within surge efforts did not support long-term improvement in the security environment.

## **B. WHY THE SURGE WAS INSUFFICIENT**

In Baghdad, there was some reciprocity between surge troops and the Iraqi population: the protection of Iraqis fostered by U.S. forces attacking irreconcilable insurgents may have contributed to the improvement in the security environment following the surge but, as we have seen, by no means did that effort coincide with the decrease in lethality. The attack effort was Baghdad-centric and did not address the insurgents' rationing of essential services, or the political support for violence even in Baghdad. This relationship between insurgents and the population indicates the strategy of attacking insurgents from dispersed bases may have provided few short-term gains, but did not generate enduring improvement in the security environment, as the surge strategy did not eliminate the key elements of insurgent success: sanctuary and social support gained by the rationing of essential services discussed in Chapter II. The primary tactic of protecting the population in Baghdad during the surge presumed that the only mechanism of control by the insurgents over the population was intimidation and coercion, and by protecting Iraqis from this coercion, the insurgent's sanctuary and social support networks would dissolve. The strategy however failed to address the insurgent's additional mechanisms of control, and did not simultaneously incorporate provision of essential services and governance into areas secured by surge troops. Kilcullen points out that "effective counterinsurgency is a matter of good governance, backed by solid population security and economic development measures."<sup>73</sup> In Baghdad, the surge contributed to one of these three factors—degradation of the violence and intimidation as a mechanism of control—but failed to address good governance,

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<sup>73</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 60.

elimination of political violence, and increased economic development measures to counter rationing, all of which were primarily left to the Iraqis to figure out at the district and city levels of Baghdad.

As briefly noted earlier, it would be foolish to argue that an effective strategy of attacking the enemy is unnecessary for a short-term improvement in the security environment: rather, it is, in fact, useful to reduce insurgent capacity and resources while simultaneously attacking sanctuary and social support networks in order to hasten the improvement of the security environment. Steven Metz notes that “another lesson [can be drawn] from past counterinsurgency campaigns: While the ultimate resolution of the conflict comes through political means, the underlying political causes of the conflict cannot be addressed without security.”<sup>74</sup> The starting point for improvement is, therefore, security, including efforts that degrade insurgent capacity against a select population of insurgents. A small number of hardcore fighters will continue violent attacks regardless of local conditions or criminal/political reconciliation programs, and can only be removed through precision operations conducted primarily by Special Operations Forces.<sup>75</sup> However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the strategy of conventional units operating from centralized bases to conduct operations proved ineffective against an elusive enemy who maintained sanctuary among the population. In these operations from 2004 through 2007 (Fallujah 2004, Tal Afar, Mosul, and Najaf) General Purpose Forces, SF, and Iraqi Forces fought and won conventional attack battles. These successes, though, were few compared to the nation-wide threat posed by insurgents disaggregated into the population. However, these battles “proved” this strategy's worth to U.S. policy makers and validated the centralized-base concept to those commanders who did not understand a more effective strategy. The

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<sup>74</sup> Steven Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008): 183.

<sup>75</sup> Special Operations Force's activities in Iraq with regard to Al Qaeda and other hard-core fighters are not discussed in this thesis for reasons of classification of information. However, the scale of improvement in the security environment is most likely not due to their counter-terror efforts, but Iraqi initiatives.

strategy of these battles was in fact “a strategy of attrition in which victory came from killing or capturing enemy combatants until the opponent's will collapsed . . . But, history suggests, it seldom brings success in counterinsurgency.”<sup>76</sup>

Counterinsurgency theories include fundamental principles that argue for influencing the population for the benefit of the government and effectively degrading insurgent sanctuary and social support networks. The Army's new manual on Counterinsurgency, Field Manual 3–24 explains, “Success in Counterinsurgency operations requires establishing a legitimate government supported by the people and able to address the fundamental causes that insurgents use to gain support.”<sup>77</sup> David Galula defines counterinsurgency victory in his 1964 book *Counterinsurgency Warfare* as “not the destruction in a given area of the insurgent's forces and his political organization . . . A victory is that plus the permanent isolation of the insurgent from the population . . . by and with the population.”<sup>78</sup> General Stanley McChrystal, Commander of the International Security Assistance Forces – Afghanistan, issued new guidance in August 2009: “an insurgency cannot be defeated by attrition; its supply of fighters, and even leadership, is effectively endless.”<sup>79</sup> Among the many theories and practices of counterinsurgency is a smorgasbord of sub-strategies for the counterinsurgent to select from and apply in a given area, based on the unique requirements of the population. Many of these sub-strategies require simultaneous employment in the correct combinations or chronological sequence. Four of the most basic combination of sub-strategies include “security, governance, development, and information.”<sup>80</sup> The correct application of these ingredients for success “must be

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<sup>76</sup> Steven Metz, *Iraq & the Evolution of American Strategy* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008): 163.

<sup>77</sup> United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, *Field Manual (FM) 3-24 Counter-Insurgency Operations*, <http://www.usgcoin.org/library/doctrine>, (accessed 21 August 2009): 6–1.

<sup>78</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, (Westport: Praeger Security International, 1964): 54.

<sup>79</sup> General Stanley McChrystal, Commander International Security Assistance Forces, “ISAF Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance,” <http://www.nato.int/ISAF/> (accessed September 4 2009).

<sup>80</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 71.

designed to help the population choose between the government and the insurgent, and enforce that choice once made.”<sup>81</sup>

If Galula and other counterinsurgency theorists are right, whatever attacking insurgents may have accomplished (what the surge forces did), in order for the security environment to improve beginning in January 2007, governance and development must have been provided to Iraqis and the mechanism of insurgent control over the population must have been severed by these means. It is plausible to think, therefore, that the improvement in the security environment came about not because of what the surge did (target insurgents) but because of what the Iraqis did (degrade the insurgents’ sanctuary and social support networks by improving governance and development).

### **C. EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS**

The following conflict models support the evidence that political efforts at the tribal (in the case of Anbar), provincial, and central government levels are plausible explanations for the improvement in the security environment.

Since the preliminary military effort in Iraq from 2003 to 2007 was attacking insurgents, and the surge intended to continue to attack insurgents (clear, hold, build), several strategic interaction models offer suggestions to translate these strategies into predictable outcomes and support the theory that political factors were the necessary and sufficient contributors to the improvement in the security environment.

The security environment can be disaggregated into a conflict analysis of U.S. and Allied forces (including Iraqi Security Forces) against insurgents. Arreguin-Toft’s Strategic Interaction Model describes the relationship between

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<sup>81</sup> David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerilla* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 67.

Strong Actors (US and Allies) and Weak Actors (insurgents). Arreguin-Toft defines strong actors as those who enjoy a relative power superiority of 10:1 over their opponents.<sup>82</sup>

Ivan Arreguin-Toft conducted a detailed strategic interaction analysis of conflicts,<sup>83</sup> evaluating 202 cases from 1800–1998 to empirically identify the outcome of direct and indirect strategies employed between strong and weak actors.

		Weak actor strategic approach	
		Direct	Indirect
Strong actor strategic approach	Direct	Strong Actor Wins	Weak Actor Wins
	Indirect	Weak Actor Wins	Strong Actor Wins

Figure 4. Expected Effects of Strategic Interaction on Conflict Outcomes (expected winners in cells) From (How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict).<sup>84</sup>

Arreguin-Toft conducted his analysis by arguing that there are two kinds of strategies which he described as direct and indirect. “Direct strategic approaches—e.g., conventional attack and defense—target an adversary’s armed forces with the aim of destroying or capturing that adversary’s physical capacity to fight, thus

<sup>82</sup> Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 3. Arreguin-Toft does account for other security commitments that constrain Strong Actors from the full application of resources to a single conflict.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 39.

making will irrelevant.”<sup>85</sup> His analysis revealed that strong actors only defeat weak actors when employing a like strategy, e.g. direct vs. direct or indirect vs. indirect. “Indirect strategic approaches—e.g., barbarism and Guerrilla Warfare Strategy—most often aim to destroy an adversary's will to resist, thus making physical capacity irrelevant.”<sup>86</sup> Arreguin-Toft highlights Guerilla Warfare Strategy (GWS) as a weak state's method of choice under the indirect strategy, demonstrated in Iraq by the insurgent's use of bombs, snipers, and follow-on information operations designed to attack the will of U.S. forces and appeal to a U.S. domestic audience. For example, an elusive triggerman may remotely detonate a roadside bomb to kill or injure several U.S. soldiers. This reduces the military strength of the strong power only a little, but the greater effect achieved by the attack is influencing the will to fight: the insurgent has the ability to kill without being captured and then broadcast the attack through popular media. Over time, the continued attacks and lack of progress in mitigating these attacks demoralize both the strong actor and the strong actor's domestic population, which becomes demoralized because its material advantage creates the expectation of an easy win—something which the weak actor avoids by not directly confronting the strong actor.

Two essential elements of the GWS include physical or political sanctuary and social assistance of the local population,<sup>87</sup> both of which are best countered through an indirect strategy from the strong actor. While a direct strategy—conventional attack—counters the insurgent's capacity to fight, by limiting his resources and personnel,<sup>88</sup> it does not address the sanctuary and support mechanisms. Compared to a direct strategy, an indirect strategy employed by

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>86</sup> Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 34.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>88</sup> A direct strategy is typically employed during Counter-Terrorist operations against a group or network of terrorists, where the number of fighters is relatively small and may be separated from the population–enemy-centric warfare.

the strong actor addresses these remaining two essentials, while also limiting personnel and resources.<sup>89</sup>

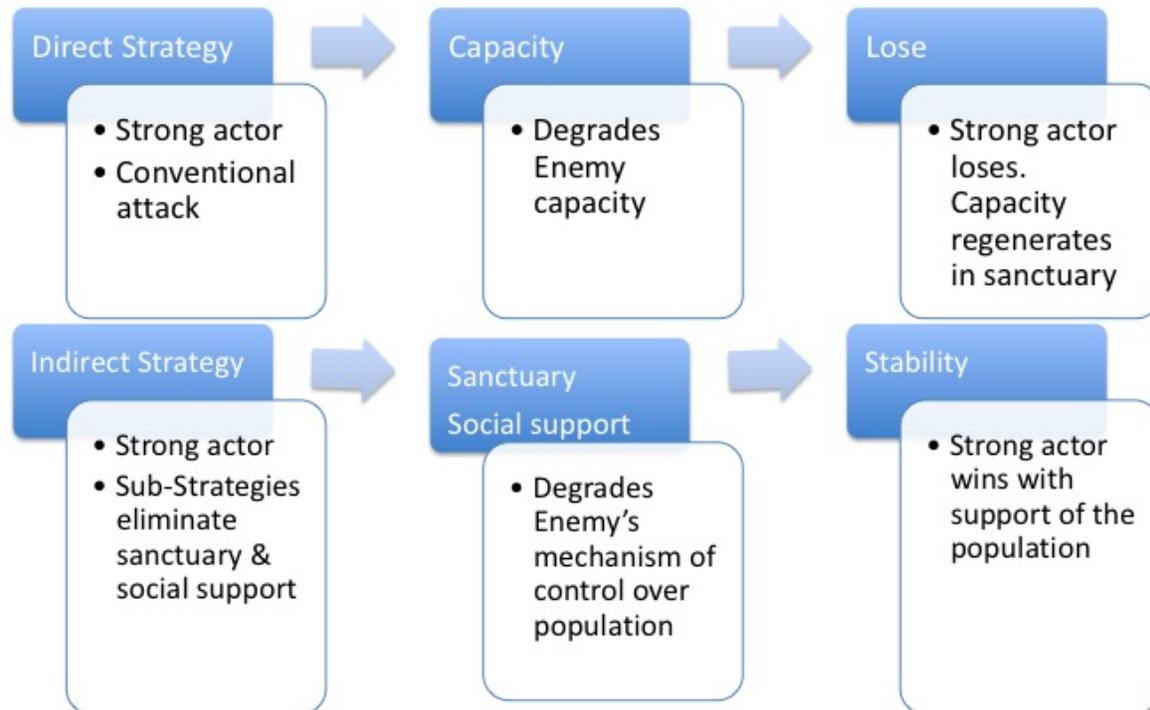


Figure 5. Expected Effects of Strategic Interaction (Strong Actor Direct/Indirect, Weak Actor Indirect) After (How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict).<sup>90</sup>

If Arreguin-Toft's analysis is correct, it is unlikely that a direct strategy such as the surge improved the security environment as observed in Iraq in 2008, or improved it for the long-term. The U.S. is a strong actor and according to Arreguin-Toft's analysis, a strong actor wins only when it uses the same strategy as its opponent.

Arreguin-Toft's strategic interaction model and its application to the United States conflict in Iraq is further supported by data analyzed by Lyall and Wilson in

<sup>89</sup> An indirect strategy is more appropriate for Counter-Insurgency operations against larger groups that are integrated throughout the population and receive sanctuary/significant physical or political support from that population—population-centric warfare.

<sup>90</sup> Author generated chart from information in: Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

2009. Lyall and Wilson conducted a detailed conflict analysis of 300 insurgencies occurring globally since 1800, resulting in the conclusion “that increasing mechanization within state militaries is primarily responsible for . . . states increasingly less likely to defeat insurgents.”<sup>91</sup> Their analysis reveals “that modern militaries possess force structures that inhibit information collection from local populations. This not only complicates the process of sifting insurgents from noncombatants but [also] increases the difficulty in selectively applying rewards and punishment among the fence-sitting population. Modern militaries may therefore inadvertently fuel, rather than deter, insurgencies.”<sup>92</sup> As the United States employed the most modern military force in the world in Iraq, the inherent chance of success in waging counterinsurgency warfare was limited at the outset.

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<sup>91</sup> Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson III, “Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars,” *International Organization* 63 (Winter 2009): 67–106, <http://www.humansecuritygateway.info/> (accessed 21 August, 2009): 67.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

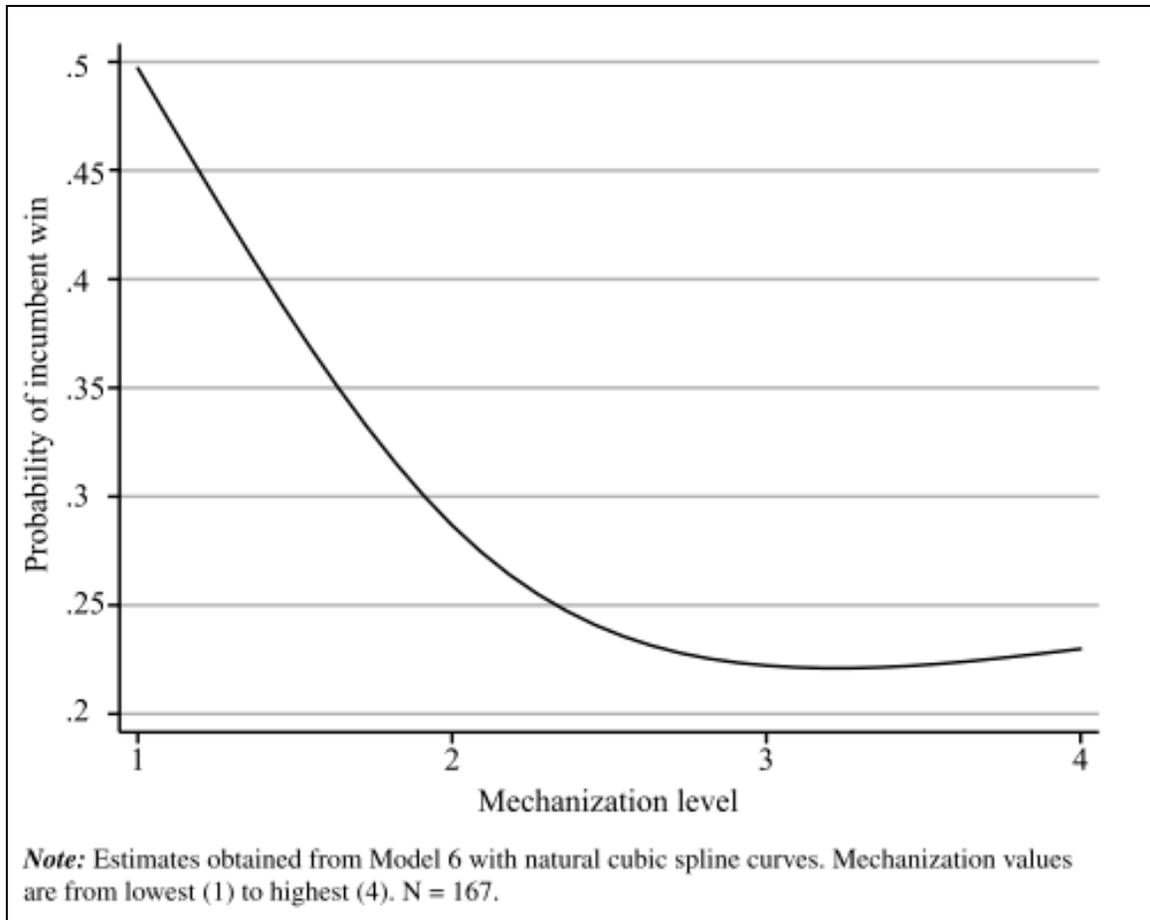


Figure 6. Lyall–Wilson Graph of Conditional Effect of Mechanization on Probability of Incumbent Win 1918–2005 From (Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars).<sup>93</sup>

Lyall and Wilson further suggest that forces that maintain a status as an “occupier” during the conduct of counterinsurgency warfare are exponentially more likely to fail in their efforts to defeat insurgents.<sup>94</sup> After several years of UN supported American sovereignty, the U.S. certainly earned the title and status of Occupier in Iraq, in the eyes of some Iraqis and Americans, as well as in the eyes of the international community. Finally, the analysis also indicates that a

<sup>93</sup> Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson III, “Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars,” *International Organization* 63 (Winter 2009): 67–106, <http://www.humansecuritygateway.info/> (accessed 21 August, 2009): 90.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 91. The reduced chance of victory by an “occupier” is negative 59 percent. This is irrespective of other factors that further reduce likelihood of victory.

country fighting insurgents who can maintain a “safe refuge,”<sup>95</sup> or sanctuary with which to train, refit, and rebuild their capacity and support has an even greater probability of defeat.<sup>96</sup> The conclusions drawn by Lyall and Wilson indicate that the United States Military was unlikely to achieve victory against Iraqi insurgents.

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<sup>95</sup> Jason Lyall and Isaiah Wilson III, “Rage Against the Machines: Explaining Outcomes in Counterinsurgency Wars,” *International Organization* 63 (Winter 2009): 67–106, <http://www.humansecuritygateway.info/> (accessed 21 August, 2009): 90.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

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## V. CONCLUSION

The United States expended significant amounts of blood and treasure in Iraq following the 2003 invasion, tallying 34,444 casualties<sup>97</sup> and \$683.4 billion<sup>98</sup> in total expenditure as of early September 2009. As United States policy makers, defense department officials, and analysts look for causes of stability in Iraq, it is extremely difficult to observe these numbers from an American viewpoint and not arrive at the conclusion that these sacrifices by service members and taxpayers contributed more directly to the security environment observed in Iraq today than Iraqi efforts. However, what this analysis has revealed is that the contribution of surge forces likely only hastened the improvement in the security environment in Baghdad, but was not sufficient for the large improvements observed in a foreign territory occupied by United States forces. In consideration of the efforts and sacrifices by the American people and allied nations in Iraq, the clear lesson is that a given country must be willing to support itself and rebuild following a devastating conflict in a manner that suits the desires of its domestic population and counters the conditions for insurgency. It would further prove useful for a new government shaped by U.S. foreign policy efforts to reflect the familiar conditions of the old government. Iraq found comfort in an improved centralized government because it was familiar with centralized government. Other countries (such as Afghanistan) may find the familiarity of a decentralized government more effective and suitable to the desires of the population. The United States strategy toward such a country should focus primarily on supporting the host-nation establishment of legitimate governance, versus a strategy of attrition against insurgents. This thesis has argued that it is plausible to conclude that the significant improvements in the security environment and

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<sup>97</sup> Includes killed and wounded personnel. Global Security Organization, "US Casualties in Iraq," in *Military Operations in South West Asia*, [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq\\_casualties.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_casualties.htm) (accessed September 17, 2009).

<sup>98</sup> National Priorities Organization, "Cost of Wars in Iraq," in *Cost of US Wars since 2001*, <http://www.nationalpriorities.org/> (accessed September 17, 2009).

overall stability occurred because of the efforts of the host nation central and local governments, and the willing contribution to and support by the majority of the population to the Iraqi government. The improvement in the security environment came after the free Iraqi elections and the subsequent policy changes that improved the quality of life of many Iraqis. Although not discussed in this thesis, economic policies designed to streamline national expenditures and encourage foreign investment began to demonstrate tangible results.<sup>99</sup> The ownership of the security environment by the Iraqi central government in January 2007 forced Iraqi military leadership and policy makers to implement comprehensive security plans supplemented by an effective and complementary political protocol, and increased the quality and legitimacy of the Iraqi Security forces and political apparatus. The consolidation and ratification of the Iraqi Constitution, while not flawless, offered a detailed set of guidelines for the fledgling government to operate within, improving efficiency and enhancing the perception of legitimacy by the population writ large. Prime Minister Maliki's efforts within the political environment allowed the targeting of nefarious members of his own religious and political party in order to eliminate corruption, and only strengthened the platform of legitimacy for the central government.

In addition to Prime Minister Maliki's political initiatives, David Kilcullen sums up the results of the awakening in Bob Woodward's book, and makes specific mention of the political-security relationship:

The pattern we are seeing [in August 2007] runs somewhat counter to what we expected in the 'surge.' . . . The original concept was that we (the coalition and the Iraqi Government) would create security, which would in turn create space for a 'grand bargain' at the national level. Instead, we are seeing the exact opposite: a series of local political deals has displaced extremists, resulting in

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<sup>99</sup> Congressional Research Service, "Measuring Security and Stability in Iraq," *December 2008 Report to Congress*, [http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq\\_Reports/](http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq_Reports/) (accessed March 6, 2009).

major improvement in security at the local level, and . . . the United States . . . had to accept the solutions that Iraqis themselves had chosen.<sup>100</sup>

It may be difficult and politically challenging for politicians in the United States and our allies to base foreign policy success on host nation leaders and their populations, particularly when extremely capable U.S. military commanders and politicians are present in the country and a suitable host nation political candidate is lacking. Yet, relying on the efforts of host nation leaders and their populations remains the most appropriate course of action for America's engagement and success in small wars.

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<sup>100</sup> Bob Woodward, *The War Within* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008): 384.

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