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**THE LOST CARAVAN: THE RISE AND FALL OF  
AL QAEDA IN IRAQ, 2003–2007**

by

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June 2010

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**THE LOST CARAVAN: THE RISE AND FALL OF AL QAEDA IN IRAQ,  
2003–2007**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 2006, a coalition intelligence report was writing off portions of Iraq as being lost to the control of the U.S.-led coalition and the government of Iraq. Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)—a local manifestation of a transnational movement—was at its peak, while the U.S.-led coalition was attempting to remove itself from the Hobbesian violence raging throughout the country in the forms of a civil war and an insurgency. Yet, within a year, AQI was a mere shadow of its former self, rejected by the Sunni population and on the run, hounded by coalition forces.

This thesis analyzes the many factors that contributed to AQI's demise. Beginning with the premise that Iraq's Sunnis and AQI developed along two distinctly different paths, this thesis traces AQI's demise to disparate cultural and ideological differences. With this rift in place, additional factors widened the gap between the Sunni and AQI, further accelerating the group's decline. This thesis then goes on to develop a theory on insurgent/popular alignment, offering insights into how insurgents build support with the population and how the U.S. Special Forces community can build popular support for Unconventional Warfare efforts as a third party to an insurgency.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAI	<i>Ansar al-Islam</i> (Supporters or Partisans of Islam)
AAS	<i>Ansar al-Sunna</i> (Group of the Followers of Sunna)
AIF	Anti-Iraqi Forces
AQ	Al-Qaeda
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
AQM	Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia; AQI
ASC	Anbar Salvation Council
COIN	Counter Insurgency
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
C/S	Counter-state
DoD	Department of Defense
FRE	Former Regime Elements
FRL	Former Regime Loyalists
GoI	Government of Iraq
IA	Iraqi Army
IAI	Islamic Army of Iraq
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IGC	Iraqi Governing Council
IIG	Interim Iraqi Government
ING	Iraqi National Guard
IP	Iraqi Police

ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
JAM	<i>Jaish al-Mahdi</i> (Army of the Mahdi)
MNC-I	Multi-National Corps—Iraq
MNF-I	Multi-National Force—Iraq
MSC	Mujahidin Shura Council
PSC	Protracted Social Conflicts
QJBR	<i>Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayan</i> (Organization of Jihad's Base in the Country of the Two Rivers)
SF	Special Forces
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SoI	Sons of Iraq
TAL	Transitional Administrative Law
TWJ	<i>Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad</i> (Group of Monotheism and Jihad)
UW	Unconventional Warfare
VBIED	Vehicle-borne Improvised Explosive Device
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

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Like the decline of AQI and the broader Sunni insurgency, the fabric of this thesis is composed of a number of disparate threads collected throughout time and place. The bulk of this thesis is made up of thoughts that were formed from my own experiences in Iraq, where I was able to see the events described in thesis take place in front of me from my perch during 2007. From that vantage point, I was able to see trends come together in time without the dilution that comes from being separated from the front lines by multiple layers of staff bureaucracy and command. For that experience, I am eternally thankful to my superiors who gave me the opportunity to see the battlespace from a point remarkably distant from the immediate picture offered from the foxhole.

A number of friends and mentors have provided inputs as well. Their cross-woven threads have added much to the textural richness of this work, forcing me to see beyond my own view. To borrow from Newton, it is only because I have stood on the shoulders of these giants that I have seen a little further. Many of them are professors here at NPS, chief among them are Dr. Gordon McCormick, Dr. Heather Gregg, Doowan Lee, and Dr. Doug Borer, while others reside in the outposts of freedom scattered around the world, continuing to wrestle with the intractable problems of our time. Your assistance has added vibrancy to the narrative, helping me to better see the lessons the Iraq War has to offer. This thesis is as much yours as it is mine.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.* Fortunate is he who can understand the causes of things.

—Virgil, *Georgics*, no 2, 1 490

To be a successful soldier you must know history.<sup>1</sup>

—General George S. Patton

In late 2007, the levels of violent activity in Iraq declined precipitously. Compared to an average of 1200 significant events per week in December 2006, insurgent activity had dropped to less than half of that a year later.<sup>2</sup> During that same period, the Iraqi insurgency had waned. The Shi'a insurgent group Jaish al-Mahdi had declared a unilateral cease fire preferring to utilize the ballot box for change. Al Qaeda in Iraq was on the run, hounded by both indigenous Sunni insurgents and the Sunni population at large. The vexing issue for academic, policy, and military circles is not so much in acknowledging that this phenomenon occurred, as much as in establishing how it occurred, given that this outcome was not foreseen in January 2007 when President Bush announced his “new way forward,” deciding to send additional ground forces to Iraq in order to rein in the escalating levels of violence seen in 2006. To account for this, a number of theories have been offered, ranging from what could be considered the “surge theory” to the “Awakening theory.”

From the standpoint of the military practitioner, this polarization is rather irksome, nagging at the subconscious. The burden of his profession requires that the he—more so than other professions—must see history in a realist way: as it occurred, not as he wishes to see it. This means he must widen the scope of his inquiry of an event, extracting the event in question from its black box, and gain an understanding of how that

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<sup>1</sup> George S. Patton in Andrew Carroll, *War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 240.

<sup>2</sup> United States. Dept. of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: Report to Congress, March 2007* (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of Defense, 2007), 19, [http://www.defense.gov/home/pdf/9010\\_March\\_2007\\_Final\\_Signed.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/home/pdf/9010_March_2007_Final_Signed.pdf) (accessed March 30, 2009).

event arrived in time, its position in the human and physical environment, and personalities involved. In doing so, he allows history to fulfill the promise of imparting wisdom applicable to future situations; faced with a situation analogous to one in the past, we can utilize an understanding of previous outcomes to provide potential avenues to grappling with the problem ahead of us.<sup>3</sup> For example, the Zeitgeist of 2009–2010 is to apply U.S.-centric lessons from Iraq directly to the Afghan War, most notably in the form of “surging” ground forces and utilizing population-centric counterinsurgency techniques.<sup>4</sup> But have these “lessons” of Iraq been hastily applied to Afghanistan before complete digestion? As evidenced by some comments designed to temper public expectations, the decision to “surge” in Afghanistan in an effort to replicate the effects of efforts in Iraq may be an example of instant history at its worst in the face of a resurgent Taliban.<sup>5</sup>

Understanding the practitioner’s need to have a holistic view, what then were the causes of the decline in Iraq’s Sunni insurgency, and more specifically Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), in 2007? As alluded previously, one side of the debate maintains that the surge of troops with its concomitant change in strategy led to the decline of AQI and the Iraqi insurgency. In contrast, alternate hypotheses place the primacy of the revolt of the Sunni tribes as the root cause, highlighting the Anbar Awakening as the origin of AQI’s decline. Still others seek to highlight the adaptation of the U.S. military to the nuances of counterinsurgency operations over time. But what if there are other explanations? Were other factors and unplanned events responsible as well? This thesis seeks to cast the net

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<sup>3</sup> Here, historian Michael Howard offers this warning in our attempt to make use of the past: “Like the statesman, the soldier has to steer between the dangers of repeating the errors of the past because he is ignorant that they have been made, and the danger of remaining bound by theories deduced from past history although changes in conditions have rendered these theories obsolete.” Michael Howard, “The Uses and Abuses of Military History,” *Parameters* XI, no. 1 (March, 1981), 13.

<sup>4</sup> See John J. Kruzal, “Iraq Counterinsurgency Lessons Apply to Afghanistan, Petraeus Says,” Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=54746> (accessed February 22, 2010).; Thom Shanker and Richard A. Opper Jr., “In Tactical Shift, Troops Will Hold Afghan Ground After Clearing it,” *The New York Times*, sec. A, July 3, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Clarifying comments he previously gave in a speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on January 21, 2010, General Petraeus remarked that, “What I was trying to say, at the least, is that [we] shouldn’t expect to see the kind of rapid turnaround in the security situation in Afghanistan as was the case following the surge in Iraq.” David Petraeus as quoted in Josh Rogin, “What Petraeus Meant to Say...” *Foreign Policy*, [http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/01/21/what\\_petraeus\\_meant\\_to\\_say](http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/01/21/what_petraeus_meant_to_say) (accessed January 21, 2010).

ever wider, promoting not only a more holistic view in line with the complexities of human interaction, but also seeks to determine the degree to which various factors influenced the decline of AQI and the Sunni insurgency. To accomplish this explanation, I intend to build off of the existing literature and utilize my own operational experience as a guide to analyzing the demise of AQI in 2007.<sup>6</sup>

## **A. THE DECLINE OF THE AQI AND THE SUNNI INSURGENCY: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

Since late 2007, scholars have offered a multitude of explanations for the decline of violence and the abatement of AQI. As this debate has played out over time, the positions have largely gelled into two distinct positions—those actions that originated with the U.S-led coalition and those actions that originated indigenously. By looking at the literature from a broader perspective, we can see similar causes that leap out in explaining the demise of AQI and can be roughly classified as belonging in either one of these two positions. In an attempt to clarify the cacophony of voices attempting to determine the root cause of the decline in Iraq’s insurgency and to alleviate an *ad tedium* explanation of the literature, I have summarized and coded a variety of theories for ease of comparison in Table 1. One of the important reasons for looking at the literature in this fashion is to sort out each author’s position to see from what perspective they are coming from. E.H. Carr admonishes us to understand the background of the author.<sup>7</sup> Like blind men each describing one part of the elephant, the literature provides a partisan account of events.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> During early 2007, I was a company-grade officer serving as the assistant operations officer for the Special Operations Task Force-North, which was charged with conducting special operations across northern Iraq. From that vantage point, I was involved with daily operations across Northern Iraq. Later, I moved to Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Arabian Peninsula to serve as the current operations officer where my aperture was widened to include the entire country. From that position, I was able to observe not only the vast majority of special operations in Iraq, but also to observe the events as reported to Multinational Corps-Iraq interacting with them operationally on a daily basis.

<sup>7</sup> E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 48.

<sup>8</sup> While my positioning in regard to the events may offer more insight in explaining the demise of AQI and the decline of the Sunni insurgency, I cannot escape the military background inherent with my position as a Special Forces officer, which holds that indigenous ways may often be better than our own. It is because of this that I tend to favor placing more causal weight onto indigenous factors.

<u>Author</u>	<u>U.S.-centric Actions</u>	<u>Indigenous Actions</u>
Dr. Stephen Biddle		– Anbar model of bottoms up
Shawn Brimley	– COIN strategy – Population control measures (i.e. walls)	– Sunni Awakening
Dr. Juan Cole	– COIN TTPs (population control measures i.e. walls)	– Tribal feuding with AQI – Results of ethnic cleansing – SOI initiative to form local militias
Dr. Stephen Hadley	– Surge	
Dr. Kimberly Kagan	– Surge – Leadership changes in US forces	
Colin Kahl & LTG (Ret.) William Odom	– Surge – Decisions to reconcile with marginal insurgents	– Sunni Awakening – Segregation of sects due to ethnic cleansing
LTG John F. Kelly	– MNF-W Command Philosophy	– Sunni tribe cooperation with U.S. forces
David Kilcullen	– COIN strategy – Decisions to reconcile with marginal insurgents	
Lawrence Korb	– Surge	– Sunni Awakening
LTC (Ret.) John Nagl	– COIN Strategy – Long-term development of ISF	– Sunni Awakening
Michael O’Hanlon	– Surge	
GEN Raymond Odierno	– Change in strategy and employment of Surge forces	
Andrew Phillips		– AQI’s ideological inflexibility and unwillingness to adapt local sensitivities and interests to their ideology – AQI’s use of indiscriminant violence
Linda Robinson	– GEN Petraeus’ leadership – COIN strategy	– Sunni rejection of AQI
Bing West	– COIN strategy – Bottom-up partnerships between CF and Iraqi citizens	
Bob Woodward	– Surge – Counter-leadership targeting of insurgents by SOF	– Anbar Awakening

Table 1. Hypotheses of Iraq’s Declining Insurgency.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Biddle as quoted in United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations, *Iraq After the Surge: Political Prospects*, 110th Congress, 2nd sess., 2008, <http://foreign.senate.gov/hearings/2008/hr080402p.html> (accessed June 26, 2009); Shawn Brimley, Juan Cole, Lawrence Korb, John Nagl, and Michael O’Hanlon as quoted in Dylan Matthews and Ezra Klein, "How Important was the Surge?" *The American Prospect*, [http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=how\\_important\\_was\\_the\\_surge](http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=how_important_was_the_surge) (accessed July 22, 2009); Stephen J. Hadley, "Statement by National Security Advisor Stephen J. Hadley," *The White House*, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/09/20080905-5.html> (accessed July 22, 2009); Kimberly Kagan, *The Surge: A Military History* (New York: Encounter Books, 2009), 197; Colin H. Kahl and William E. Odom, "When to Leave Iraq: Today, Tomorrow, Or Yesterday?" *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 4 (Jul/Aug, 2008), 151; John F. Kelly in Timothy S. McWilliams and Kurtis P. Wheeler, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume I: American Perspectives, U.S. Marines and Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2009), ix; David J. Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 184-5; Raymond Odierno as quoted in Kagan, *The Surge: A Military History*, 196; William E. Odom as quoted in United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations, *Iraq After the Surge: Military Prospects*, 110th Congress, 2nd sess., 2008, <http://foreign.senate.gov/hearings/2008/hr080402a.html> (accessed June 26, 2009); A. Phillips, "How Al Qaeda Lost Iraq," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 63, no. 1 (Mar, 2009), 64; Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How this Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), 345–360; Francis J. West, *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq* (New York: Random House, 2008), 364–66; Bob Woodward, "Why did Violence Plummet? It Wasn't Just the Surge." *The Washington Post*, Sep 8, 2008.

The first camp—and perhaps the loudest voice in the current debate—advocate what can be considered a U.S.-centric argument. Here, the locus of the origin of the decline of the Sunni insurgency lay in the actions of the U.S. and its coalition. Proponents claim that it was a series of military factors such as the surge in American ground forces, coupled with a near simultaneous change in counterinsurgency strategy that led to the deflation of high levels of violence. Fredrick Kagan—widely considered the architect of the surge strategy—notes “the surge of forces in 2007 and the change of strategy that accompanied it did what the targeted counter-terrorism approach could not do: it drove the terrorists out of their sanctuaries and rallied the support of the Iraqi people against them.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the operational commander of Coalition forces in Iraq remarked that—

It’s tempting for those of us personally connected to the events to exaggerate the effects of the Surge. By the same token, it’s a gross oversimplification to say, as some commentators have, that the positive trends we’re observing have come about because we pair off the Sunni insurgents because of Muqtadah al Sadr simply decided to announce a cease-fire. *These assertions ignore the key variable in the equation—the Coalition’s change in strategy and our employment of the Surge forces.* [emphasis added]<sup>11</sup>

This U.S.-centric viewpoint includes lesser actions that help buttress the surge theory, further enhancing its dominance—counter-leadership targeting of AQI leadership by special operations forces, decisions to reconcile with lower-level insurgents, and various counterinsurgency tactics.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of applicability, this school of thought believes that lessons of the surge are universally applicable and have expanded the idea that increasing counterinsurgent

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<sup>10</sup> United States. Congress. House. Committee on Armed Services, *Counterinsurgency and Irregular Warfare: Issues and Lessons Learned*, 111th Congress, 1st sess., 2009, 5, [http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/TUTC050709/Kagan\\_Testimony050709.pdf](http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/TUTC050709/Kagan_Testimony050709.pdf) (accessed June 26, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Raymond Odierno as quoted in Kagan, *The Surge: A Military History*, 196.

<sup>12</sup> For counter-leadership targeting of AQI leadership by special operations forces, see Bob Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006-2008* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), 487. For decisions to reconcile with lower-level insurgents, see Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, 184-5. For increased efficacy and application of counterinsurgency procedures, see John Nagl as quoted in Matthews and Klein, *How Important was the Surge?*

forces will lead to the demise of the insurgency to a near absolute in counterinsurgent doctrine, essentially elevating population-centric counterinsurgency doctrine in such a way as to deify it, establishing, in effect, what could be considered the First Law of Counterinsurgency—protect the population.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the narrative of the surge’s success serves as “social proof” that the concepts in FM 3-24—the Army’s capstone COIN manual—and President Bush’s increase of troops are applicable to all insurgencies.<sup>14</sup> From this standpoint, not only do the Army’s COIN efforts in Iraq re-establish the Army’s track record by excising the ghosts of Vietnam, but it also shows that the force itself does not need to change.<sup>15</sup>

The second camp claims that the roots of the reduction in the Sunni insurgency lie in indigenous factors. One of the key tenets of this school of thought is the claim that a tribal revolt by Anbaris led the way to decreased violence due to AQI’s use of heavy-handed tactics and coercion.<sup>16</sup> However, emerging literature makes note of the rejection

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<sup>13</sup> Celeste Ward, "Countering the Military's Latest Mantra," *The Washington Post*, sec. B, May 17, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> In a recent editorial, Fredrick and Kimberly Kagan argue that increasing U.S. forces in Afghanistan to secure the population will serve to reduce violence and prevent the Afghan government from losing legitimacy. Frederick W. Kagan and Kimberly Kagan, "In Afghanistan, Real Leverage Starts with More Troops," *The Washington Post*, sec. A, November 27, 2009. On the concept of social proof see Chapter 4 in Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. (New York: Morrow, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> This is an important subtheme to the debate. If the Army in its newfound (and more adaptive) modularity can conduct counter-insurgency with its current forces structure, then the principle of a modular “one-size fits all” force stands as valid, with no need to bifurcate the force as advocated by Krepinevich for a more modern national security environment. Likewise, in spite of calls for the institutionalization of an “Advisor Corps” within the Army, the Army has not moved to make any force structure created for Iraq and Afghanistan permanent. For a summary of the debate on the Army’s future, see Paul McLeary, "U.S. Army Future Follows New Doctrine," *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, [http://www.aviationweek.com/aw/generic/story\\_channel.jsp?channel=defense&id=news/COMP100909.xml](http://www.aviationweek.com/aw/generic/story_channel.jsp?channel=defense&id=news/COMP100909.xml) (accessed February 22, 2010). For the bifurcation of the Army, see Andrew F. Krepinevich, *An Army at the Crossroads* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2008), [http://www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/PubLibrary/R.20081117.An\\_Army\\_At\\_The\\_Cro/R.20081117.An\\_Army\\_At\\_The\\_Cro.pdf](http://www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/PubLibrary/R.20081117.An_Army_At_The_Cro/R.20081117.An_Army_At_The_Cro.pdf) (accessed September 3, 2009). On the Advisor Corps see, John A. Nagl, *Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for a Permanent Army Advisor Corps* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2007), [http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/Nagl\\_AdvisoryCorp\\_June07.pdf](http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/Nagl_AdvisoryCorp_June07.pdf) (accessed January 23, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> For an example of this perspective, see John A. McCary, "The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives," *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (January, 2009), 47–49.

of AQI's ideology as a causal factor.<sup>17</sup> Other indigenous factors contributing to the decline of the insurgency include the Sunni's willingness to side with Coalition forces due to the perception that U.S. forces would soon leave Iraq after the 2006 Congressional elections.<sup>18</sup>

Further reviewing the literature, two things appear that are important for the research question at hand. First, throughout the literature there is a lack of causal linkages to a breadth and depth that provides a satisfying explanation of the decline in the Iraqi insurgency. Regarding the breadth of explanation, because of the polarization of the debate, little has been done to link *all* credible factors together to provide an explanation that is both necessary and sufficient; none provide a comprehensive narrative of what factors contributed to the decline of the Sunni insurgency and how significant they were in this effort. The U.S.-centric view provides a necessary, but insufficient, explanation for the cause of the decline of Iraq's insurgency at best.<sup>19</sup> Although the factors advocated by the indigenous camp should take on greater importance in explaining the decline of AQI and the Sunni insurgency, even they provide an insufficient causal explanation of the decline of the insurgency by themselves.<sup>20</sup> In terms of depth, the most

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<sup>17</sup> Recent work by Long puts forth the notion that due to ideological differences, AQI's coercion was used to force the Sunnis back into alignment, thus the coercion should be seen as an effect of the differences between AQI and the Sunni. Likewise, Andrew Phillips makes the case that the root of split between AQI and the Sunni occurred over ideological differences. Austin G. Long, "The Anbar Awakening," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 50, no. 2 (2008), 77–78; Phillips, *How Al Qaeda Lost Iraq*, 64. Interestingly, captured AQI and Islamic State of Iraq documents reinforce this assertion. See Harmony Document NMEC-2007-612449, *Analysis of the State of ISI*, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Neil Smith and Sean MacFarland, "Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point," *Military Review* LXXXVIII, no. 2 (March/April, 2008), 52.

<sup>19</sup> In an attempt to advocate increased numbers of U.S. security forces in Afghanistan, Frederick and Kimberly Kagan refrain from mentioning major events like the Anbar Awakening, insisting that the bulk of the work done to reduce violence in Iraq was done by U.S. forces. "The implementation of a fully resourced counterinsurgency strategy—enabled by the deployment of nearly six additional U.S. combat brigades—transformed Iraq's government within 18 months." Additionally, their argument fails to consider the sequential nature of events. In Iraq, the Awakening occurred *before* the introduction of additional U.S. forces; once delinked from the insurgency, the Iraqi government became a more attractive option for Anbaris to support. Applying this logic to Afghanistan, the sequence of events is likely to be reversed (i.e. increased government legitimacy prior to an insurgent/popular cleavage) and the results drastically different than those seen in Iraq. Kagan and Kagan, *In Afghanistan, Real Leverage Starts with More Troops*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Descriptions of the Awakening movement reveal that numerous attempts occurred prior to the Ramadi Awakening in September 2006. What most fail to explain is *why* the Ramadi uprising stood fast while the others crumbled. Similarly, tribal engagement efforts by Coalition forces occurred as early as the spring of 2004, but it wasn't until late 2006 that these efforts bore any fruit.

glaring problem with the literature is that, on the whole, it lacks a level of granularity in depicting the micro-level causal linkages needed to buttress their conclusions.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, the common narrative as espoused by the literature is missing the perspective of all parties involved. Most of the literature describes the event in question through U.S. eyes; even the side of the debate that argues the primacy of indigenous factors lacks a Sunni or AQI perspective in assembling and justifying its explanation. Any explanation of the decline of Iraq's insurgency must incorporate the perspective of all three agents: the state, the insurgent, and the population. With the dominant U.S.-centric explanations for the insurgency's demise, the inherent solipsistic lens prevents an understanding of other equally important perspectives. The mere fact that the U.S. was a third party to the Iraqi insurgency, albeit as an adjunct of the government of Iraq, should bestow less causal weight to U.S.-centric actions. Without understanding AQI's actions and the reasons behind them from their perspective, we are missing one third of the story, and thus important explanations that factor on the decline of the AQI.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, any examination of the decline of the Sunni insurgency should examine the battleground of the insurgency—the Sunni population.<sup>23</sup>

## **B. MISALIGNMENT: A THEORY OF AQI'S DECLINE**

Like many historical events, the events of 2007 defy simple mechanistic explanation. Causal chains here are extraordinary complex, crossing through multiple generations. Each individual, organization, and nation brought with it its own historical

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<sup>21</sup> For example, the surge theory cannot explain why violence plummeted in provinces in the environs of Baghdad, where the vast majority of surge brigades were assigned. The surge theory fails to explain the reduction of insurgent activity in other Sunni provinces north of Baghdad.

<sup>22</sup> However, recent scholarship has further developed the perspective of AQI based on captured documents, insurgent communiqués and works on insurgent Internet forums. For example, see Phillips, *How Al Qaeda Lost Iraq*, 64.; Brian Fishman, *Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned from Inside Al-Qaeda in Iraq* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2009), [http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/DD\\_FINAL\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/DD_FINAL_FINAL.pdf) (accessed April 26, 2009); Evan F. Kohlmann, *State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq: August 2007* (New York: The NEFA Foundation, 2007), <http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/iraqreport0807.pdf> (accessed December 15, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, only 4% of Iraqis surveyed in a February 2008 poll believe that U.S. forces deserve credit for increased security following the Surge. Gary Langer, *ABC/BBC/ARD/NHK Poll - Iraq Five Years Later: Where Things Stand* (New York: ABC News, 2008), <http://www.abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/1060a1IraqWhereThingsStand.pdf> (accessed August 3, 2009).

baggage. The U.S. brought the experience of its previous military campaigns, and was haunted by the ghosts of Vietnam when faced with counterinsurgency redux in Iraq. The Sunni brought their own fears and past as well. With visions of Sunni exceptionalism embedded deeply within their psyche, the sudden disappearance of the Ba'ath state on April 9, 2003 reminded them of their precarious position in Iraqi society and increased the nagging worry that their past actions toward the Kurds and Shi'a would be reciprocated. Likewise, AQI and other transnational Jihadi Salafis brought memories of a vision of the golden age of *jihad* to Iraq, with dreams of defeating a second superpower that had strayed into the land of the caliph.

As an insurgency is a battle over political space and the population, the character of an insurgency is largely determined by the society wherein this phenomenon takes place, becoming what should be the key perspective in explaining an insurgency's origins and evolution. Looking at the evidence at hand, it appears that the Sunni revolt against AQI was at its heart a reaction to protect local identity from being subsumed by an outside group. As much as the demonization of Sunni identity by the U.S. and its Iraqi quislings created the insurgency in 2003–2004, the perceived belief by the Sunnis that AQI would destroy their identity caused AQI's demise. The Sunni attempted to resist this imposition of new identity on numerous occasions, only to see each attempt quickly suppressed by AQI, and it was not until the Ramadi-based Anbar Salvation Council in late 2006 that the Sunni resistance to AQI actually stood firm. With this perspective in mind, it stands that the decline of violence in Iraq stems from AQI's original sin—those “fundamental errors in the initial design of an insurgency”<sup>24</sup>—in that the organization failed to gain ideological and cultural alignment and could not become socially embedded with the Sunni population.<sup>25</sup> This misalignment between the AQI and the Sunnis over a

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<sup>24</sup> Lincoln B. Krause, "Playing for the Breaks: Insurgent Mistakes," *Parameters* XXXIX, no. 3 (Autumn, 2009), 50.

<sup>25</sup> This hypothesis is based on the notion that people prefer to be around others like them. Parsing this out even further, I maintain that ideological divisions, based on differing views of how the population should be governed, between insurgents and a target population will lead to the decline of an insurgent movement due to disparate worldviews—the greater gap between the two agents, the less probability for insurgent growth and thus the decline of an insurgent group. Likewise, cultural divisions would likely lead to a divergence between insurgents and a target population. If these factors diverge from the norms held by the population, then the resultant misalignment will create a schism which cannot be bridged by the insurgent and thus it is a matter of time before the insurgency breathes its last breath.

vision of Iraq’s future, AQI’s interference with indigenous authority structures and AQI’s failure to understand Sunni social norms and beliefs are likely the most proximate causes of the decline of AQI and their portion of the Sunni insurgency. AQI’s violence toward the Sunni was, as others have argued, a means to force the Sunni back into alignment and under their control.

Nevertheless, while necessary, AQI’s flaws are insufficient to explain such a rapid decline in the activity of the Sunni insurgency in Iraq in 2007. The burgeoning capacity and increased legitimacy of the central government in Baghdad appears to be a crucial factor in explaining why the Ramadi Awakening took hold when previous attempts did not. The timing of the government’s capacity and U.S. efforts to adapt to the nuances of counterinsurgency operations at the tactical level seem to be the factors that helped to widen the gap between the Sunni and AQI. Other factors—the surge, improved counterinsurgency doctrine, tactical adaptation of the U.S. military to counterinsurgency, counter-leadership targeting, new strategic and operational leadership, the increasing capacity of the Iraqi government to govern, and the acquiescence of Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM)—accelerated the widening of the schism between AQI and the Sunni, reinforcing the divide. Figure 1 provides a visual depiction of this chain of events, and makes note of the highly sequential nature of my assertion.

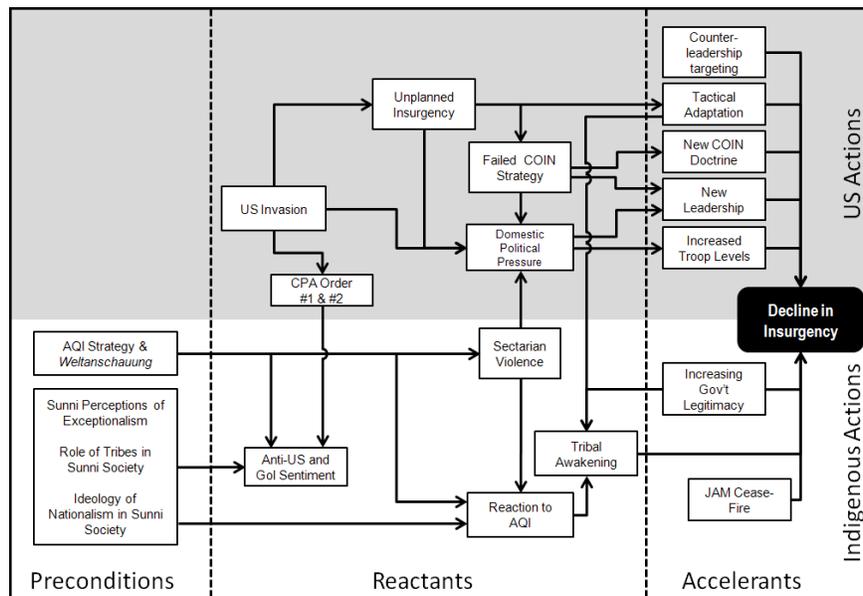


Figure 1. Hypothesized Causal Sequence

## C. METHODOLOGY

The complications arise in the moving this assertion from one that is plausible to one that is probable, by establishing a direct linkage between each causal factor and another to show an acceptable degree of cause and effect. To assist in this effort, I have utilized a number of methodological techniques to demonstrate both the external and internal validity of this assertion. To demonstrate the overall fit of the assertion that misalignment is the prime cause of the decline of AQI, I utilize the technique of congruence procedure. In essence, “the essential characteristic of the congruence method is that the investigator begins with a theory and then attempts to assess its ability to explain or predict the outcome of a particular case.”<sup>26</sup> With this method, we can assume that if the outcome of the case and the theory’s prediction are consistent, then there is a high likelihood that a causal relationship exists between the independent and dependent variables. The standard for determining the degree of congruence is to observe “similarities in the relative strength and duration of hypothesized causes and observed effects.”<sup>27</sup>

Although these similarities can provide a great deal of support for the theory, they could lead to erroneous or spurious causal explanations. To prevent this, we must strengthen the internal validity of the assertion through a separate technique, known as process-tracing. This technique offers the ability to utilize historical narratives and convert them into an analytical causal explanation. Process-tracing can help expand the proposed causal mechanism in this case and to extract variance in the independent variables. This technique “attempt[s] to identify a causal path (the causal chain) that depicts how the independent variable leads to the outcome of the dependent variable,” making it a useful tool to explain changes over time.<sup>28</sup> Because learning and adaptation between actors takes place in a chronological fashion, and we should expect to see longitudinal variance in both the independent and dependent variables in each causal

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<sup>26</sup> Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), 181.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*,

argument, thus allowing the investigator to “test whether the observed processes among variables in a case match those predicted or implied by the theory.”<sup>29</sup>

While these techniques are very useful in explaining the overall fit of the assertion and the internal strength of each factor, something must be done to tie these disparate causal strands together. As there exist a number of causal chains that each contribute at varying times and intensities to the decline of AQI, the investigator must consider them as a whole, rather than attempting to make one or two causal factors stand on their own as the greater debate would have it. This can be accomplished through the use of the historian’s technique of “convergent colligation,” wherein different causal mechanisms converge to explain a single event.<sup>30</sup> This allows us to “perceive a unity within an indefinite number of facts,”<sup>31</sup> notes Roberts, allowing us to include other independent events that converge with the prime causal chain. By pulling together all of these causal chains, we can create a level of “closure” that can satisfactorily explain the causes of the decline in the insurgency.<sup>32</sup>

The data used to validate the assertion of this thesis come from a wide variety of sources, all of which can be ranked in order of preference, utility and veracity. First in order of reliability, are those sources that record the conversations of participants. These are drawn from published interviews and transcripts. This first person perspective offers the ability to see the events unfold through the eyes of the participants. Likewise, military reports, captured enemy documents, and jihadi Web sites fall into this category.<sup>33</sup> These documents offer individual and organizational interpretations of the events in question. Second in order of historical reliability are newspapers and other

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<sup>29</sup> George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, 217.

<sup>30</sup> Clayton Roberts, *The Logic of Historical Explanation* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 112–118.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>32</sup> For a broader explanation of closure, including methods to create vertical and horizontal closure, see Roberts, *The Logic of Historical Explanation*, 114–115.

<sup>33</sup> For this, I have chosen to use only declassified enemy documents readily available to the general public in order to allow the explanation in this thesis to reach a broader audience. Further declassification of documents, including unit operational records will be invaluable in constructing a definitive history of the insurgency. Many of these enemy documents and unit operational documents are classified at the Secret level and as such maintain a 10 to 25-year period until declassification and release.

media journalistic reports. Here, media reports offer what are often considered mundane facts, sprinkled with first person accounts, but maintain a relatively high degree of integrity provided by journalistic standards. Lastly, secondary sources in books and academic journals are used. The main drawback in using these sources is that they offer massaged and processed facts in order to make a specific point. However, their utility in this endeavor lies in the greater insight and analysis not readily found in the first two categories of sources. In all cases where an author of these sources makes mention of a specific fact or event, I have made every effort to track down and use the same original source. Additional challenges involved in this case include the fact that this research has been conducted in the waning days of the Iraq War, and as such has been based on the limited amount of information available at the time of writing. Future interviews with the Iraqi population will be critical for expanding this research at a later date in order to discover their motivations for breaking ranks with AQI.

#### **D. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS**

Because the causal chains are numerous and intertwine with each other, attribution of the decline of AQI and the Sunni insurgency is difficult to pin down to any single key cause, or utilize any linear explanation. TO overcome this hurdle and help organize the thesis and its analysis, I have chosen to borrow from a framework employed by historian Lawrence Stone. Whereas his framework categorizes causes into preconditions, precipitants and triggers, in this case, I have adapted this, dividing the causal factors in question into the categories of preconditions, reactants and accelerants as depicted in Figure 1.<sup>34</sup> Not only do these categories portray a temporal sequence, but they offer an attempt at magnifying the effect of some causes more than others. An added benefit to this framework is that it allows an investigator to compare the weights of causes within each category, arguably a more useful approach than random comparison across categories, thus, removing the inherent difficulty of comparing such diverse causes

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<sup>34</sup> “Such an approach [at understanding all the factors that lead to a complex event],” he writes, “raises serious problems of organization, and for analytical purposes, it seems best to unravel the tangled skein of the developing crisis stage by stage, examining first the long-term preconditions, next the medium-term precipitants, and lastly the short-term triggers.” Lawrence Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution, 1529-1642*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1995).

such as the evolution of tribalism in Iraqi society with the replacement of general officers at the strategic and operational levels in Iraq in the Spring of 2007.<sup>35</sup>

Preconditions are those factors that created the situation found early in the Iraq War and stress the perspectives and experiences that the participants brought into the insurgency. Chapter II examines the Sunni and AQI as they developed prior to 2003–2004, specifically exploring the role of existing ideological and socio-cultural factors amongst Iraq’s Sunnis that AQI needed to overcome in order to grow their organization and realize their dream of power in Iraq. In addition, the second half of the chapter offers a survey of the Sunni insurgency in Iraq, providing an overview of the numerous insurgent groups and their aims, culminating with an explanation of the origins of AQI. This examination provides a basis for understanding the shifting alliances between groups and explains the rise of AQI.

Reactants describe the interplay between the Sunni population at large, AQI, and other Sunni insurgent groups. Chapter III explores this interaction over 2003–2007, examining the actions of AQI and their impact on Iraq’s Sunnis. By examining the historical record, we can see why the differences between the two took so long to surface.

Accelerants are those factors that can be considered as having sped up the reactants, hastening the decline of AQI and the Sunni insurgency. Chapter IV provides a description and analysis in an attempt to indicate the relative weight that various factors—such as the increasing strength of the Baghdad government, the troop surge, counter-leadership targeting, the implementation of revised COIN doctrine, tactical adaptation, the JAM cease-fire and the impact of new strategic and operational leadership—had on the decline of AQI and the Sunni insurgency.

To apply this historical perspective, I attempt to offer an insight on how the Special Forces community, as practitioners of unconventional warfare (UW), might learn from AQI’s rejection by the Sunni population of Iraq in Chapter V. In this chapter, I

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<sup>35</sup> On this, Stone comments that “the great methodological gain from breaking the problem down into distinct categories of preconditions, precipitants and triggers is that the historian is relieved of the futile, and intellectually dishonest, task of trying to arrange all the causes in a single rank order.” Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution*, 58.

expand the hypothesis of AQI's decline into a broader theory of insurgent/popular alignment, serving to place the hypothesis within an understanding rooted in the classic literature on insurgency and counter-insurgency.

The final chapter offers concluding thoughts on the Iraq War and the demise of AQI and directions for future research.

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## II. THE PRECONDITIONS

In order to move beyond the instigation of terrorist actions and push the Sunni insurgency towards the establishment of an Islamic caliphate, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) had to adapt its program to include Iraq's Sunnis. However, over their history, the Sunnis of Iraq developed particular ideologies, cultural aspects, and social structures that were anathema to AQI's *modus vivendi*. These particular characteristics of the Sunnis can be viewed as preconditions, which served as the foundation for the Sunni's break with AQI in 2006 and set into motion the decline of AQI. To that end, the first portion of this chapter will trace the establishment of these characteristics of Sunni Iraqis from the Ottoman Empire through the fall of Saddam in order to describe the nature of the Sunni insurgency and how the Sunni defined the insurgency as a campaign of *resistance* rather than the *revolution* desired by AQI.<sup>36</sup> The second half of the chapter will examine the formation of the Sunni insurgency and the emergence of AQI, paying particular attention to the group's ideology and strategy.

### A. IRAQ'S SUNNIS UNTIL 2003

#### 1. The Sunnis and the State: An Ideology of Sunni Dominance

The Sunnis of Iraq have long been a minority group within Iraq, with most estimates indicating that the Sunnis comprise 15–20% of the total Iraqi population.<sup>37</sup> But

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<sup>36</sup> Because history is a never-ending continuum of processes, 2003 cannot artificially be chosen as the starting date to examine the Iraqi insurgency—participants carried past baggage in the form of experiences and grievances that developed before the insurgency physically began. By briefly reviewing the major events in Iraqi society prior to the U.S. invasion, we can see the rise of insurgency within its true context rather than imposing an artificial U.S.-centric perspective the insurgency's rise and decline. This method allows for an examination of the insurgency from the perspective of those who participated in it. Assuming that primary leaders of Iraqi society were between 50–65 years of age in 2003–2007, we must turn the clock back to at least 1938—when they were born—to describe those events that these Iraqis either observed or participated in, as these events shaped and created identities in Iraqi society, thus forming an understanding of the motivations for which the Sunnis were fighting for. Similarly, the rank-and file of insurgents were born after the Ba'ath seized power in 1968.

<sup>37</sup> The commonly accepted division of Iraq's population is approximately 60% Shi'a, 15-20% Sunni 18% Kurd and 2-7% other minority groups. Sharon Otterman, "Iraq: The Sunnis," Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/7678/> (accessed November 20, 2009).

given their small numbers, how did the Sunnis come to dominate Iraqi society? And just how did Iraq's leaders justify and maintain this dominance given Iraq's ethnic and sectarian heterogeneity? Although a minority, the Sunni have dominated Iraqi society from the time of the Ottoman Empire until the U.S. invasion in 2003. This historical dominance of state and society from a minority position has inculcated within the Sunni a desire for the maintenance of the *status quo* with a united Iraq comprised with a social hierarchy in which their place was at its apex.

The Ottoman Empire absorbed the majority of what is geographically defined as modern-day Iraq in the mid-17th century. Ottoman control followed the pathways of the Tigris and Euphrates and by 1634, they had established permanent rule over the Arab population from Mosul to Basra. Ottoman interactions with the Arabs had mixed receptions. While a large ethnic gap existed between the Ottoman Turk rulers and the Arabs of Iraq, they possessed the common religious heritage of Sunni Islam with the Sunni Arabs. On the other hand, the Ottomans viewed the Shi'a Arabs as a potential Persian fifth column due to their shared religious ties with Iran.<sup>38</sup> Recurrent wars between the Ottomans and Persian until 1818 reinforced the religious commonalities between the Ottomans and the Sunni Arabs while highlighting the Sunni-Shi'a divide. Thus, the Ottomans began to rely increasingly on urban Sunni Arabs for support, setting a precedent for the future of Iraq. In 1869, a number of administrative and education reforms were implemented under Midhat Pasha, the governor of Baghdad, to better solidify Ottoman control over the province, all of which began to develop the idea of Sunni exceptionalism in Iraq.

Midhat Pasha's administrative reforms developed local councils that attempted to "associate the local populace with the [Ottoman] government and provide Iraqis with some administration experience."<sup>39</sup> These councils soon became dominated by Sunnis as both the Kurds and Shi'a largely desired to keep to themselves. The inclusion of Sunni notables and tribal *sheikhs* into the governing councils underscored their positions within

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<sup>38</sup> Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1985), 19.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Iraqi society because of their influence in the Ottoman administration, which in turn increased Sunni ascendancy over the Kurds and Shi'a.<sup>40</sup>

Education reforms resulted in the formation of a secular educational system to expand the administrative abilities of the local Iraqis and provide local leaders for the Ottoman Army. Over time, the secular education system was seen by Iraqis as a means of upward social mobility to all classes and religious backgrounds and Sunnis took full advantage of the Ottoman educational system, sending their sons through the system to become officers in the Ottoman Army.<sup>41</sup> The establishment of secular schooling in 1869, "conclusively broke the *ulama's* [Sunni clerics] monopoly on education,"<sup>42</sup> paving the way into Iraqi society for such secular ideologies as nationalism, communism, and Ba'athism.

The overall effect of these educational and administrative reforms was to develop the Sunni Arab belief that they alone of Iraq's various sects and ethnic groups should rule Iraqi society, as the result of the acquisition of the requisite skills to govern and the trust granted to them by the Ottomans. As Ottoman schools used the Turkish language for instruction, those students who had knowledge of Turkish prior to schooling were more apt to enroll and succeed in school, later embarking on careers that placed them in prominent roles in society.<sup>43</sup> Davis notes that "those who were able to study at the schools were usually the sons of civil servants [who spoke Turkish] and were overwhelmingly Arab Sunnis, which reflected the traditional Ottoman policy of promoting the interests of fellow Sunni Muslims within the Ottoman provincial

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<sup>40</sup> Liora Lukitz, *Iraq: The Search for National Identity* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 73.

<sup>41</sup> Reeva S. Simon, "The Education of an Iraqi Ottoman Army Officer," in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, eds. Rashid Khalidi and others (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 152-153. Hashim notes that 10% of the admissions to the Military Academy in Istanbul in 1903 were reserved for Sunni Arab and Kurd cadets from Mesopotamia. By the end of World War I, roughly three hundred officers from the Iraqi middle class formed the core of Sharif Faisal's Arab army in the Hijaz, having deserted from the Ottoman Army. Ahmed S. Hashim, "Saddam Husayn and Civil-Military Relations in Iraq: The Quest for Legitimacy and Power," *Middle East Journal* 57, no. 1 (Winter, 2003), 13; Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 34.

<sup>42</sup> Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists, and Free Officers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 169.

<sup>43</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 26.

administration.”<sup>44</sup> A second order effect of the educational reforms was that Iraqis in the service of the Ottoman Empire came into contact with Europe and European ideas. The influence of German officers serving as advisors in the Ottoman Army brought ideas of nationalism into Sunni Arab minds, where they were sown in fertile ground, following the introduction of Turkism into Ottoman schools by the Young Turks after 1908.<sup>45</sup>

If the Ottomans were responsible for installing the Sunnis into the power structures of Iraq, the British should be considered as cementing the Sunni into permanent position, making the Sunni central to the rule of Iraq. Although British involvement in Mesopotamia stemmed from the Crown’s desire to protect British interests in the Persian Gulf, by the end of World War I, Britain had gained control over the three *vilayets* of Mesopotamia. By all accounts, the history of the modern state of Iraq properly begins as the British Army trudged through the ashes of the Ottoman Empire in Mesopotamia.

Favor towards the Sunnis was evident in British actions towards the Mandate of Iraq. The interim government formed in November 1920 was predominantly comprised of Sunni Arabs.<sup>46</sup> The re-establishment of Ottoman councils brought the trained Sunni administrators back into the political sphere. The most blatant indicator of British favor towards the Sunni Arabs was the imposition of Sharif Faisal bin al-Hussein bin Ali al-Hashemi, one of the key leaders of the Arab Revolt during the First World War. With Faisal’s establishment on the throne, the Sunni pan-Arab nationalists who served in his army during the war were installed in various positions in the nascent Iraqi state.<sup>47</sup> While helping to cement Faisal’s rule based on ties of loyalty and prior service in the Arab Revolt, these pan-Arab nationalists also helped to expunge the last vestiges of Ottoman culture from Iraqi society and usher in a program to further Arabize the Iraqi

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<sup>44</sup> Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, 36.

<sup>45</sup> Simon, *The Education of an Iraqi Ottoman Army Officer*, 158-160.; Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 27–28.. For a more detailed explanation of the influence of German nationalism on the creation of Iraqi nationalism, see Reeva S. Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars: The Creation and Implementation of a Nationalist Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 14–23.

<sup>46</sup> Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 44.

<sup>47</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 36–37.

state. Rather than destabilize Iraq to ensure long-term sustainability by developing a system of proportional representation in the interest of short-term stability, Britain instead institutionalized a system of minority rule in Iraq, which would wreak havoc on Iraq for the remainder of the century.

Once granted sovereignty by the League of Nations in 1932, Iraq soon faced 36 years of unrest, in large part over the nature of the Iraqi state. Firmly entrenched in power, the Sunni ruled Iraq in all of the post-Mandate regimes until 2003. Left without the presence of an outside benefactor to ensure their position atop Iraqi society, these regimes attempted to utilize various ideologies to help justify the status quo, with some looking outward and others looking inward. Pan-Arabism served to link Arabs together across the false boundaries of the Arab states. As the majority of Arabs are Sunnis, identification with the Pan-Arab movement serves to reinforce the Sunni Arab perception of their “right” to rule Iraq, even though they are a minority in the country. In stark contrast, the Iraqi nationalist vision, “look[ed] for its foundational myths to Iraq’s ancient civilizations as well as to its Arab heritage, but without privileging the latter.”<sup>48</sup> The inward focus of Iraqi nationalism served as a means to bridge Iraq’s ethno-sectarian divisions.

For the majority of the monarchy, Iraq maintained a pan-Arab outlook largely due to the monarchy’s Hashemite origins. These roots led the monarchy to emphasize a shared heritage and thus a sense of unity between the Hijaz in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Jordan. Iraq’s outlook changed with the fall of the monarchy through a coup at the hands of military officers in 1958. As a means to stay in a position dominating Iraqi society and maintain power, an ideology that balanced both pan-Arabism and Iraqi nationalism to placate the factions in Iraqi society has evolved since the 1958 Revolution. Iraq veered away from a pan-Arab ideological outlook under Qasim and embraced a form of Iraqi nationalism, only to veer back to pan-Arabism five years later underneath the ‘Arif

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<sup>48</sup> Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, 13.

brothers. It was not until the ascension of the Tikriti Ba'athists<sup>49</sup> that true Iraqi nationalism was fully embraced, first as a means of ensuring stability of Iraqi society, and then as a means of ensuring regime survival under Saddam after the Iran-Iraq War and the 1991 Gulf War.

The Iraqi Republic was established in 1958, when Abd al-Karim Qasim seized power in a coup d'état, ending the 26-year Hashemite dominance of Iraq. Qasim's five years of rule were marked by a reversal of the monarchy's allegiance to pan-Arabism.<sup>50</sup> Under Qasim, Iraq's folklore and Mesopotamian heritage were emphasized to counteract the forces of pan-Arabism. Additionally, Qasim began to implement a series of social welfare programs to instill social and economic change using land reform, low-cost housing for the masses, and increased petroleum output.<sup>51</sup> Despite these attempts to bridge the gaps in Iraqi society, Qasim's regime fell in 1963, largely as a result of the failure to encourage widespread participation in the regime.<sup>52</sup>

Qasim's downfall ushered in a short-lived Ba'athist regime, which was brought down after eight months of infighting, and replaced by the regimes of 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif and 'Abd al-Rahman 'Arif. For the next five years, the 'Arif brothers reversed Qasim's movement toward wholesale Iraqi nationalism, attempting to reestablish Iraq as a member of the pan-Arab world in order to maintain the support of Nasserists in the Iraqi Army. Moreover, Abd al-Salam 'Arif's admiration of Egypt's ability to dominate not only the region, but its own society provided additional impetus to adopt the pan-

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<sup>49</sup> The term Tikriti Ba'ath is used here following Eric Davis' definition in order to "refer to the second Ba'athist regime, which came to power in 1968, because, as Batatu and others have shown, the party was dominated by Sunni Arab members drawn from the town of Tikrit." However, after 1979, with Saddam Hussein's ascension to power, the term is less useful, as the government's composition changed as Saddam replaced Ba'ath Party members with his own immediate family into positions of power. For purposes of clarification here, mention of the Ba'ath after 1979 will use the term regime or Saddam to signal the transition. *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>50</sup> While Qasim came from a group of officers who were ardent pan-Arabists, Qasim believed that domestic reform and the creation of an Iraqi national community should take place before engaging the Arab world. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 147.

<sup>51</sup> Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990), 76–78; Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 169–175.

<sup>52</sup> Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, 116.

Arab creed.<sup>53</sup> Iraq even contributed forces to the Arab side in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war as a means to show solidarity with the Nasserists of the Arab World. Although its contribution was meager, the resultant Arab defeat at the hands of the Israelis threw doubts on the legitimacy of the ‘Arif regime and the pan-Arab ideology, contributing to their eventual downfall.

In the aftermath of a coup on July 17, 1968, the Tikriti Ba’ath regime struggled to adhere with the core Ba’athist policy of pan-Arabism. Pointing to the failures of the regimes in Damascus and Cairo, the new regime soon espoused the position that within the pan-Arab world, Iraq’s natural place should be *primo inter pares* and that their form of revolution was correct and to be emulated. Maintaining its ultra-revolutionary rhetoric and the fiscal costs of keeping 25% of its military in Jordan to support Palestinian organizations took its toll on the nascent regime, which faced trouble with Iran and the Kurds.<sup>54</sup> After attempting to stay in line with orthodox Ba’ath doctrine and practice a policy of pan-Arabism for the first years of its rule, post-1968 Ba’athist ideology pushed away from the pan-Arab ideology held sacrosanct by the monarchy, the early republic, and Levantine Ba’athism, instead anchoring itself firmly in an Iraqi nationalist ideology.

The reason for this change is threefold. First, the decline of pan-Arabism’s appeal was due in part to popular reaction to the Arab failures in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, as noted earlier.<sup>55</sup> Secondly, the dearth of Shi’a representation in the post-1968 Ba’ath regime spelled internal disaster for the regime if it continued the pan-Arab ideology of its

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<sup>53</sup> Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 171.

<sup>54</sup> It is ironic to note how much the Tikriti Ba’ath clung to their revolutionary ethos—rather than coming to power at the head of a popular revolution, the Tikriti Ba’ath came to power through the now-standard Iraqi coup d’état.

<sup>55</sup> While in the wider Arab world, the 1967 Arab defeat triggered a turn towards a return to Islam, in Iraq, it triggered Iraqi nationalism. In this sense, the ideological sea change in the Arab world was only not based upon the dichotomy of secularism versus religion as many observers point out, but also included ethnic unity versus inclusive nationalism. For Iraq, its distance and minimal involvement from the core unifying issue within the Arab world—the Israeli occupation of Palestine—likely led to Iraq moving towards nationalism rather than religion.

previous, albeit brief, incarnation in 1963.<sup>56</sup> Baram notes that “while pan-Arabism was not abandoned, it was restrained by a new stress on the local Iraqi identity, a stress that the party seems to have felt could improve its relations with the Shi’a.”<sup>57</sup> Thirdly, the ascension of the Syrian Ba’ath party to power in 1966 necessitated the strengthening of Iraqi national identity to stem the calls for immediate unification between the two Ba’athist regimes, as Baghdad believed it would play second fiddle to the “better entrenched” regime in Damascus.<sup>58</sup> Beset with potential enemies both inside and outside Iraq, the Tikriti Ba’athists turned towards a policy of Iraqi nationalism, while leaving the door open to pan-Arabism in case of unification to ensure they maintained their seat of power and to placate domestic pan-Arabists.<sup>59</sup>

Having learned the lessons of the previous Ba’ath regime’s short-lived coup in 1963, the Tikriti Ba’ath sought to embed the Sunni-specific *Weltanschauung* of Sunni dominance and Iraqi nationalism into the Iraqi psyche to ensure their rule. This was an important lesson the Tikriti Ba’ath learned from the previous four decades of Iraqi independence. “Without political institutionalization, politics [prior to the 1968 coup] reverted back to subnational groups based on tribal, ethnic, or regional identities,” writes Eric Davis. “These particularistic tendencies, which produced a constant reorganization of coalitions, provided a recipe for political instability.”<sup>60</sup> In an attempt to develop a sense of nationalism, the Party commenced a campaign to utilize a number of cultural tools to build an *Iraqi* collective identity that transcended ethno-sectarian cleavages.

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<sup>56</sup> Contrary to conventional wisdom, the Ba’ath Party originally enjoyed a large degree of non-sectarian leadership and was fairly representative of Iraqi society at large. The commands (or highest levels) of the Ba’ath Party from 1952 to 1963 were comprised of 53.8% Shi’a, 38.5% Sunni, and 7.7% Kurd. However, by 1970, the balance shifted to 5.7% Shi’a, 84.9% Sunni, and 7.5% Kurd. Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq’s Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba’athists, and Free Officers*, 1080.

<sup>57</sup> Amatzia Baram, *Culture, History, and Ideology in the Formation of Ba’athist Iraq, 1968-89* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 18.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>59</sup> The foundation of this rekindled spirit of Iraqi nationalism was “the admission that the Arab peoples, or nations-in-the-making, within their present borders, were there to stay and that, should unity between two or more Arab states ever come about, under no circumstances should it undermine the cohesion of the existing nation-states.” Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Ba’athist Iraq, 1968-89*, 134.

<sup>60</sup> Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, 153.

But with this swing towards nationalism, the Tikriti Ba'ath faced an internal contradiction. On one hand, the use of Iraqi nationalism would placate the Shi'a and Kurds, but cause the regime to distance itself from its Ba'athist doctrine and revolutionary credentials. On the other hand, pan-Arabism would maintain the Party's adherence to Aflaq's Ba'athism, but would lead to further alienation of the majority of Iraqis. To balance this ideological cognitive dissonance, the Tikriti Ba'ath utilized a process of cultural re-engineering, which developed a new national identity, placing pan-Arabism in the backseat, and looking to its own past for inspiration rather than the Ba'ath Party's Levantine origins.

## **2. Iraqi Culture: Embedding the Narrative of Sunni Dominance and Iraqi Nationalism Under the Tikriti Ba'ath**

The purpose of Tikriti Ba'athist efforts to restructure Iraq's understanding of itself was conducted with short term and long-term goals in mind. In the short-term, restructuring served as a means of bridging the aforementioned internal inconsistencies in Tikriti Ba'athist ideology. In the long term, the goal was to "reset" Iraq's identity and to embed the Ba'athist ideology into Iraqi culture. The mechanism used by the Tikriti Ba'ath, and later by Saddam Hussein, was to rewrite the history of Iraq itself. Davis notes that—

more than simple political indoctrination, the project represented an attempt to construct a new public sphere, including the reconstruction of political identity, the relationship of the citizen to the state, and the public understandings of national heritage. Simultaneously, it sought to negate Iraqi nationalism's inclusive legacy precisely while trying to appropriate it to build a "new Iraqi man and society."<sup>61</sup>

This scheme, known as the Project for the Writing of History (*Mahru' I'adat Kitabat al Tarikh*), sought to emphasize Iraq's uniqueness in the Arab by linking modern Iraq to ancient Mesopotamian civilizations.<sup>62</sup> Extending—or rather heavily

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<sup>61</sup> Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, 148.

<sup>62</sup> A discussion of how Saddam Hussein used historical writing to reshape specific events in Iraq's recent past can be found in Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 169–175.

emphasizing—Iraq’s ancient history served two major purposes. First, it linked the Tikriti Ba’ath and Saddam Hussein as the current manifestation of a lineage of powerful empires that had ruled Mesopotamia over 5,000 years, serving to not only legitimate the regime, but also to point towards Iraq’s greatness in the Arab world.<sup>63</sup> Second, extending the accepted history of Iraq to a time preceding the establishment of Islam served as a means to paper over the sectarian divisions between the Sunni and Shi’a by indicating that they were the same people, previously unified when Iraq was at its height of power in antiquity.

To accomplish this grand project and to appeal to the entirety of the Iraqi population, a number of techniques were used. For the poor and illiterate, festivals, films, and the erection of statues and monuments were used to introduce Ba’athist visions of society, while for the intelligentsia and other educated classes, books, journals and debate were used.<sup>64</sup> What gave the state the added clout to conduct this massive program was the result of the nationalizing of the oil industry in 1972 through the implementation of Public Law 69.<sup>65</sup> The rising revenues garnered by the regime from the sale of

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<sup>63</sup> Another beneficial aspect of utilizing the Mesopotamian story is that it allows the regime to follow the pan-Arab penchant for hostility towards Israel. Embedded in the narrative is a story of Babylonian victory over Israel under Nebuchadnezzar II in 597 BC. This served as proof that the Ba’ath had not forsaken their pan-Arab ideals and linked the current regime to the Arab struggle in Palestine, especially with Egyptian rapprochement with Israel in 1979.

<sup>64</sup> The large amount of monuments and the heavy reliance on festivals in the regime’s program of cultural production is likely due to the low levels of literacy in Iraq during the first decade of Tikriti Ba’ath rule. For example, in 1978, Iraq was 44.5% illiterate in urban areas and 77.0% illiterate in rural areas. J. S. Birks and C. Sinclair, "The Challenge of Human Resources Development in Iraq," in *Iraq: The Contemporary State*, ed. Tim Niblock (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 246.

<sup>65</sup> The effect of this law was twofold. First, it increased revenues to fund social development and second, it fostered a spirit of Iraqi nationalism. The Slugletts note that, “the nationalization of the IPC [Iraqi Petroleum Company] brought the country behind the Ba’ath as no other policy had done or could have been done, and the regime made the fullest possible use of the new mood, by encouraging the belief that the victory over the Company was not won by the Ba’ath Party alone but by the Iraqi people under the Party’s leadership, a line that was also part and parcel of the Ba’ath’s own image as the standard bearer of the Arab nation.” Second, after the dramatic increase in the price of oil following the Arab oil embargo, Iraq was able to invest its profits from the sale of oil into economic and social programs in an attempt to garner further support for the state by the creation of an egalitarian society through the development of wide-spread patronage networks. The regime’s use of patronage networks served to atomize groups and re-link them as individuals directly to the state to ensure maximum control of society by the regime. This concept is discussed later in this chapter. Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship*, 155.

petroleum—initially at \$488 million in 1968, rising to over \$12 billion in 1979—were used to fund the cultural restructuring of the Tikriti Ba'ath and Saddam Hussein.<sup>66</sup>

Folklore served as a means to introduce visions of Iraqi nationalism. The regime introduced a number of festivals that highlighted ties to the history and soil of Iraq. In Mosul, the Spring Festival was used to introduce Mesopotamian themes, all linking Iraq to antiquity and select themes in Islam.<sup>67</sup> Other festivals were used to emphasize Iraqi poetry and Iraq's religious history. But as Baram points out, "the leitmotif of all the festivals was the affirmation—almost always implicit, and very rarely explicit—of the existence of an Iraqi people and an 'Iraqi man.'"<sup>68</sup>

For the literate and the intelligentsia, the state increased its support to the publication of cultural literature under the Ministry of Culture and Information. These publications included not only academic journals such, but also journals for professional associations and labor unions as well.<sup>69</sup> Government sponsorship and oversight allowed the regime to mold cultural themes within the literate population that were consistent with its visions of Iraqi society and directly inject that same vision in a way that would ensure its widest dissemination.

So too, did the regime use archaeology to instill a sense of Iraqi nationalism. Official support was intended to "make the Iraqi people aware of their importance and relevance of the country's ancient history—including that of the pre-Islamic era."<sup>70</sup> Increased funding by the regime in the 1970s ensured that archaeological evidence could link the present regime with that of powerful empires of the past, most notably the

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<sup>66</sup> As analyst Joe Stork points out, "The consolidation of political power under the present [Ba'ath] regime thus occurred in conjunction with a momentous expansion of the state's economic functions." Joe Stork, "State Power and Economic Structure: Class Determination and State Formation in Contemporary Iraq," in *Iraq: The Contemporary State*, ed. Tim Niblock (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 32–33.

<sup>67</sup> Baram provides a description of the first Mosul Spring Festival in 1969, soon after the Tikriti Ba'ath came to power, in which the regime used a procession from the present to the past, encompassing the pan-Arab themes of the day, Iraq's contribution to Islam, and the Arab pre-Islamic civilizations of Babylon and Nineveh. In the years that followed, less emphasis was placed on pan-Arab themes and more was placed on Mesopotamian themes by the regime. Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968–89*, 53–58.

<sup>68</sup> Baram, *Culture, History, and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968–89*, 57.

<sup>69</sup> Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, 162.

<sup>70</sup> Baram, *Culture, History, and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968–89*, 25.

Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian and Chaldean Empires.<sup>71</sup> Just as important as excavation was the political education and interpretation of Iraq's archaeological past. One indicator of the premium placed by the Ba'ath on the archaeological narrative was a 1969 announcement in the premier Iraqi archaeological journal, *Sumer*, on plans to construct museums in every province, sub-province and near any important archaeological site.<sup>72</sup> Museum exhibits, while showcasing their regional artifacts, also "stressed all-Iraqi unity by exhibits from other provinces, or pictures accompanied by explanatory captions."<sup>73</sup>

All of these tools served to embed a sense of Iraqi-centric nationalism in the psyche of Iraq's citizens by the political manipulation of historical memory. For the Sunnis, this project to create an Iraqi national identity placed them in the starring role of Iraq's history and culture. Although the regime's cultural narrative strove to maintain an egalitarian tone to accommodate the Shi'a and Kurds, it was left unspoken that the Sunni were on top of Iraqi society through their dominance of the government, security services, and armed forces. To the Sunnis, the revitalization of an Iraqi nationalist identity further drove home the idea that the accepted *status quo* in Iraq was that under any governmental system, the Sunnis should be on top of the hierarchy, followed by Kurds and secular Shi'a, and at the bottom were the religious Shi'a.

As a part of restructuring collective identity, the Ba'athist had to deal with the threat posed to it from the resurgence of Islam in the decades following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Being the progeny of a secularist ideology like Ba'athism, it is no wonder that very little in the early efforts of Ba'ath cultural restructuring dealt with the role of Islam in Iraqi society. As mentioned earlier, the degree to which the regime emphasized

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<sup>71</sup> Uncovering the past was only one aspect of the Tikriti Ba'athist archaeological program. The Party also attempted the *recreation* of the past by replicating historical structures. Baram points out that one of the most prominent archaeological projects embarked upon by the Tikriti Ba'athists was the reconstruction of Babylon due to its special status in Mesopotamian history and "its location in the Shi'i region and on the boundaries of Baghdad [which] enabled the regime to use it as an illustration of the historical unity of Iraq's people, or at least the country's Sunni and Shi'i Arabs." Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968-89*, 45.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

its Mesopotamian history in the early 1970s was for the express purposes of unifying Iraqi society, rather than emphasizing their sectarian divisions that would come about through the emphasis of Iraq's Islamic history.

Initially staying quiet and using the increased amount of social welfare programs brought about by the deluge of funding from oil to increase the incentives for cultural assimilation, the regime attempted to co-opt Islam as a means of legitimizing its rule and ensuring regime survival by the 1980s and 1990s after being hit with popular dissatisfaction with Iraq's two Gulf Wars. But to Saddam, Islam still remained a threat to the regime, "because the mosque had the potential to be a ready-made inter-tribal network for plotting anti-regime activities."<sup>74</sup>

What is important to the matter at hand is that within the regime, Saddam was the only one who could participate in the religious discourse of Iraq. "As a rule, other officials or party figures kept silence on the issue of Islam except in Hussein's presence or with his prior permission," notes Bengio.<sup>75</sup> Dominance of religious discourse allowed Saddam to attempt to regulate the amount of influence of religion in Iraqi society, ensuring that extreme forms of Islam would not be tolerated. For example, the regime's established the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, which:

... monitored places of worship, appointed clerics, approved the building and repair of all places of worship, and monitored and censored the publication of religious literature. The ministry served as a source of intelligence for the regime. The content of religious classes and study groups was monitored and evaluated by the ministry, and the ministry itself produced and broadcast all religious programming on the state television and radio stations.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Lin Todd and others, *Iraq Tribal Study – Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, the Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe* (Arlington, VA: Global Resources Group, 2006), [http://turcopolier.typepad.com/the\\_athenaeum/files/iraq\\_tribal\\_study\\_070907.pdf](http://turcopolier.typepad.com/the_athenaeum/files/iraq_tribal_study_070907.pdf) (accessed April 26, 2009).

<sup>75</sup> Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq*, 182.

<sup>76</sup> Todd and others, *Iraq Tribal Study – Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, the Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe*, 3–29, 3–30.

Even individual clerics fell under the regime's control. "Clerics who strayed from the official line were quickly reminded that the regime was in charge of the re-Islamization process," writes Hashim, with inflammatory clerics being jailed or exiled.<sup>77</sup>

As the result of a series of regional political and military events from 1979 on, the increased pressure on Iraqi society under Saddam caused him to reintroduce state-sanctioned religion in an effort to secure his rule. Resurgent fears of Shi'a betrayal after the Iranian revolution, caused Saddam's to emphasize Iraq's Islamic heritage beginning as early as 1977, a far cry from earlier Ba'athist attempts to appropriate history.<sup>78</sup> Utilizing imagery of the Battle of Qadisiya in AD 636—where Arab forces triumphed over Persian Sassanid Empire and paved the way for the Islamic conquest of Mesopotamia—Saddam labeled the Iran-Iraq War *Qadisiyat Saddam* (Saddam's Qadisiya) in an attempt to draw a parallel between the two.<sup>79</sup> Later, Saddam had the words *Allah akhbar* (God is great) added to the Iraqi national flag in an attempt to contrast Iraq's "true" Islamic credentials with those of the Iranians. Following the 1991 Gulf War, Saddam again revitalized religion in Iraqi society in order to address deepening public dissatisfaction after the imposition of sanctions. Placating Iraqis who were turning to Islam to cope with the effects of sanctions, the regime "closed all nightclubs and discotheques and banned the public sale of alcohol," in addition to reintroducing Islamic punishments, such as amputations for theft.<sup>80</sup> The regime also began to repair old mosques and build new ones in addition to introducing compulsory

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<sup>77</sup> Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 110.

<sup>78</sup> In addition to rising Islamist fervor in neighboring Iran at the time, Saddam was posturing within the Ba'ath regime to ease out Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr from the Presidency. Part of this involved manipulating Saddam's image to appeal to a broader audience both in and outside of Iraq. By playing up his Islamic credentials—even to the point of claiming descent from the martyred Shi'a Imam Husayn ibn Ali—Saddam aimed to gain wide scale acceptance of an Arab ruler who could embody political and a degree of religious rule. For a description of Saddam's use of religion in image building, see Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq*, 79–85.

<sup>79</sup> It is interesting to note that the choices of Islamic history and Arab successes used by the regime took place prior to the Sunni-Shi'a split after the death of Imam Hussein in AD 680, revealing Saddam's tendency to use history for political ends. By choosing this battle, he not only drew parallels of victory, but also to Islam's golden age of expansion, all in an attempt to gain popular support amongst Iraq's sects for his external policies. For a detailed discussion of the way that Qadisiya was actively manipulated by the regime, see Bengio, *Saddam's Word: Political Discourse in Iraq*, 172–175.

<sup>80</sup> Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, 232.

Quranic studies at all levels of the educational system.<sup>81</sup> Overall, Saddam sanctioned a degree of religiosity in ostensibly secular Ba'athist Iraq. To Saddam, Islam served as a safety valve, allowing Iraqis—especially the Shi'a—to seek solace in religion as a way of coping with the crippling effect of sanctions instead of entering into collective action.

As will be expanded upon below, material success in Ba'athist Iraq was contingent upon loyalty to the regime. The large numbers of Sunnis who were linked through Saddam's patronage networks were required to stay in line with Ba'athist policies in return for tangible and intangible support from the regime. In examining the statistics of child malnutrition in the wake of UN sanctions, Amatzia Baram points out that in comparison with the rest of Sunni provinces, low levels of child malnutrition rates in certain cities in Salah-ad-Din Province are likely due to the kinship ties that Saddam utilized to maintain the loyalty of his security services.<sup>82</sup> Failure to follow the Ba'athist line in any form, such as espousing unsanctioned religious sentiment or public criticism, would put individuals in jeopardy, especially if their positions depended upon the whim of Saddam.<sup>83</sup> Much of Saddam's manipulation of society through restructuring historical identity was designed to "coup-proof" his regime.<sup>84</sup> An important component of this survival strategy is how Saddam used and manipulated the social structure of Iraqi society, to which we now turn.

### **3. Tribes: The Structure of Sunni Society**

Tribes have been used throughout Iraqi history as a way of extending the influence of the center and to shore up those in power. As a form of social organization,

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<sup>81</sup> Todd and others, *Iraq Tribal Study – Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, the Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe*, 2–26.; Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 111.

<sup>82</sup> Baram also notes that resistance to Saddam's rule from tribes in Anbar may have contributed to higher rates of child malnutrition in that province. Amatzia Baram, "The Effect of Iraqi Sanctions: Statistical Pitfalls and Responsibility," *Middle East Journal* 54, no. 2 (Spring, 2000), 208–209.

<sup>83</sup> Resistance to Saddam's rule from tribes in Anbar may have contributed to higher rates in that province, possibly indicating their chafing under the regime's yoke culminating with the aborted Dulaimi tribal rebellion in 1995.

<sup>84</sup> For an excellent overview of the concept of "coup-proofing" and its practice in the middle east, see James T. Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security* 24, no. 2 (Autumn, 1999), 131–165.

tribes pre-date the arrival of Islam in the Arab world. Tribes remain a major social structure in rural Sunni Iraqi society, providing “protection, representation, and a sense of identity for its members,”<sup>85</sup> seeking to provide order for everyday social life.

*a. Sunni Tribalism*

Tribes in Sunni Iraq have a structure that begin with an individual and his extended family and emanate outward through successive layers towards the tribe. The nucleus of Sunni life is the extended family (*khams*), which consists of all men who share the same great-great-grandfather.<sup>86</sup> Within the *khams*, all men owe loyalty to each other. Violent and dishonorable acts perpetuated on the *khams* by an outsider require all the men in the aggrieved *khams* to respond to not only avenge the grievance, but also to bring honor back to the *khams*. *Khams* are intermeshed with houses (*bayts*), making them the lowest level of tribal organization. *Bayts* are linked together to form a *hamula*, which sometimes represents a village of a given tribe. When combined, *hamulas* form a clan (*fakhd*, pl. *afakhd*), who have their own chief, name and territory. A group of *afakhd* forms a tribe (*ashira*), who also has its own leader, name and territory. Finally, a number of tribes form a tribal confederation (*qabila*), a very loose and informal organization.<sup>87</sup>

Amongst tribes, a hierarchy was formed, loosely based around means of subsistence. The People of the Camel (*ahl al-ibl*) were on top, followed by the People of the Sheep (*shawiyah*), the cultivators (*Harratha* or *filalih*) and lastly, the marsh-dwellers (*mi'dan*).<sup>88</sup> This hierarchy stems from the Bedouin tradition, which valued military valor and mobility. The Sunnis of northwest Iraq were mainly from the top tiers of the

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<sup>85</sup> Todd and others, *Iraq Tribal Study – Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, the Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe*, 2–2.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 2–42.

<sup>87</sup> Faleh Jabar, "Sheikhs and Ideologues: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Tribes and Patrimonial Totalitarianism in Iraq, 1968-1998," in *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, eds. Faleh Jabar and Hosham Dawood (London: Saqi, 2001), 74.

<sup>88</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists, and Free Officers*, 68.

hierarchy. Tribes like the Shammar Jarba and Zubayd exercised their dominance of the lower tiers by extracting tribute from the sedentary tribes along the Tigris and Euphrates.<sup>89</sup>

Tribal leaders are referred to as sheikhs, and their selection in Sunni tribes is not patrilineal, but instead based on the individual's courage, leadership and luck.<sup>90</sup> In Sunni tribes, sheikhs were responsible for the overall well-being of the tribe, including the provision of support for the weakest and poorest members. Sheikhs often had the power to resolve dispute within their tribe and serve as a representative to speak on behalf of the tribe to outsiders. Even with this much responsibility, however, the power of the sheikh was not absolute; in reality, his role was to influence the tribe rather than control it. Sheikhs often had to consult with tribal elders prior to significant decisions, and only after collaborating and coming to consensus would the tribe follow the sheikh.<sup>91</sup>

Hosham Dawood notes that the source of power for the sheikh stemmed from his ability to influence others—

Through exercising his leadership capacity and his political ability to maintain the unity of his group as a whole, playing the role of arbiter within the tribe or the confederation, he would show his appropriateness, whether by the suppleness of his manoeuvres or his ability to gain the consent of the tribal members to the use of force in order to maintain order within the tribe or gain prestige in the outside world.<sup>92</sup>

It was because of this ability to govern through consensus and influence that sheikhs were elected rather than the title being passed along from father to son. However, over time, certain *bayts* have tended to maintain primacy on tribal leadership.

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<sup>89</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists, and Free Officers*, 68–69.

<sup>90</sup> Amongst Shi'a tribes, however, tribal leadership is based on lineage and also shares power with holy man who is a *sayyid*, or descendant of the prophet Mohammed. Todd and others, *Iraq Tribal Study – Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, the Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe*, 2–41, 2–44; Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 1 (February, 1997), 3.

<sup>91</sup> Todd and others, *Iraq Tribal Study – Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, the Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe*, 2–42.

<sup>92</sup> Hosham Dawood, "The 'State-ization' of the Tribe and the Tribalization of the State: The Case of Iraq," in *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, eds. Faleh Jabar and Hosham Dawood (London: Saqi, 2001), 116.

A critical component of a sheikh's ability to exercise leadership is his ability to conduct acts of *wasta*. *Wasta* is an Arabic word that means intercession or mediation and denotes either the act or the person conducting the act of intercession/mediation. By virtue of their positions, tribal sheikhs are often called upon to perform both types of *wasta* for their tribesmen. Intermediary *wasta* seeks to resolve conflict, and "binds families and communities for peace and well-being in a hostile environment."<sup>93</sup> Intercessory *wasta* on the other hand, "involves a protagonist intervening on behalf of a client to obtain an advantage for the client—a job, a government document, a tax reduction, admission to a prestigious university."<sup>94</sup>

***b. Tribalism and the State***

How has this social structure weathered the changing political tides that have plagued Iraq's modern history? At times, tribalism has languished, but more recently, it has flourished because of political manipulation. A brief review of the political manipulation of Iraq's tribes follows to provide an understanding of how important tribalism was to Iraq's Sunnis in the aftermath of the 2003 U.S. invasion.

The Ottoman land reforms under Midhat Pasha not only encompassed areas such as education and administration of Mesopotamia, but also included reforms over land. By implementing the 1958 Ottoman Land Law, Midhat Pasha hoped to create security in land tenure through land registration as a means to encourage agricultural production, but also to generate revenues for the treasury. The Land Law altered the structure of society; the strongest tribal sheikhs of the *ahl al-ibl* continued to dominate Iraqi society, becoming landowners, while the weaker tribesmen became peasants.<sup>95</sup> As such, land reforms gave more power to sheikhs, segmenting the population and forcing tribe members to positions of serfdom. Sheikhs emerged as tax farmers, collecting taxes on behalf of the state, increasing their power not only economically, but also politically.

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<sup>93</sup> Robert B. Cunningham and Yasin K. Sarayrah, "Taming *Wasta* to Achieve Development," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (Summer, 1994), 29.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>95</sup> Jabar, *Sheikhs and Ideologues: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Tribes and Patrimonial Totalitarianism in Iraq, 1996–1998*, 76.

Through increased wealth and local power based on land reforms, *sheikhs* were increasingly recognized on their political utility to the Ottomans rather than through tribal elections.<sup>96</sup> Under the British Mandate and later the Monarchy, tribal leaders were used to maintain the control over Iraqi society.

The issue of land reform under the early Republican regimes further segmented tribal linkages by redistributing land to peasants and linking them to the state through the use of agricultural aid and resources. Qasim also removed the Tribal Disputes Code, causing tribesmen to be judged by the civil and criminal statutes rather than traditional tribal codes of behavior. But while tribal linkages of the average Iraqi took on less import, for those in power the use of patronage through tribal affiliation was taking on a greater role in the rule of the Republic under Qasim and the 'Arif brothers through their use of patronage to maintain regime stability.

As much as the Ba'athists faced a cognitive dissonance between the ideologies of pan-Arabism and Iraqi nationalism, the party also faced a dilemma over the role of tribes in Iraqi society. One of the fundamental tenants of the Ba'athist thought was that tribalism and all that it brought were anathema to the Ba'ath view of the modern Iraqi man.<sup>97</sup> In its first proclamation after coming to power in 1968, that Ba'ath stated, "we are against religious sectarianism, racism, and tribalism," viewing all of these as the last trappings of Iraq's colonial past.<sup>98</sup> Yet, while uttering these words the Ba'ath under Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr—and later Saddam Hussein—utilized tribal and kinship ties to control the levers of power after 1968. "So embarrassing did these clan and local ties become," writes historian Phebe Marr, "that in 1976 the regime made it an offense for

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<sup>96</sup> Dawood, *The 'State-ization' of the Tribe and the Tribalization of the State: The Case of Iraq*, 117.

<sup>97</sup> Amatzia Baram points out that the Tikriti Ba'ath viewed tribalism as a threat to the party's rule and its goals for Iraqi society. To them, "tribalism was regarded as a major obstacle on the road to the 'socialist transformation' of the Iraqi village." However, "Ba'ath criticism of tribal shaykhs and values is understandable not only from the purely ideological viewpoint. One has to bear in mind also that Ba'ath members were overwhelmingly lower-middle-class urban youth from Baghdad, Nasiriyya, and other towns. Some, especially in the provincial towns, came from a tribal background, but only a few came from the shaykhly families. The tribal shaykhs represented a competing social elite." Baram, *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991–96*, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Ba'ath Party Communiqué No. 1, as quoted in Baram, *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies: 1991–96*, 1.

public figures to use a name indicating tribal, clan, or local affiliations.”<sup>99</sup> Coupled with the ban on naming, the Tikriti Ba’ath barred sociological work on tribes and tribalism from occurring, “claiming that tribes were a ‘traditional’ pre-modern social factor, and a ‘shameful’ aspect for ‘revolutionary’ development,” notes Keiko Sakai.<sup>100</sup>

Under the Republic, tribalism was weakened through both indirect and direct methods. Land reform policies under Qasim, the Arif brothers and the Tikriti Ba’ath that led to increased rural to urban migration over time, as both land reform and development of the welfare state—with the attendant socialist benefits of the petroleum based economy—caused more peasants to move to the cities. Between 1965 and 1988, Iraq reported an urban growth rate of 206.1% compared to a rural growth rate of 18.6%. Furthermore, while more than half of the population lived in rural areas in 1965, the number of rural residents was reduced to 27% in 1988.<sup>101</sup> The Tikriti Ba’ath deliberately worked to weaken certain Sunni tribes who either lived close to Baghdad or were a threat to the regime because of their size. Land appropriation and redistribution was used to check the potential influence of these tribes.<sup>102</sup>

In spite of the Ba’athist regime’s reinforcement of anti-tribal sentiments through policy, events of the 1980s soon caused a reversal in Ba’athist efforts. The regime’s volte-face can be attributed to the realities of the Iraq’s position in the Iran-Iraq War. Again worried about the potential for Iraq’s Shi’a to defect to the side of their co-religionists in Iran, the regime turned toward a new version of tribalism for pragmatic

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<sup>99</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 244. Specifically, Saddam banned the use of an individual’s tribal title (*laqab*) and lineage title (*nisba*) in the 1970s, ostensibly to erase “aristocratic factors such as ‘nobility of origin’ based on tribes, status groups or notable families.” Keiko Sakai, “Tribalization as a Tool of State Control in Iraq: Observations on the Army, the Cabinets and the National Assembly,” in *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, eds. Faleh Jabar and Hosham Dawood (London: Saqi, 2001), 141.

<sup>100</sup> Sakai, *Tribalization as a Tool of State Control in Iraq: Observations on the Army, the Cabinets and the National Assembly*, 137.

<sup>101</sup> Baram, *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein’s Tribal Policies 1991–96*, 3.

<sup>102</sup> Tribes affected in these actions were the Shammar Jarba, located in the Sunni triangle and Jaziera Desert; the Azza, from the Iranian border north of Baghdad; and the Jubbur, located mainly in the Tikrit area, but also Mosul. As large Sunni tribes, they could potentially challenge the rule of Saddam’s Albu Nasir tribe. Ironically, these attempts to expropriate tribal lands led to the January 1990 plot to assassinate Saddam by disaffected Juburri army officers, leading to increased attempts to fracture certain tribes. Baram, *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein’s Tribal Policies: 1991–96*, 4.

reasons. Increasing the emphasis on Iraq's Arab identity called for increased emphasis on tribal identity as tribalism has long been a part of the Arab ethos. Additionally, after the 1991 Intifada, tribes were seen as a way of linking the population to the regime, with the tribes serving as a sort of connective tissue for the regime, as Saddam's atomization policies were seen as not providing the regime enough grassroots support.<sup>103</sup> The increased emphasis on tribal affinities took on a number of dimensions, including the reintroduction of tribal lineage, increased stature of sheikhs in Iraqi society, and material rewards bestowed upon cooperative tribes.

In the 1989 elections, more than half of the candidates officially used tribal title (*laqab*) or lineage title (*nisba*) to indicate tribal affiliations. In his examination of Sunni tribalism and the Tikriti Ba'ath, Keiko Sakai notes that the use of *laqab* and *nisba* by candidates was higher in Sunni provinces and lower in Kurdish and Shi'a provinces (even though tribalism was just as strong if not stronger in the Shi'a south), indicating "the regime's political attitude towards and dependency on certain tribal groups in the Sunni Triangle."<sup>104</sup>

One of the effects of the resurgence of state-sponsored tribalism was the increased prominence given to sheikhs by the regime. Saddam and other high-ranking Ba'ath members regularly visited sheikhs to establish ties, which ostensibly gave cooperative sheikhs more intercessory *wasta*. One Anbari sheikh notes that "When I visit...state institutions as a head of a tribe they accord me much more respect than that which I receive as a member of Parliament."<sup>105</sup> Sunni sheikhs had more stature in the eyes of the regime than their Shi'a peers. In tribal oaths of allegiance, they never had to make promises to turn in infiltrators, traitors, saboteurs and other criminals to the regime like Shi'a criminals were required to do.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Baram, *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies: 1991-96*, 7.

<sup>104</sup> Sakai, *Tribalization as a Tool of State Control in Iraq: Observations on the Army, the Cabinets and the National Assembly*, 151.

<sup>105</sup> As quoted in Baram, *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies, 1991-96*, 12.

<sup>106</sup> Baram, *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96*, 12.

Besides status, cooperative sheikhs were also given material rewards for their loyalty, becoming incorporated to the regime's patronage networks, receiving gifts, and government provided jobs for their tribal members. In the late 1980s, some of the mid-level Ba'ath party leadership was incorporated into Iraqi Army units to serve as political officers, causing the regime to utilize tribes in an economy-of-force role to substitute for party control in certain rural areas. Those sheikhs who played an economy-of-force role were given a large degree of autonomy by the regime, with privileges to maintain standing tribal forces to maintain security and were allowed to utilize tribal law instead of the state's judicial system.<sup>107</sup> Certain tribes and other individuals linked to the regime were given freedom and access to the regimes smuggling networks established after the imposition of sanctions. Bypassing the effects of sanctions imposed on their fellow citizens, these networks of privilege allowed certain groups and individuals to maintain a higher standard of living.<sup>108</sup>

#### **4. The Effectiveness of Ba'athist Manipulation of Sunni Society**

Many historians and analysts of the Hussein regime have pointed out that the question remains as to how much of Ba'athist cultural restructuring, tribalization, and ideological adaptation actually took hold in Iraqi society.<sup>109</sup> Field work before the U.S. invasion in 2003 was highly restricted and little was done to measure the effect of the Ba'ath re-engineering project. Despite this restriction, one author indicates the cultural restructuring project failed to truly unify Iraq. Eric Davis points out that the failure of the

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<sup>107</sup> Baram, *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96*, 12-13.

<sup>108</sup> Much has been written about Saddam's use of patronage as a mechanism of societal control. After the 1991 Gulf War, the role of a "shadow state" took on greater importance for Hussein. Saddam "was seeking to create among the Iraqis a dependent client base that would have a stake in the survival of his regime. In doing so, he hoped to displace some communal leaders who had hitherto commanded obedience, and to recruit others who could 'deliver' the clan or community which they headed." Comprised of ever-widening circles of patronage emanating from Saddam himself, the core was comprised of those who enjoyed common family, tribe or regional backgrounds. Further beyond this were the networks comprised of patrons and clients each granting privilege in return for obedience. One author notes that an estimated 500,000 patrons were used to control a population of 26 million Iraqis, and were largely Sunnis. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 219, 259.

<sup>109</sup> For a discussion of this question, see Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977), 277-278; Baram, *Culture, History, and Ideology in the Formation of Ba'athist Iraq, 1968-89*, 138-141; Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 287-288.

Ba'ath to “establish itself as a hegemonic force in Iraqi society ultimately failed,” as evidenced by the 1991 Intifada, its subsequent repression, and the exodus of the middle class from the country.<sup>110</sup> As he rightly points out, there is a difference between the idea of regime (or state) and the idea of an Iraqi nation, which the Ba'ath failed to understand. Dissatisfaction came from the regime's policies and methods of governing, rather than that of sectarian divisions. For instance, there was no call during the Intifada to establish a separate Shi'a state or any move for the Shi'a to secede from Iraq and side with their co-religionists in the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>111</sup>

However, while the Shi'a proved relatively impervious to Ba'athist efforts, the real indicator of the effect of the Ba'athist indoctrination and cultural restructuring program is borne out in the formation of the mainstream Sunni Iraqi insurgency. It is well-known that the primary target of Ba'athist indoctrination were children. If we were to assume that the average insurgent's age—what the U.S. military terms “military-aged males”—was between 17–35 in 2003, he would have been born between 1968 and 1986, placing them in the Iraqi educational system from 1975 onwards. These were the same years that the Ba'athist cultural restructuring efforts were taking place, exposing the future insurgents of the 2003 Iraq War to Ba'athist ideology and cultural manipulation. The nationalistic nature of the Sunni insurgency testifies to the depths to which the Iraqi nationalist message propagated by the Tikriti Ba'ath and Saddam took hold. In fact, after the invasion, Iraqis celebrated the 45th anniversary of the 1958 coup. During the celebration, nationalist symbols abounded, with participants carrying the Akkadian sun and images of Qasim.<sup>112</sup>

Like the policies of cultural restructuring and ideological adaptation, Saddam's tribal policies were another means to ensure regime security. Linn and others note:

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<sup>110</sup> Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, 276–277.

<sup>111</sup> Based on interviews with participants in the 1991 Intifada, Baram suggests that “those who fought against the regime did so for a combination of reasons: general Shi'i protest against Sunni domination or against Ba'athi secularism and the relative economic neglect of the south, but also, significantly, discrimination against a particular tribe and bad blood between it and the regime.” Baram, *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991–96*, 10.

<sup>112</sup> *About Baghdad*, DVD, directed by Sinan Antoon and others (New York: InCounter Productions, 2005).

While the Sunni tribes were recipients of greater wealth and opportunities than any other ethno-religious group in Iraq, that privilege came at a cost. Sunni Arab prestige was a gilded cage that afforded benefits to those who did not speak out against the regime and kept ranks with tribe and state. The regime compensated the Sunnis with wealth in exchange for giving up democracy and political freedoms, and the Sunni tribes could opt only for blind political loyalty or exclusion.<sup>113</sup>

But while the regime needed tribal policies to serve as connective tissues to further stabilize a weakening regime, official endorsement for rural social structures provided the Sunnis with a tangible source of identity from which to draw upon from a system that had always surrounded them. With the reemphasis and legitimization of the tribal system from the end of the Iran-Iraq War until the downfall of the Ba'ath regime in 2003, AQI would face a difficult battle attempting to co-opt and recruit Sunni tribes wholesale.

While intended to gain widespread allegiance to the Iraqi state—albeit under Sunni rule—the Ba'ath did achieve partial success with their cultural restructuring program. When discussion came up to federate Iraq or even to dissolve it on sectarian lines, both Sunni and Shi'a largely rejected it, preferring to keep the boundaries of the existing Iraqi state intact. But out of all of Iraq's people groups, it was only the Sunni who held on to that portion of Ba'ath cultural indoctrination that placed them on top of Iraqi society. The inculcation of an Iraqi-centric *Weltanschauung* by the Sunnis of Iraq would later spell the death of AQI and the Sunni insurgency.

## **B. AL QAEDA IN IRAQ AND THE SUNNI INSURGENCY**

### **1. The Sunni Insurgency**

Within weeks of the fall of Hussein's regime, a resistance movement began to form in Iraq. Although reports are conflicting on whether or not Saddam Hussein

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<sup>113</sup> Todd and others, *Iraq Tribal Study – Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, the Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe*, 4–3.

deliberately prepared to fight an irregular war after the U.S. invasion,<sup>114</sup> the record does show that the elements of the security services did distribute “thousands of tons of arms and munitions in readiness for the conflict, storing them in civilian areas, mosques, schools and hospitals.”<sup>115</sup>

But the presence of weapons strewn about does not create an insurgency in and of itself; other factors are required. Writing in 1970, Scott and Clark hypothesize that a number of preconditions, combined with a precipitating event are required for an insurgency to begin in the case of an invading or occupying army—hostility toward the occupying regime; a discontented elite willing to provide organization and leadership; readiness to use force; and the capacity to conduct insurgent conflict.<sup>116</sup> All four of these pre-conditions existed after the onset of the U.S.-led invasion, while the fall of Saddam’s statue on April 9, 2003 served as the precipitating event in the formation of the Sunni insurgency. Hostility towards the U.S.-led Coalition reached a boil with the removal of the Ba’ath government, and the later imposition of Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Orders #1 (De-Ba’athification) and #2 (Dissolution of the Ba’athist Security Forces).<sup>117</sup> This resulted in a complete reversal of Sunni position vis-à-vis Iraqi society. Those

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<sup>114</sup> A large amount of speculation has been made on Saddam’s reported comment—“resist one week and after that I will take over”—to his ministers on the eve of the ground war. Many observers believe that Saddam actually planned to use an insurgency rather than WMD to fight the coalition. However, the sole mention of any plan in the unclassified literature of the Iraqi regime to prepare foreign fighters for a post-war insurgency is mentioned in the *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq’s WMD*. M14, the Directorate of Special Operations for the Iraqi Intelligence Service, conducted special operations both inside and outside of Iraq. According to the report, M14 oversaw the Challenge Project, “a highly secretive project regarding explosives.” After the ground war, the U.S. Joint Forces Command sponsored an effort to develop lessons learned from the initial campaign. After interviewing numerous Ba’ath Party officials and government administrators, they conclude that there were no deliberate plans for waging an irregular war after the invasion. They attribute the numerous munitions distributed around the country to Saddam’s plan to prevent their destruction by an air campaign as had been done in the 1991 conflict. For more information see Kevin M. Woods and Joint Center for Operational Analysis, *Iraqi Perspectives Project: A View of Operation Iraqi Freedom from Saddam’s Senior Leadership* (Norfolk, VA: United States Joint Forces Command, Joint Center for Operational Analysis, 2006), 210; United States Central Intelligence Agency, *Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq’s WMD*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2004), 78.

<sup>115</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 163.

<sup>116</sup> Andrew MacKay Scott and Donald P. Clark, *Insurgency* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 18.

<sup>117</sup> United States. Coalition Provisional Authority, *Coalition Provisional Authority Order 1: De-Ba’athification of Iraqi Society* (Baghdad, Iraq: Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003); United States. Coalition Provisional Authority, *Coalition Provisional Authority Order 2: Dissolution of Entities* (Baghdad, Iraq: Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003).

Sunnis who found them thrown out of positions of status and power served as a disaffected elite who were able to turn informal networks and patronage systems into organizational structures needed for insurgent action. The readiness to use force as a method was merely the result of a semantic transition from “repelling” coalition forces during the invasion to “resisting” the occupation. Finally, the capacity to conduct insurgent conflict stemmed from the aforementioned presence of copious amounts of military hardware strewn about the country and rudimentary military skills held by the population at large as a result of Ba’athist conscription policies. But what may have begun as a guerilla effort by remaining pockets of former regime loyalists sprang into a wider popular-based insurgency as the year went on due to a number of other reasons.

*a. Motivations of the Sunni Insurgency*

What then provided Iraqis with the motivation to rise up against the Coalition, when—viewed from the American perspective—they had been freed from the weight of the Ba’athist yoke? One author provides an insight into this phenomenon:

The process of social and psychological disruption that accompanies the downfall of traditional societies opens the way to a host of sharp cleavages within such societies. A general sense of social insecurity may intensify the urge to seek the sense of identity that comes from loyalty to ethnic, regional, or other traditional or parochial associations.<sup>118</sup>

With the fall of Saddam’s statue in Baghdad’s Firdos Square on April 9, 2003, the Ba’ath state of Iraq was effectively dissolved. Iraqis then turned to those other symbols of their identity and, in many ways, the removal of the Ba’athist controls led to a resurgence of identification by religious sect. Being lesser than a national identity, but broad enough to subsume lower levels of identity such as the tribe, city and province, the sect—as a supra-tribal and sub-national means of identity—became the one of the basic defining characteristics of the Iraqi insurgency. The lion’s share of the Iraqi insurgency was based on the simple fact that, as the minority, the Sunni had the greatest reason to resist the imposition of a Shi’a-dominated central government. Although JAM and other

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<sup>118</sup> Lucian W. Pye, "The Roots of Insurgency and the Commencement of Rebellions," in *Internal War: Problems and Approaches*, ed. Harry Eckstein (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 164.

like-minded Shi'a insurgents had reasons to reject the ostensibly secular central government, taking up arms to change the government was hardly necessary due to Shi'a dominance of the ballot box. However, for the Sunni, the situation was drastically different. Having been seen the Ba'ath regime evaporate, the Sunni had no patron to protect and elevate them in Iraqi society.

At its heart, the Sunni insurgency arose out of a loss of Sunni identity. The Sunnis not only lost their positions in government due to marginal Ba'athist affiliation, but their entire way of life had been upended with the invasion. Additionally, the primacy of the Sunni in governing Iraq was taken away and given to the Shi'a majority, further compounding the Sunni loss of prestige. Ahmed Hashim provides a deeper analysis of this loss of identity and why its loss cut so deeply in the Sunni psyche:

For the Sunni Arabs the downfall of the regime in April 2003 was not only or even primarily the collapse of power and privileges—indeed, many of them had little power and few, if any privileges—but of the entire nationalist edifice that has been in existence for more than eight decades and that had *identified* Iraq with them. This was cataclysmic. It constituted a grievance [emphasis in original].<sup>119</sup>

The Bush Administration desired to implement a pluralist democratic society in Iraq, further compounding the loss of Sunni identity stemming from both the actions of the coalition and the CPA's dictums. Democracy would place the Sunni into a new position in Iraqi society—that of a permanent minority. Without a governmental system that protected minority rights, the Sunni would always be on the losing end of the Shi'a majority. "Groups such as actors in protracted conflict situations initiate plans, actions, reactions and strategies in order to accomplish the goal of satisfying individual and societal needs or of reducing and eliminating need deficiencies," notes Azar.<sup>120</sup> Realizing the need to restore their lost identity in post-Saddam Iraq, the Sunnis took to arms as a way of ensuring the return to some sort of *status quo ante*, even though the restoration of Sunni dominance was anathema to U.S. policy.

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<sup>119</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 68–70.

<sup>120</sup> Edward E. Azar, "Protracted International Conflicts: Ten Propositions," in *International Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, eds. Edward E. Azar and John W. Burton (Sussex, UK: Wheatsheaf, 1986), 33.

In addition to a loss of Sunni identity, the U.S. invasion was perceived by the Sunnis as an illegitimate occupation of their territory by a foreign power, thus, the move toward armed conflict with the coalition was a natural, legitimate response for the Sunnis. “Iraq is our homeland, it’s our Iraq. If you don’t defend your land, you will not defend your honor. Each square foot of Iraq is worth the soul of our lives. Each square foot of Iraq is worth the breath we take,” notes an Iraqi butcher in Adhamiya in the fall of 2003.<sup>121</sup> The presence of an occupier in their midst meant that all means of resistance were on the table, from passive resistance to armed violence. “All kinds of resistance are ‘correct,’” notes a Sunni imam, “because the nationalists are fighting for nationalism, the Arabs for the Arabs, and the Muslims for Islam. They all lead to the same conclusion—that an occupied country should resist.”<sup>122</sup> In this environment, it was relatively easy for insurgents to mobilize popular support—“If a country has suffered foreign invasion, the population is likely to be easily reached by the appeals of the insurgents. The predisposition to resist will be there, and the insurgent leadership need only activate latent feelings and channel the resulting action,” notes Scott and Clark.<sup>123</sup> In some ways all it took was for Bush to sound like Lieutenant General Maude, who captured Baghdad from the Ottomans in 1917 to say, “Our coalition came to Iraq as liberators and we will depart as liberators.”<sup>124</sup> To Iraqis, Maude’s lines were familiar, and Bush’s words must have brought about a sense of déjà-vu.

But as much as these two factors provided an impetus for the start of the Sunni insurgency, it is important to understand that insurgent objectives often change over time as the result of changes in the political environment. This is especially the case with Iraq. What originally started out as an anti-occupation insurgency, designed to resist

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<sup>121</sup> The Butcher, as quoted in *Meeting Resistance*, DVD, directed by Molly Bingham and Steve Connors (New York: Nine Lives Documentary Productions, 2007).

<sup>122</sup> The Imam, as quoted in Bingham and Connors, *Meeting Resistance*.

<sup>123</sup> Scott and Clark, *Insurgency*, 23.

<sup>124</sup> Upon capturing Baghdad, British lieutenant General Sir Fredrick Stanley Maude noted in a speech to the residents of Baghdad that “our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators.” For Bush’s remarks, see George W. Bush, “President Addresses the Nation,” The White House, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/09/20030907-1.html> (accessed January 13, 2010). For Maude’s remarks, see Stanley Maude, “The Proclamation of Baghdad,” *Harper’s Magazine* 306, no. 1836 (May, 2003), 31.

Coalition attempts to impose rule over Iraq, eventually morphed into a civil insurgency in the summer of 2004 as Sunni insurgent groups recognized as fact their reduced number. As the U.S. support to a Shi'a-dominated Iraq continued with the installation of the Interim Iraqi Government (IIG), the Sunni continued to use violence as a means to extract political power in the post-Saddam government. Lost Sunni influence over Iraqi society and the ascendance of the Shi'a to near-permanent positions of power in the elections of 2005, led to increased efforts against those seen as contributing to the Sunni fall from power. As Shi'a-dominated and U.S.-sponsored national governments were formed, Sunni resistance took on a defensive character, as Sunnis began to fear Shi'a retribution for years of Sunni rule over Iraq.

Yet while indigenous factors—a loss of identity and the need to restore a sense of social balance—were critical in the development and growth of the Sunni insurgency, mistakes by coalition forces made at the tactical, operational and strategic levels contributed to increasing levels of Sunni resistance to the presence of the U.S. and its allies in Iraq. At the tactical level, the lack of cultural understanding of Iraqi society was largely absent from coalition forces' interaction with the population after the fall of the Ba'ath regime. The insensitive manner in which soldiers conducted house to house searches and handled detainees inflamed Iraqi sensitivities. In addition, the occupation of former regime palaces and monuments likely contributed as well. In Baghdad, U.S. forces occupied the al-Shaheed Monument, a tribute to the Iraqi soldiers who died in the Iran-Iraq War, using its grounds as a motor pool. Inside, where the names of fallen Iraqi soldiers are inscribed in a manner similar to the Vietnam Memorial, U.S. forces used the area as a parking area, posting signs for designated parking spots atop the engraved names.<sup>125</sup>

At the operational and strategic levels, these mistakes can be categorized as heinous when viewed in hindsight. The absence of any coherent post-invasion planning done in the run up to the invasion, including the failure to consider the possibility of an insurgency and the Bush Administration's ill-conceived policy to impose

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<sup>125</sup> Antoon and others, *About Baghdad*.

the CPA—in Iraqi eyes a governing apparatus much akin to the British Mandate of the previous century—also contributed to the rapid growth of the insurgency through the summer and fall of 2003.<sup>126</sup> Yet, even in the midst of these grave errors, the ignominious actions at Abu Ghraib prison in the fall and winter of 2003, and its shoddy handling, stand out as a key accelerant to the growth of a nascent Sunni insurgency.

**b. Composition of the Sunni Insurgency**

The Sunni insurgency was not as monolithic as many casual observers assume. Instead, it maintained a high degree of variegation and was full of nuances. No two insurgent groups—or insurgents for that matter—were exactly alike. All had diverging views on what was at stake and what should be done about it in the aftermath of the U.S. invasion, as will be described later. Rather than smooth uniformity, the topography of the insurgency was full of valleys and mountains. Amongst the Sunni populace, a number of insurgent groups emerged along various lines, and many have drifted between categories over time. These groups can be categorized along lines describing their overall objectives, as depicted in Table 2.<sup>127</sup>

<u>Type</u>	<u>Representative Groups</u>	
Secular & Islamist Nationalists	<i>Fida'iyin Saddam</i> <i>Jaish Muhammad</i> (2003-2005)	New Ba'ath Party <i>Al-Awdah</i>
Iraqi Salafists	1920 Revolutionary Brigade <i>Jaish al-Rashideen</i> <i>Jaish al-Mujahideen</i> <i>Jaish Muhammad</i> (2005-)	Islamic Army in Iraq HAMAS-Iraq <i>Ansar al-Sunna</i>
Transnational Jihadi Salafists	<i>Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad</i> (2001-2004)	Al Qaeda in Iraq (2004- )

Table 2. Iraqi Insurgent Groups.

<sup>126</sup> The actions of the CPA have been widely chronicled and fall outside the scope of this thesis. For further information, see James Dobbins, Coalition Provisional Authority and International Security and Defense Policy Center, *Occupying Iraq: A History of the Coalition Provisional Authority* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corp., 2009), 364.

<sup>127</sup> Categorization here is a very rough way to explain an extremely complex phenomenon. Like living organisms depending on the evolution of events, relationships and the external environment, an insurgency is difficult to fully understand. The numerous official and unofficial groups and sub-groups, especially when combined with their fleeting, chameleon-like character, pose problems for the understanding of an insurgency such as this. While it does not accurately indicate the granular nature of the Sunni insurgency, for conceptual purposes I have stayed with presenting a loose categorization, as this allows for the understanding of the basic contours of the insurgency.

The majority of early Sunni insurgent groups had a nationalist aspect to their rhetoric. In the fall of 2003, an Iraqi political scientist noted that “in reality, the vast majority of this resistance is a nationalist, popular resistance by Iraqis who have no relationship with the former regime.”<sup>128</sup> In Iraq, the nationalist camp has initially maintained two distinct approaches to nationalism—secular nationalists and Islamist nationalists. The core groups of the secular nationalists are formed around those former Ba’athists and are known by Coalition Forces as Former Regime Elements (FRE) or Former Regime Loyalists (FRL). The Ba’athists were the core of the insurgency in its early months, as many Sunnis waited to see what would happen. As previously noted, it is unknown to what extent the Ba’athist resistance was planned for by Saddam prior to the U.S. invasion. But it is without doubt that many of the Ba’athist insurgent organizations were composed of former members of the intelligence and security services of the Hussein regime. *Al Awdah* (The Return) is an example of an insurgent group comprised of former security officials, coming into prominence in mid-June 2003. But with the capture of Saddam in December 2003, the secular nationalists were largely discredited. As they tried to cast off the ties to Ba’ath secularism, many moved toward the Islamist nationalist camp.

Similarly, Islamic nationalists are comprised of those Iraqis opposing the Coalition on nationalistic and Islamic principles, believing that resistance is further justified along the lines of the defensive *jihad* “imposed on them by aggressive forces intent on dividing the country, marginalizing the Sunnis by turning power over to the Iranian-backed Shi’a parties and the U.S.-dependent parties, and plundering Iraq’s oil wealth.”<sup>129</sup> This is likely the largest part of the Sunni insurgency and is comprised of those who believe in the unity of Iraq as a state rather than its devolution into sub-states or incorporation into the caliphate. Hashim notes that “these organizations range from those that believe that they have a legitimate right to resist occupation and do not feel it is

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<sup>128</sup> The Professor, as quoted in Bingham and Connors, *Meeting Resistance*.

<sup>129</sup> Mohammed M. Hafez and United States Institute of Peace, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007), 72.

necessary to develop a more complex ideological formation for their resistance, to actors who have articulated solid nationalist and Islamist principles to justify their resistance activities.”<sup>130</sup>

Iraqi Salafists are comprised of those groups who, “promote a philosophy of *tawhid*, the absolute unity of God, and excoriate any system that adopts man-made rules and laws and fails to rule in accordance with *sharia* (Islamic law).”<sup>131</sup> Salafism is a form of Sunni Islam that venerates the form of Islam practiced by the first three generations following the Prophet Mohammed, based on a popular *hadith* or saying of the Prophet—“The best of my community [i.e., Muslims] are my generation, then those who come after them and then those who follow them.”<sup>132</sup> However useful the term Salafism is in describing insurgent groups, it provides little insight into the expected political ends desired by these groups. Hence, Salafism should be considered as a spectrum of varying religious concepts regarding how Islam should serve to govern the actions of man, through the concept of *manhaj*, or the practicing one’s Islamic creed. Although Salafists concur that the pious forefathers practiced the pure form of Islam, there is little agreement on what *manhaj* looks like in political life in the Muslim world.<sup>133</sup>

In spite of this, insurgents within this category seek to unify certain theological and political concepts. To the majority of Iraqi Salafis, modern ideas of governance (e.g., democracy) and religious ideas (e.g., Sufism and Shi’ite Islam) are

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<sup>130</sup> Ahmed S. Hashim, *Iraq's Sunni Insurgency* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2009), 19.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>132</sup> As quoted in Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 34.

<sup>133</sup> To differentiate the various camps and posture themselves as the superior variant of Salafism, the Jihadi Salafists have parsed Salafism into eight sub-groups in a somewhat pejorative way. In their eyes, the spectrum moves from a position of “selling out” (Establishment Salafists) to that of true self-fulfillment of the Salafi creed (Jihadi Salafis). Sub groups on this spectrum include Establishment Salafists, Madkhali (or Jami) Salafists, Albani Salafists, Scientific or Academic Salafists, Salafist Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood), Sururis, Qutubis, and Global Jihadis. For a detailed analysis of each of these sub-groups of Salafism and how they relate to Jihadi Salafists, see Jarret Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 22-41. Similarly, Bernard Haykel parses Salafists into three groups: Salafi Jihadis, non-violent political activists, and quietists. Haykel, *On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action*, 48-50. In a like manner, Quintan Wiktorowicz divides Salafists into the categories of purists, politicians and jihadis. Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (2006), 208.

anathema, and thus provide the rationale for their continued violent activism against the Iraqi government and Coalition forces. For example, a communiqué establishing the a Salafist umbrella group, the Jihad and Reform Front (RJF)<sup>134</sup> states that the group's position on the political process—

We don't admit with any political game starting with the bad known Braymer [sic] council to the sectarian Maliki traitor government. We also don't admit with the sectarian elections and consequently what built on it. We don't admit in any agrrement [sic] that these governments endorsed. We don't admit with the constitution that wrote under the occupation weapons, and also we don't admit to any constitution that opposes Allah's faith.<sup>135</sup>

This view on governance has allowed certain elements of the Iraqi Salafis—Ansar al-Sunna, Jaish Muhammad, Jaish al-Mujahideen, and the Islamic Army of Iraq—to maintain a degree of common cause with AQI until 2006-7, based on a rejection of the principles on which the post-Saddam government was established. For the Iraqi Salafis, nothing short of the removal of U.S. and coalition forces and the establishment of a Sunni Islamic state will see a reduction of insurgent activity. “And the front by its constituents—commit to continue Jihad in Iraq until accomplishing all the goals, which is the complete and true withdrawing of the occupation in all its figures from Iraq, governance in Allah's religion and supporting the truth,” notes the same RJF communiqué.<sup>136</sup>

Transnational Jihadi Salafists<sup>137</sup> under the guise of al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and its associates—the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC), later the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)—comprise the final category of the Iraqi insurgency. Despite its relatively small size within the wider Iraqi insurgency, to many observers AQI was the most visible—and the most demonized—portion of the Iraqi insurgency. From a theological perspective,

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<sup>134</sup> The RJF is an alliance between the Islamic Army in Iraq, Jaish al-Mujahideen, and the Al-Fatihin Army. Established in May 2007 by the IAI, to many observers, the RJF served as a true indigenous counterbalance to the AQI dominated Islamic State of Iraq.

<sup>135</sup> "JR Front Establishing Statement," Islamic Army in Iraq, [http://iaisite-eng.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=35](http://iaisite-eng.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=35) (accessed January 6, 2010).

<sup>136</sup> *JR Front Establishing Statement*.

<sup>137</sup> Jihadi Salafist is used here in lieu of the more common Salafi-Jihadists to indicate the Salafist core of their beliefs, with Jihadi used to indicate a specific current amongst Salafists.

Jihadi Salafists have tended to take the most conservative aspects of several forms of Salafism and combined it into a different product. The key ideas used in defining Jihadi Salafist doctrine are *Aqidah* (Islamic creed), *Tawhid* (the oneness or unity of God), *Takfir* (the practice of calling individuals an apostate), *Al-Wala wal-Bara* (loyalty and disavowal), and *Jihad* (struggle), and will be explained in further detail in the next section in regards to AQI's ideology.<sup>138</sup> The fusion of these five points of religious doctrine creates a proactive version of Salafism, which "concentrates on the analysis of political reality, devising strategies and practices for how to change it, and applying them to different situations and circumstances."<sup>139</sup> Whereas Iraqi Salafists tend to utilize an ideology of "violent irredentism" seeking to maintain a telluric edge to their platform, Jihadi Salafists utilize a political ideology of "global Jihadism"—a willingness to link the Iraqi insurgency to the broader transnationalist jihadi agenda against the far enemy.<sup>140</sup>

## 2. Al Qaeda in Iraq

Having understood the nuances in the greater Sunni Iraqi insurgency and loosely categorizing them by their ideology and political goals, it is to a more in-depth examination of AQI that we now turn, to provide an insight in to the pre-conditions that contributed to AQI's falling out with Iraq's Sunnis and the rest of the Sunni insurgency in 2006-07.

Unlike the rest of the Sunni insurgency, nearly all of which developed in the immediate aftermath of the regime's fall, Al Qaeda in Iraq evolved along much different lines. AQI originated initially from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Jihadi Salafist group, *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* (TWJ), or "Unity and Jihad." After being released from a Jordanian prison in the 1999, Zarqawi formed TWJ to destroy the Jordanian monarchical

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<sup>138</sup> Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice*, 39–51.

<sup>139</sup> It is because of this penchant for action through violence that the Jihadi strain of Salafism is denounced by the majority of Salafis. Roel Meijer, "Introduction," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 24.

<sup>140</sup> For a rationale based categorization system, rather than a theologically based system, in the study and analysis of Islamic activism, see Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islam," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 259.

system and establish an Islamic government by “training suicide bombers in a number of camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan.”<sup>141</sup> During his time in Afghanistan, Zarqawi and TWJ received financial support from Osama bin Laden’s al Qaeda organization, establishing a loose affiliation between the two organizations in spite of differences over the strategic sequencing of Jihadi Salafist efforts. Unlike al Qaeda’s focus on the far enemy, Zarqawi’s operational focus at the turn of the century remained on Jordan—the near enemy.<sup>142</sup>

With the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001, Zarqawi fled Afghanistan as terrorist camps and bases were attacked. From that point on, the record of his activities remains murky until after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, with most sources indicating that the TWJ sought refuge in Kurdistan with Ansar al-Islam (AAI) in 2002.<sup>143</sup> With the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the far enemy came to Zarqawi’s neighborhood, allowing him to pragmatically shift TWJ’s operational focus to Iraq where he could battle both the far enemy while maintaining the ability to strike the near enemy. As fortuitous as this may have been in the early days of the invasion, Zarqawi and TWJ faced a major setback as the U.S. invasion also brought with it a direct assault on the Ansar al-Islam camp in Kurdistan.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Lee Hudson Teslick, "Profile: Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi," Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9866/> (accessed March 12, 2009); Mary Anne Weaver, "Inventing Al-Zarqawi," *The Atlantic Monthly* 298, no. 1 (July/August, 2006), 92.

<sup>142</sup> This is one of the major issues of contention between Zarqawi and bin Laden which prevent any merger attempts prior to the Iraq War. For Zarqawi, the “near enemy” was more dangerous than that of the “far enemy,” and thus should be the first focus for the international Salafi-jihadist movement. Bin Laden on the other hand—influenced by the Egyptian experience of Ayman al Zawahiri—felt that the far enemy should take primacy because of its support for the near enemy of apostate Muslim regimes.

<sup>143</sup> In his February 2003 speech to the United Nations, Secretary of State Colin Powell accused Iraq of being in collusion with Zarqawi. According to Powell, Iraq gave Zarqawi a base from which to launch operations in the broader Middle East and Europe, train operatives, and support in developing chemical weapons such as ricin. "Full Text of Colin Powell's Speech: U.S. Secretary of State's Address to the United Nations Security Council," *The Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/feb/05/iraq.usa> (accessed January 6, 2010). For Zarqawi’s connections in Kurdistan see Jonathan Schanzer and Dennis Ross, *Al-Qaeda's Armies: Middle East Affiliate Groups & the Next Generation of Terror* (Washington, D.C.: Specialist Press International; Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2005), 136; Hafez and United States Institute of Peace, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, 173.

<sup>144</sup> For a detailed description of Operation VIKING HAMMER, the assault on the Ansar al Islam stronghold, see Chapter 13 of Linda Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces*, 1st ed. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

Throughout the summer of 2003, TWJ is credited with—and more importantly, admits—very little activity in Iraq as the group rebuilt itself in the aftermath of the loss of its Kurdistan base. But by the end of the summer, the group commenced operations. Two major suicide attacks in August 2003 can be seen as an attempt by Zarqawi to attack both the far and near enemies in Iraq. The first attack, on 19 August, destroyed the UN headquarters in Baghdad, killing Sergio Vieira de Mello, the UN special envoy to Iraq. The immediate effect of this attack was that the UN closed their offices in Iraq, leaving the U.S. to rebuild Iraq with only its meager coalition. Ten days later, on Friday, 29 August 2003, a member of TWJ drove a car laden with explosives into the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf, killing nearly a hundred worshippers and Shi'a Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, the leader of the Shi'a political group, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq.<sup>145</sup> This attack was a harbinger of things to come as Zarqawi and TWJ attempted to split Iraqi society apart and introduce their Jihadi Salafist agenda.

Throughout the fall and winter of 2003, Zarqawi and TWJ conducted only 25 operations as it prepared to prepare the organization for future operations following its eviction from Kurdistan earlier in the year. Zarqawi explains his slow start—

What has prevented us from going public is that we have been waiting until we have weight on the ground and finish preparing integrated structures capable of bearing the consequences of going public so that we appear in strength and do not suffer a reversal...<sup>146</sup>

Much of Zarqawi's preparations went toward finding the right personnel with whom they could collaborate with in Iraq. "We have been striving for some time to observe the

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<sup>145</sup> The attacker was later identified as Yassin Jarrad, father of Zarqawi's second wife. Nimrod Raphaeli, "MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis no. 231 - 'The Sheikh of the Slaughterers': Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi and the Al-Qaeda Connection," Middle East Media Research Institute, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1406.htm> (accessed January 7, 2010).

<sup>146</sup> Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, *Untitled Letter*, 2004, [http://www.cpa-iraq.org/transcripts/20040212\\_zarqawi\\_full.html](http://www.cpa-iraq.org/transcripts/20040212_zarqawi_full.html) (accessed January 7, 2010). This letter, which was captured by U.S. forces in January 2004 and publicly released the next month, shows no clear attribution to its actual author. Written in highly structured Arabic, it may not actually have been written by Zarqawi himself. It is probable that it could have been written by an associate, most likely by a spiritual mentor such as Sheik Abu Anas al-Shami. Nevertheless, it appears to have originated at the highest levels of TWJ, due to its markers of Jihadi-Salafist thought. Amongst the cognoscenti, the letter is considered to bear the imprint of Zarqawi's thinking and should be considered a credible indicator of the group's thoughts about the situation in Iraq during the winter of 2003–4.

arena and sift the those [sic] who work in it in search of those who are sincere and on the right path, so that we can cooperate with them for the good and coordinate some actions with them, so as to achieve solidarity and unity after testing and trying them,” Zarqawi further explains.<sup>147</sup> But, it was not until the capture and subsequent beheading of U.S. citizen Nicholas Berg in the spring of 2004 that the group stepped out of the shadows into the world press, despite conducting two major suicide attacks against Shi’a worshipers in Baghdad and Karbala on March 2, while they were celebrating the Shi’a holiday of Ashura.

Iraq had become the latest destination for the transnational jihadist after previous forays into Afghanistan, Somalia, Bosnia, Chechnya and other parts of the Middle East. What made Zarqawi’s organization a magnet for growth was its external connections and timing. “In the chaotic aftermath of Saddam’s fall Iraq became an ideal venue for deterritorialized [sic] nomadic jihadists to prosecute their dream of unifying the *ummah* under the banner of a universal Caliphate,” notes Phillips.<sup>148</sup> Being comprised of non-Iraqis, outsiders could readily join and be accepted by Zarqawi’s group more than other homegrown insurgent groups.

Although not formally connected to al Qaeda, Zarqawi made moves to further affiliate himself with bin Laden. After explaining his strategy for TWJ in Iraq, Zarqawi proposes subservience to bin Laden:

If you agree with us on it, if you adopt it as a program and road, and if you are convinced of the idea of fighting the sects of apostasy, we will be your readied soldiers, working under your banner, complying with your orders, and indeed swearing fealty to you publicly and in the news media, vexing the infidels and gladdening those who preach the oneness of God.<sup>149</sup>

After months of discussions—likely over Zarqawi’s animosity over the Shi’a—in late 2004 Zarqawi extended obeisance to bin Laden in late 2004, formalizing the relationship

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<sup>147</sup> al-Zarqawi, *Untitled Letter*.

<sup>148</sup> Phillips, *How Al Qaeda Lost Iraq*, 70.

<sup>149</sup> al-Zarqawi, *Untitled Letter*.

between Zarqawi's group in Iraq and al Qaeda writ large.<sup>150</sup> In a response given on an audiotape on 27 December 2004, bin Laden introduced Zarqawi to the Iraqi people as his representative in Iraq—"Know that the warrior comrade Abu Mus'ab Al-Zarqawi is the commander of the Al-Qa'ida organization in the land of the Tigris and the Euphrates, and the comrades in the organization there must obey him."<sup>151</sup>

Upon swearing loyalty to bin Laden, Zarqawi's group took the moniker *Tanzim Qa'idat al-Jihadi Bilad al-Rafidayan* (TQJBR), or more commonly known as al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). The relationship of al Qaeda to AQI is similar to that of a corporation and an independent franchisee. The corporation, in this case Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda, grants an operating license to Jordanian-born Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—leader of a local aspiring insurgent group in Iraq—to conduct operations in its name. The corporation thus gains access to a region where it had little prior access and the franchisee receives the benefit of a ready-made, recognizable corporate image. However, because of the corporate/franchisee relationship, little corporate guidance is followed as the corporation is not the owner of the local franchise. The common consensus on this arrangement is that it helped both parties more than it hurt each of them. AQI got access to a global brand, funding and recognition, but the group took its own direction regarding its operational strategy.

#### *a. Ideology of AQI*

The political ideology of AQI is rooted in a current of Islamist discourse, recently evolved over the last three decades, namely Jihadi Salafism. To fully appreciate AQI's political vision, we must delve into Jihadi Salafist beliefs and unpack a number of doctrinal issues—*Tawhid*, *Aqidah*, *Takfir*, *Al-Wala wal-Bara*, and *Jihad*—on which Jihadi Salafists take a more extreme stance than other Salafists.

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<sup>150</sup> Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, "Communiqué from *Al-Tawheed Wal-Jihad* Movement (Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi) in Iraq," Flashpoint Intel, <http://www.flashpoint-intel.com/images/documents/zarqawi-bayat.pdf> (accessed January 7, 2010).

<sup>151</sup> Osama bin Laden, as quoted in "MEMRI: Special Dispatch no. 837 - Osama Bin Laden to the Iraqi People," Middle East Media Research Institute, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1286.htm> (accessed January 7, 2010).

*Tawhid* is a concept that refers to the oneness of God, forbidding any equivalent associates of God such as idols or the veneration of saints. In the puritanical form of Salafism, Wahabbisim, *tawhid* is comprised of four divisions: *tawhid rububiyaa*, “unity of lordship and the affirmation of God’s unique qualities and powers”; *tawhid al-asma’ wal-sifat*, “affirmation of the unity of his names and attributes”; *tawhid uluhiyaa*, “oneness of divinity, the oneness of the object of worship, total submission to God alone”; and *tawhid hakimiyya*, the sovereignty of God.<sup>152</sup> *Tawhid rububiyaa* holds that God is the sole creator and provider and maintains no equal, superior, or offspring. *Tawhid al-asma’ wal-sifat* refers to God having characteristics that are unique to him and have no equivalent human form. *Tawhid uluhiyaa* maintains that only God can be worshipped; prayer and worship of other objects or persons violates the unity of God. While the first three concepts of *tawhid* are commonly accepted by other Salafists, *tawhid hakimiyya* is emphasized by Jihadi Salafists, yet rejected by mainstream Salafis. This form of *tawhid* was developed by jihadi ideologues such as Qutb and Maududi, and maintains that as the source of all creation; only God can provide laws delineating what is good and what is evil, thereby, condemning those governments who do not utilize *Shari’a* as the sole source of human law. “Unlike the *mutazila* (rationalist strand in Islam), [Jihadi] Salafis do not believe that humans can arrive at the truth or distinguish between right and wrong through reasoning,” writes Hafez. “There are limits to human rationality, and because one can never comprehend God’s plan beyond what he has revealed for us, so one has to follow the word of God as exemplified by the sayings and deeds of his Prophet and the pious ancestors.”<sup>153</sup> To Jihadi Salafists, *tawhid* is the *sine qua non* of their belief, as evidenced by Abu Maysara, a spokesman for AQI. He notes that one of AQI’s goals is to “renew pure monotheism that was brought by our Prophet

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<sup>152</sup> Roel Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), xv.

<sup>153</sup> Hafez and United States Institute of Peace, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, 67.

Muhammad amongst those whose monotheism was sullied by the filth of polytheistic elements, and the spreading of the axiom 'there is no God but Allah' in lands where Islam has not yet arrived.”<sup>154</sup>

*Aqidah*, or the Islamic creed, is understood to be the codification of a Muslim’s beliefs. More than a statement acknowledging Allah as God, the *aqidah* sets forth the principles by which a Muslim lives, bringing him in alignment with the teachings of God, moving one closer to perfection. By laying out a system of belief, the *aqidah* serves as “a key element in learning the difference between right action and wrong action in the eyes of God,” writes Brachman.<sup>155</sup> To the Jihadi Salafists, the central tenet in their *aqidah* is *tawhid*, serving as the point from which all other points of religious doctrine emanate from.

*Takfir* is the act of pronouncing another person an unbeliever and placing him outside the Muslim community, in a manner similar to the Christian concept of excommunication. *Takfir* allows Jihadi Salafis to pronounce those who do not abide by their interpretation of *tawhid* as apostate, whether Muslim or not. Unlike the majority of Sunnis who accept *takfir* against individuals, Jihadi Salafists extend this point of doctrine to entire communities and governments.<sup>156</sup> Thus, to Jihadi Salafists, any government that fails to acknowledge the sovereignty of God is to be rejected as apostate. One final note is that unlike other Salafis, who believe in a strict process to declare *takfir*, Jihadi Salafists have an extremely low standard of evidence—“We believe that anyone who performs a statement or an act of unbelief is an unbeliever because of this [statement or act] even if he did not intend unbelief by this.”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> "MEMRI: Special Dispatch no. 884 - The Iraqi Al-Qa'ida Organization: A Self-Portrait," Middle East Media Research Institute, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1344.htm> (accessed January 7, 2010).

<sup>155</sup> Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice*, 42.

<sup>156</sup> Omar Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 9.

<sup>157</sup> "Al-Qaeda's Creed and Path," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer, trans. Bernard Haykel (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 52. Haykel, *On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action*, 52.

*Al-wala wal-bara*, or loyalty and disavowal, is a relatively recent development in Islamic thought.<sup>158</sup> Originally considered a religious innovation (*bid'a*) by the founder of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, it has become a mainstay of Jihadi Salafist thought thanks to its development by such scholars as the 13<sup>th</sup> Century scholar Ibn Taymiyya and the more recently, the Palestinian-Jordanian ideologue 'Isam ibn Muhammad ibn Tahir al-Barqawi, who is more widely known as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.<sup>159</sup> Al-Maqdisi's interpretation of *al-wala wal-bara* links loyalty to the Islamic statement of faith, the *shahada* ("There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah") and *tawhid* to "effectively turn denunciation of political leaders in the Muslim world into an obligation that true believers cannot possibly avoid. Instead of giving them their loyalty, al-Maqdisi insists that Muslims are obliged by the very basis of their faith to disavow un-Islamic rulers."<sup>160</sup> In effect, the doctrine of *al-wala wal-bara*, not only dictates specific obligations to Muslims, but it also divides the world into two distinct camps: the faithful, and the *kuffar*, or unbelievers. Through this Manichean perspective, Jihadi Salafists like al-Maqdisi justifies that *takfir* can be applied to *kuffar* because the sins they commit can be classified as indicating major unbelief, or *kufr akbar*, without having to prove *i'tiqad* (conviction of sin), *istihal* (permission to sin), *jahd* (negation or denial)—all conventional standards to conduct *takfir*.

To the most Jihadi Salafists, the concept of *Jihad* is interpreted as "fighting" from a *Shari'a* perspective, and more specifically that it is to take the form of the offensive *jihad* (*Jihad al-Talab wal Ibtida*'). "Jihad is an indispensable component of comprehensive Islamic activism," writes Hafez, "which begins with preaching (*dawa*)

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<sup>158</sup> Joas Wagemakers, "The Transformation of a Radical Concept: *Al-Wala' wa-l-Bara'* in the Ideology of Abu Muhammad Al-Maqdisi," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 81.

<sup>159</sup> Amongst Western audiences, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi's notoriety derives not from his ideological or theological writings, but by his close relationship with Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. The two originally met in Afghanistan during the 1990s and shared the same opinion of the Jordanian government. Returning to Jordan in 1993, the two began to establish an organization to attack the Jordanian regime and were later arrested and convicted for their actions. During their shared time together in Jordanian prison, it is widely assumed that Zarqawi soaked up the doctrinal principles of Jihadi Salafi thought from al-Maqdisi.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

and culminates with confronting obstinate unbelievers.”<sup>161</sup> A Jihadi-Salafi ideologue and Al-Qaeda commander, Yousef al Ayiri believes that *Jihad al-Talab wal Ibtida*’ “refers to the call made by Muslims to non-Muslims to convert to Islam. If non-Muslims resist this call, or reject Islamic authority over them, Islamic doctrine declares that Muslims have a collective obligation to fight them so that they do.”<sup>162</sup> *Jihad* is also a duty incumbent on the individual when an individual is called on to fight by a legitimate Muslim ruler, or if non-Muslims take a Muslim prisoner.<sup>163</sup> Abu Maysara notes that AQI wages

*Jihad* for the sake of Allah, so that His message be supreme, and in order to recapture all the lands of the Muslims from the hands of the infidels and the apostates, and to apply the *Shari'a* law, Allah's law, in these areas, without any distinction [in this respect] between ruler and ruled, and to free the Muslim prisoners of war, since this is a personal obligation [incumbent] on every Muslim, as all the *ulama* agree...<sup>164</sup>

A final aspect of *jihad* is that it is to continue until “all of humanity submits to Islam or the authority of Muslim rule.”<sup>165</sup> Thus for Jihadi Salafis, they have a divine mandate to continue to fight until Judgment Day.

These five doctrinal points serve to develop a specific *Weltanschauung* within Jihadi Salafists, which orients their actions towards the body of Muslims, or *ummah*, which they see as being under attack by apostates and infidels. Abu Maysara again notes that their efforts are “not an issue of Iraq in the geographic sense; [but] rather it is an issue for our great Islam.”<sup>166</sup> It is this orientation on the *ummah* and not the nation that provides the key distinction in distinguishing the political goals of Jihadi Salafists from Iraqi Salafists. Rather than liberating Iraq from the occupier and returning it to its residents, AQI aimed “to re-establish the Rightly-Guided Caliphate in accordance

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<sup>161</sup> Hafez and United States Institute of Peace, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, 70.

<sup>162</sup> Brachman, *Global Jihadism: Theory and Practice*, 50.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>164</sup> MEMRI: *Special Dispatch no. 884 - The Iraqi Al-Qa'ida Organization: A Self-Portrait*.

<sup>165</sup> Hafez and United States Institute of Peace, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq: The Strategy and Ideology of Martyrdom*, 70.

<sup>166</sup> MEMRI: *Special Dispatch no. 884 - The Iraqi Al-Qa'ida Organization: A Self-Portrait*.

with the Prophet's example, because [according to the tradition] 'whoever dies without having sworn allegiance to a Muslim ruler dies as an unbeliever.'"<sup>167</sup>

Yet, despite the seemingly divine mandate given to AQI, it is interesting to note that with this litany of doctrinal principles—*tawhid*, *aqidah*, *takfir*, *al-wala wal-bara*, and *jihad*—how much AQI differed from not only the rest of the Sunni insurgency, but also the Sunnis on whose behalf the group claimed to be fighting for. With such an extreme interpretation of Islamic doctrine advocating such a grand vision, AQI stood in stark contrast to local insurgent groups, who advocated resistance rather than wholesale revolution. Secular and Islamist nationalists may agree on reclaiming the dignity of Iraq, while the Iraqi Salafis might agree with the principles of monotheism and jihad, but the re-establishment of the Caliphate was anathema to those fighting for hearth and home.

#### ***b. Strategy of AQI***

The earliest indication of AQI's strategy to establish the Caliphate in Iraq is indicated both in the attacks of August 2003 and explained in detail in Zarqawi's intercepted letter. Viewing the *ummah* as having been favored by God by bringing the far enemy to Islamic lands, Zarqawi notes that the main front for the transnational Jihadi Salafi movement is now in Iraq—"We know from God's religion that the true, decisive battle between infidelity and Islam is in this land, i.e., in [Greater] Syria and its surroundings. Therefore, we must spare no effort and strive urgently to establish a foothold in this land."<sup>168</sup> By inserting itself into post-invasion Iraq, AQI hoped to use the clarion call of resistance to the infidel to gather Muslims around itself and create the beginnings of a new Islamic caliphate.

An analysis of Zarqawi's letter indicates that his efforts consist primarily of fighting a number of enemies. Zarqawi believed that his efforts against the U.S. were easily supported, calling them easy pickings. The Kurds were merely a nuisance, whose small numbers could be dealt with later. Collaborators, however, were TWJ's biggest

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<sup>167</sup> MEMRI: *Special Dispatch no. 884 - The Iraqi Al-Qa'ida Organization: A Self-Portrait.*

<sup>168</sup> al-Zarqawi, *Untitled Letter.*

threat. Their ability to ferret out members of his group and deliver them to the occupation forces was viewed with vehemence as they could foil his efforts before he could implement them—“This enemy, made up of the Shi`a filled out with Sunni agents, is the real danger that we face, for it is [made up of] our fellow countrymen, who know us inside and out.”<sup>169</sup>

However, in spite of the challenges posed by the occupation and its attendant collaborators, Iraq’s large majority of Shi’a were Zarqawi’s ultimate prize. Instead of just focusing on the far enemy, as bin Laden and other Jihadi Salafis would desire, Zarqawi viewed the near enemy as the better source to bring about the changes wanted by transnational Jihadi Salafists.<sup>170</sup> By provoking the Shi’a to retaliate against the Sunni after AQI’s attacks on Shi’a religious, political and popular targets, Zarqawi expected the Sunni to eliminate the Shi’a unwittingly on his behalf. Given the small amounts of Jihadi Salafists in Iraq—“negligible,” he notes in his letter—he could not take the Shi’a head on, and had to use an indirect method. In this sense, Zarqawi viewed himself and his group’s *raison d’être* as serving a function not unlike Lenin’s Vanguard Party, precipitating a revolution of the *ummah* against the apostates and infidels, ushering in the Caliphate and a new Golden age. If brutal and indiscriminate, the Shi’a response was sure to arouse the ire of the *ummah*—“Our fighting against the Shi`a is the way to drag the [Islamic] nation into the battle,” says Zarqawi. In his view, Iraq’s Sunnis were not so much an objective to be won over, but more of a tool to use in attacking the Shi’a. Zarqawi viewed the rank and file Sunni with disdain—“These masses are the silent majority, absent even though present...These, even if in general they hate the Americans...they look forward to a sunny tomorrow, a prosperous future, a carefree life, comfort, and favor,” he writes.<sup>171</sup> As such, the utility of the Sunni population lay in their deaths, serving as a rallying call to the *ummah*.

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<sup>169</sup> al-Zarqawi, *Untitled Letter*.

<sup>170</sup> For an analysis of the theological roots of anti-Shi’a belief in Jihadi Salafism, see Guido Steinberg, “Jihadi-Salafism and the Shi’is: Remarks about the Intellectual Roots of Anti-Shi’ism,” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 107.

<sup>171</sup> al-Zarqawi, *Untitled Letter*.

## C. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this chapter has been to show the interconnectedness of Iraq's past with the events unfolding in 2003–2004 as the Sunni insurgency began to grow. A historical analysis of the Iraq War cannot be examined in a vacuum. Long-term forces of economics, governance, and battling ideologies left Iraq's Sunnis with a specific mindset on how to respond to the changes brought about as a result of the Coalition's invasion. To sum up, Iraq's Sunnis and AQI had remarkably different formative experiences that they brought to the table after the fall of Saddam. In the main, Iraq's Sunnis felt the need to reestablish themselves in the framework of the new Iraq in a way that would ensure they were not thrown to the curb by new masters of Iraq. Accustomed to a certain standard of living and place in society, the Sunnis were anchored firmly to the physical and ideational aspects of the Iraqi nation. In stark contrast, Al Qaeda in Iraq, and its predecessor, TWJ, was more committed to revolutionary visions than the pragmatic concerns of the Sunnis. Now having introduced the two primary characters in the Sunni insurgency, we now turn to the evolution—or more properly, the devolution—of their relationship over the next four years.

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### III. THE REACTANTS

*If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.*

—Mark 3:24-25, NASB

In attempting to explain the causes of the decline of AQI, it is important to emphasize the role played by individuals, examining the options available to them at the time, their decisions, and on the consequences of those decisions as we move closer from the past—with its broad social forces—to the event under examination.<sup>172</sup> To that end, this chapter seeks to understand how this schism evolved. It is based on the contention that the schism between AQI and Iraq's Sunnis was precipitated by the disparities between their formative experiences, which, as shown in the previous chapter, manifested itself in the two having distinctively different ideologies and cultural differences. Compounding these differences, AQI faced a lack of embeddedness with the Sunni community at large—in effect standing on the outside looking into the tribally based society of Sunni Iraqis. As the two actors joined together to combat the U.S. occupation, these differences became evident, forcing AQI to adopt measures even more alien to the Sunnis, further emphasizing the differences between them.

The choice of actions made after 2003 by AQI, the Sunnis, the GoI and the U.S. shaped the path of the Iraqi insurgency from one with a broad array of potential outcomes to a discrete result where AQI was separated from the Sunnis, lacking popular support, and on the run. Like waves harnessing the forces of currents, wind, and tide hundreds of miles out to sea and increasing in power as they move closer to shore, Sunni resistance to the excess violence and *modus vivendi* of AQI increased, culminating in the developing of the *Sahwa* (Awakening) movement in late 2006.

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<sup>172</sup> Stone, *The Causes of the English Revolution, 1529–1642*, 117.

## A. RAISING THE BARN: 2003-04

### 1. Early Collaboration

In the year following the fall of the Ba'athist regime, AQI<sup>173</sup> and the Sunnis discovered that they were fellow travelers heading down the same road, sharing a common destination—the eviction of the U.S.-led coalition. A loose relationship with AQI brought a number of benefits to Sunni insurgents. AQI was initially welcomed by the Iraqi insurgency as additional forces resisting the U.S. occupation and were able to make inroads into the Sunni populace through simple methods and shared interests. This so-called “marriage of convenience” provided a mutually beneficial relationship in 2003-2004, allowing each party to utilize the other’s strengths to hide their weaknesses.

AQI provided the Sunni insurgency with three critical benefits that would help the fledgling resistance movement. First, AQI offered advanced military skills in guerilla warfare. As a result of sanctions against Saddam’s military establishment after the 1991 Gulf War, many of the Sunnis had only rudimentary military training.<sup>174</sup> Secondly, AQI brought with it a large amount of funding that enabled Sunni insurgents to pay for daily operations and to compensate for the reduced profits faced as a result of the collapse of the smuggling network maintained by the Ba’ath regime after the U.S. invasion. Finally, AQI’s links to the transnational Jihadi Salafist movement provided additional fighters to help reinforce the Sunni resistance.

The local connections provided by the Sunnis gave AQI the benefit of their native knowledge of conditions, factions, and safe areas, all of which were initially denied to the Jordanian-based nucleus of the group. This fountain of local information would help

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<sup>173</sup> I use the term AQI here for continuity and ease of reading rather than switching between TWJ and AQI, cognizant of the fact that AQI morphed from TWJ prior to bin Laden’s pronouncement in December 2004. In the latter half of this chapter, as AQI transformed into the Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC) and later the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), I again will use the term AQI for the same reasons.

<sup>174</sup> In a dissection of the Iraqi Army defeat in the invasion, Stephen Hosmer notes that the Iraqi Army’s lack of training is indicated by their “inability to carry out basic military operations. Among other shortcomings, the Iraqi forces appeared unable to (1) coordinate supporting arms and to maneuver, (2) exploit cover and concealment, and (3) shoot accurately.” Stephen T. Hosmer, *Why the Iraqi Resistance to the Coalition Invasion Was So Weak* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corp., 2007), 69.

offset their foreign origins and mitigate the risk of exposure by local collaborators. Zarqawi considers this a blessing for his group—“We have taken possession of growing numbers of locations, praise be to God, to be base sites for brothers who are kindling [the fire of] war and drawing the people of the country into the furnace of battle so that a real war will break out, God willing.”<sup>175</sup> Anbar provided a promising home for AQI to operate from. The province’s population was largely Sunni and coalition forces were few and far between early in the insurgency. Another prime factor in its development into its central role in the Iraqi insurgency stems from its geographical features: Anbar borders with five other Iraqi provinces and has international borders with Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, providing AQI with easy access into Iraq from abroad.

The decision to align with AQI in the early days of the Sunni insurgency bears evidence of the weak position vis-à-vis the Shi’a in which the Sunnis saw themselves. One Iraqi literati at the century-old Al-Shahbandar Café in the Rusafa District of Baghdad tells us:

My brother, listen, the pressure we’ve endured for 35 years has knocked us off balance. We are only human. We are a mass of nerves. This could only lead to a breakdown...you could say all Iraqis are schizophrenic. Why? Because we’ve been knocked off balance. What can we do? Constant pressure, so we will cling to any ray of hope even if it’s a straw in this sea. We lost balance, so we’ll take anything, even if it’s from the devil or the enemy. We just want something that would guarantee our stability and balance...There is no alternative, we have no choice. *We will shake the devil’s hand if we thought it would lift us a little* [emphasis added].<sup>176</sup>

The logic followed that of an old Arab proverb—“My brother and me against my cousin, my cousin and me against the stranger.”<sup>177</sup> This notion gave the Sunnis the ability to achieve cognitive liberation, reconciling the differences between themselves and the strange bedfellow they found themselves working with.

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<sup>175</sup> al-Zarqawi, *Untitled Letter*.

<sup>176</sup> Antoon and others, *About Baghdad*.

<sup>177</sup> Ed Blanche, "Brothers in Arms?" *Middle East*, no. 340 (December 2003), 7.

## 2. Early Friction

However, tensions began to mount as AQI began to establish itself in the Sunni population. In spite of their attractive offerings to the Sunni insurgency, AQI still had a limited appeal to the population, which was not lost on Zarqawi—

Many an Iraqi will honor you as a guest and give you shelter as a peaceable brother. As for making his house into a base for launching [operations] and a place of movement and battle, this is rarer than red sulphur [sic]. For this reason, we have worn ourselves out on many occasions sheltering and protecting the brothers.<sup>178</sup>

Zarqawi further complained to bin Laden that his organization faced a “paucity of supporters,” and needed to find “those who are sincere and on the right path” in which to embed his organization in.<sup>179</sup>

In order to gain access and acceptance by Iraq’s Sunnis, AQI began utilizing elements of al Qaeda’s “best practices.” In Afghanistan, al Qaeda married into the families of local tribal leaders over time, allowing them to be embedded within the Afghan tribes.<sup>180</sup> But for AQI, time was in short supply. With the U.S. having already displaced the Ba’ath regime, Zarqawi was forced to integrate his organization quickly and without the nuances of building a long-term relationship, as al Qaeda had done in Afghanistan. Faced with a lack of time and popular support, AQI made the pragmatic decision to coerce Sunni tribal leaders to allow the leadership of AQI to marry into the leadership structure of the tribes. By developing tribal ties, AQI could not only latch onto social networks to recruit fighters and spread their ideology, but could also gain protection through tribal obligation mechanisms.

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<sup>178</sup> al-Zarqawi, *Untitled Letter*.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> David Kilcullen notes one aspect of al Qaeda’s methodology to embed into the local population “is to marry leaders and key operatives to women from prominent tribal families.” David J. Kilcullen, “Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt,” *Small Wars Journal*, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2007/08/anatomy-of-a-tribal-revolt/> (accessed August 13, 2009).

However, this was “anathema to the Anbari tribes and the tribal sheikhs,” as one author notes.<sup>181</sup> This attitude of rejection stems from Sunni tribal views regarding those outside the tribe. Tribes around Fallujah were “traditionally hostile to all foreigners, meaning anyone not from Fallujah,” and “still firmly entrenched in the tradition of the clan.”<sup>182</sup> Reinforcing this initial suspicion of outsiders was the Anbari custom that stated that marrying off the tribes’ women only occurred to those within the tribe.<sup>183</sup> This socio-cultural friction had to be overcome if AQI were to grow in Anbar, and AQI chose to target the tribal structure—“the only functioning civil authority in al-Anbar”<sup>184</sup>—through intimidation and coercion viewing Iraq’s tribes as a long-term opponent to their plan for Iraq. Rebuffed, AQI turned to coercion and intimidation, murdering sheikhs who refused to allow AQI leaders to marry into the tribe.

Besides tribal leaders, AQI’s actions towards the population at large in Fallujah also serve to illustrate the stressful relationship between AQI and the Sunnis. Describing the shift in attitudes between Coalition operations in Fallujah in April and November 2004, one Anbari *Sheikh* explains that—

In the first conflict, there was support for the resistance. In the second Fallujah, it changed the balances. In the first, as I said, many people sympathized with the resistance, and the second one changed the view and the vision of the people against al-Qaeda, because they started to realize who al-Qaeda are. Al-Qaeda are people who kill, demolish houses, rape people, so the people started to change their view of the resistance.<sup>185</sup>

After the U.S. withdrawal from Fallujah and the handover to the Fallujah Brigade in May 2003, the town became a hotbed of insurgent activity. At that time, Fallujah was

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<sup>181</sup> Dick Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi: Navy SEALs and the Winning of Al-Anbar* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 44.

<sup>182</sup> Kendall D. Gott, John McCool and U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Combat Studies Institute, *Eyewitness to War: The US Army in Operation AL FAJR: An Oral History, Vol.1* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1–2.

<sup>183</sup> Kilcullen, *Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt*.

<sup>184</sup> Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi: Navy SEALs and the Winning of Al-Anbar*, 105.

<sup>185</sup> Sheikh Sabah al-Sattam Effan Fahrhan al-Shurji al-Aziz, Principal Sheikh of the Albu Mahal Tribe, as quoted in Gary W. Montgomery and Timothy S. McWilliams, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2009), 143.

an amalgamation of insurgent groups, from Ba'athists to Jihadi Salafists. With the Brigade looking the other way—and assisting in some cases—AQI and other insurgents began implementing elements of *Sharia* upon the residents of the city. West writes,

The imams declared the city would be governed in accord with the strictest interpretation of the sharia. Those selling alcohol were stripped, flogged, and driven through town, bare backs bleeding, to be ridiculed and spat upon. Barbers were beaten if they offered “Western-style” haircuts. Students with long hair were rounded up, mocked, and shorn. Anyone caught drinking beer was beaten and paraded through the streets. Residents were whipped for petty transgressions such as talking back to a mujahedeen fighter. Shop owners selling lipstick, American-style magazines, or pop music CDs were beaten and their meager goods smashed or stolen.<sup>186</sup>

But while the Sunni insurgency continued to grow, the first points of stress in the relations of the Jihadi Salafis and the population begin to show when the AQI and other Islamist insurgents started to impose their brand of *Sharia* law in Fallujah and Ramadi.

In a communiqué released in the spring of 2005, Abu Maysara, an AQI spokesman, attempted to justify the presence of the non-native AQI within the Sunni insurgency, pleading with Iraqis for their support and justifying the lengths to which AQI had gone to keep the Sunnis united on their side—

Don't you see how all the infidels in the world have united and assembled armies from more than 30 countries to invade Iraq and to plunder its resources and to humiliate you and to violate your wives' honor? So why should your brothers the Jihad fighters—both foreigner and native—be subject to reproach? These brothers of yours emigrated from their homelands, left their wives and children, and sacrificed their blood for your sake—to protect you, to protect your families, and to preserve your honor, and to drive the invaders from your land...rise up with your brothers who fight Jihad to conquer Iraq, and after that [to conquer] the rest of the Muslim lands that were conquered by the infidels. Extend a helping hand with whatever you can...to gain God's pleasure and to be saved from the fires of Hell, and in order to be worthy successors to good forefathers so as to free yourself from the guilt of shirking Jihad... [emphasis added].<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Francis J. West, *No True Glory: A Frontline Account of the Battle for Fallujah* (New York: Bantam Books, 2005), 227.

<sup>187</sup> MEMRI: *Special Dispatch no. 884 - The Iraqi Al-Qa'ida Organization: A Self-Portrait*.

Here, Abu Maysara attempts to incorporate themes of transnational *jihad* with sentiments of resistance in an effort to appeal to the Sunni.

Although residents of Fallujah were relatively more extreme in their religious views in comparison to the majority of Iraqi Sunnis and could have tolerated more of AQI's religious creed and laws, the condescending attitude of religious superiority inherent in AQI's Jihadi Salafist ideology was viewed by the Anbaris as an affront to their personal and collective identity. Unlike Jihadi Salafis, who base their jurisprudence of directly on the Quran or in the Hanbali tradition, the majority of Iraq's Sunnis follow the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, which maintains a relatively liberal orientation, offering a high level of tolerance between various Muslims and places a premium on belief over practice.<sup>188</sup> This difference over the interpretation of a Muslim's *'aqidah* no doubt led to friction between the two groups. The seeds of revolt began to grow in the Anbaris, supplied by fresh water and fertilizer by AQI's nefarious acts of repression.

AQI's use of terror against the Sunnis in the early days of the insurgency bears further examination. As a tactic, intimidation seeks to help an insurgent gain control over a population. "It works by demonstrating that the terrorists have the power to punish whoever disobeys them, and that the government is powerless to stop them," note Kydd and Walter.<sup>189</sup> With the GoI rejecting the Sunni as complicit with the past sins of the Ba'athists and the Coalition considering them "dead-enders," AQI was free to have their way with Iraq's Sunnis, using intimidation to impose their *Weltanschauung* "directly on the population, gaining compliance through selective violence and the threat of future reprisals."<sup>190</sup> Intimidation also served as a means for AQI to emphasize the outcome for those who chose to collaborate with the Coalition and the Iraqi government.

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<sup>188</sup> Todd and others, *Iraq Tribal Study – Al-Anbar Governorate: The Albu Fahd Tribe, the Albu Mahal Tribe and the Albu Issa Tribe*, 2–16.

<sup>189</sup> Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (07/01, 2006), 66.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

As demonstrated in Chapter II, the Sunnis bore the full brunt of the Ba'athist cultural restructuring program, and although many insurgents in the early days were not fighting on behalf of Saddam, "he constituted a symbol of resistance to foreign occupation. It was important that he was free, even if he was not in direct control of the insurgency."<sup>191</sup> Saddam's capture, the declining belief in the ideology of Ba'athism by Iraq's Sunnis, and the capture of nearly all of the senior leadership of the Ba'ath regime combined to put a quick end to Sunni support of the Ba'athist-based secular insurgency. But despite the rejection of the secular nationalist current following the capture and apparent weakness of Saddam Hussein, the Sunnis did not jump onto the transnational Jihadi Salafist wagon, instead preferring to turn inward.

To fully appreciate the Sunni's position and understand the reasons for this inward turn, we must look at the predicament they were in following the invasion. In 2003–4, the Sunni identity was shaken—their patron was gone and the last vestige of their identity was removed by the early actions of the CPA via CPA Order #1 and #2. As the Ba'athist ideology became completely discredited after Saddam's capture, the fear of Shi'a dominance and revenge began to take root in the Sunni psyche.

A number of indicators reinforce this perception, chief among them being the restructuring of the post-Saddam Iraqi governments. Table 3 depicts the sectarian balance of the early post-Saddam governing bodies. The Iraqi Governing Council—the Iraqi advisory arm appointed by the CPA—was 58% Shi'a and the subsequent Iraqi Interim Government, designed to rule in the interregnum between the CPA and the post-Saddam government remained approximately 45% Shi'a. To the Sunnis, both of these bodies failed to reflect the criticality of Sunnis in the governing of Iraq, keeping them to less than 30% of the total. In addition, the majority of the Sunni representatives were exiles who had not stepped foot in the country in decades. Quite simply, native Sunnis had no one to hear their voice and no stake in the post-Saddam government of Iraq. Other events contributed to a growing sense of Shi'a dominance, which raised the specter of potential Shi'a reprisals. In the south of Iraq, Shi'a flooded the streets to celebrate the

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<sup>191</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, 88.

Shi'a religious holiday of *Ashura* openly for the first time since the Ba'ath seized power in 1968. Also, previous members of the Sunni-dominated security forces began being assassinated, which many Sunnis believed were the result of Iranian (and thereby Shi'a Iraqi) revenge from the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>192</sup>

		Sunni	Shi'a	Kurd	Other
Iraqi Governing Council (July 13, 2003 – June 1, 2004)	Total	5	13	5	2
	%	20%	58%	20%	8%
Iraqi Interim Government (June 30, 2004 – May 3, 2005)	Total	10	16	8	2
	%	27.7%	44.4%	22.3%	5.6%

Table 3. Sectarian Composition of Post-Saddam Governing Bodies.<sup>193</sup>

In an effort to frame his actions in a light that would resonate with the Sunnis, Zarqawi seized on their innate fear of Iranian domination and incorporated it into his plans to attack the *takfir* Shi'a, not only to rally the *ummah* to support efforts in Iraq as discussed in Chapter II, but also to appeal to the Sunnis as their protector. As a technique of mobilizing popular support, acts of terror are used by insurgents to, “manipulate popular beliefs about their size and future prospects in an effort to increase the expected benefits of participation.”<sup>194</sup> Although this technique may cost the insurgent a loss of short-term legitimacy, the insurgent is often rewarded when the state responds with overwhelming force, causing the population to move towards the insurgent for protection. Zarqawi knew this principle and utilized terror to strengthen his initial foothold with the

<sup>192</sup> Ironically, many conspiracy-prone Sunnis thought that AQI was in collusion with Iran based on their actions against the Sunnis. “They [AQI] were killing anyone who was in charge during the Iran-Iraq War,” notes Staff Brigadier General Haqi Isma'eel Ali Hameed. “They killed the most distinguished of Iraqi military officers who fought in the Iran-Iraq War and stopped Iran from invading Iraq. They killed the best, the most distinguished pilots, who fought against Iran in that war.” In Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, from Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 225.

<sup>193</sup> Sharon Otterman, “Iraq: Iraq's Governing Council,” Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/7665/> (accessed January 31, 2010); Nimrod Raphaeli, “MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis no. 182 - the New Leaders of Iraq (2): Interim Prime Minister Iyad Hashem Allawi and the Interim Government,” Middle East Media Research Institute, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1156.htm> (accessed January 31, 2010); Sharon Otterman, “Iraq: The Interim Government Leaders,” Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/7664/> (accessed January 31, 2010).

<sup>194</sup> Gordon H. McCormick and Frank Giordano, “Things Come Together: Symbolic Violence and Guerrilla Mobilisation,” *Third World Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (March, 2007), 307.

Sunni populace. One part of his strategy was to utilize violence to elicit a strong response from the Shi'a, aiming to mobilize the Sunni to his side as discussed in Chapter II.

In spite of AQI's repulsive actions, the Sunni insurgency continued to grow throughout 2004 as the low levels of legitimacy offered by the GoI (and its U.S. backers) failed to offer a more attractive alternative to AQI. Even though AQI progressively utilized more coercive measures against select members of the Sunni population in this time frame, there was no functioning governmental entity to act as an effective counterbalance. This balance can be pictured utilizing elements of McCormick's diamond model of insurgency as shown in Figure 2.

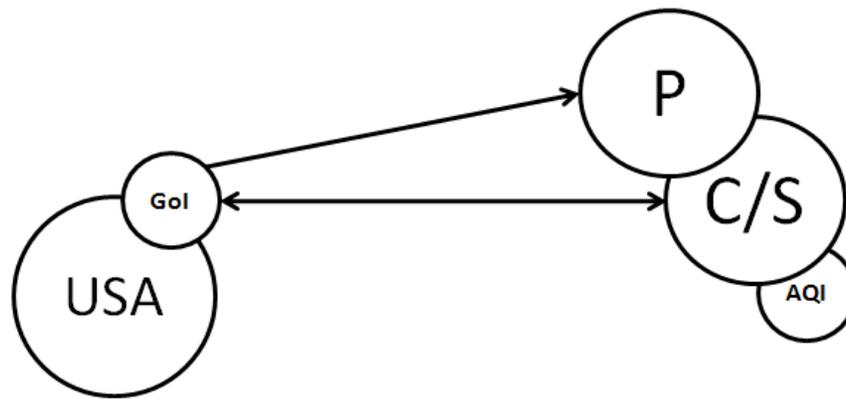


Figure 2. Insurgent/Population Alignment, 2003–2004.<sup>195</sup>

When the extreme ideology of AQI and other Islamist insurgents was revealed through their actions, the marriage of convenience became strained as the ideals of AQI's Jihadi Salafists were miles apart far from those maintained by the majority of Iraq's Sunnis. Despite AQI's efforts to utilize an anti-Shi'a strategy to motivate Sunnis to rally behind AQI—the self-proclaimed guardians of the Sunni—Iraq's Sunnis remained firmly entrenched in their allegiances: tribe first, country second, and then to the Arab world.

If AQI desired to be seen as a legitimate leader of the Sunnis, they failed to achieve any of the three Weberian bases of legitimacy. The animosity toward the *sheikhs*

<sup>195</sup> Diamond Model of Insurgency from Gordon McCormick, lecture at the Naval Postgraduate School, 2009.

provided no support to AQI being viewed as legitimate on traditional grounds. While Zarqawi may have been able to grasp legitimacy on charisma, his intercepted letter undermined this attempt by spelling out his strategy to use the Sunnis as a tool to motivate the *ummah*. Finally, the rational-legal foundation of legitimacy was completely undermined by AQI's imposition of their arbitrary version of *Sharia* on the Iraq's Sunnis.

Unbeknownst to all, the spring of 2005 became a season of transition, only noticeable in hindsight. This point marked the end of the beginning in the story of AQI and the Sunnis. While AQI's assistance was sorely needed by the Sunnis in the early days of the insurgency, by late 2004 and early 2005, a number of factors changed for the Sunnis. First, the insurgency became more organized than it had been in the chaotic weeks and months following Saddam's downfall. Though still highly acephalous, there was a unity of purpose that defined the mainstream Sunni insurgency, revolving around resistance to the Coalition occupation and progressing towards a national government that was more inclusive to the Sunni. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the political landscape began to solidify in Iraq. The end of U.S. direct rule through the CPA and the transition to the Interim Iraqi Government (IIG) through the transitional administrative law offered a small ray of hope that things would get better for the Sunnis. Although a point of transition, the darkest time of night still lay before the Sunnis, as AQI continued to utilize repression against the Sunnis.

## **B. THE ROOF COMES FALLING DOWN: 2005–09**

Following the January 2005 parliamentary elections, the Sunnis found themselves completely disenfranchised from the political process. Intimidated by not only AQI, but also Iraqi Salafist insurgent groups, the Sunnis boycotted the vote. With the prospect of the Kurds and the Shi'a writing the constitution with minimal Sunni input, the Sunnis realized their mistake of boycotting what they had been led to believe was an illegitimate process imposed on them by the occupier. The historic fear of Shi'a dominance took further root after the elections and the formation of a Shi'a government in Baghdad, providing further impetus for Sunnis to work on political efforts. While AQI viewed elections as apostasy and democracy as anathema to Islam, "in the absence of effective

grass-roots leaders, Sunni clerics pressed for an increased role at the national level, and began to build a political base in Baghdad.”<sup>196</sup> But it would not be the clerics that would return the Sunni to Iraq’s political stage. Rather, it would be through traditional tribal leaders.

### 1. Increasing Tremors

Stress fractures in the Sunni-AQI relationship soon followed with the first open revolt against AQI occurring in the border town of al Qaim in early 2005. There, the Albu Mahal tribe began waging a low-level war against AQI from late 2004 to May 2005. Animosity had been rising as the tribe realized that AQI wanted to destroy the existing social order, assassinating tribal members working in the local police force and those who collaborated with U.S. Marines in the town. Additionally, AQI attempted to move in and “had upset members of the tribe by disturbing their control over the black market and infringing on their territory.”<sup>197</sup> The tribe then began ambushing AQI fighters and mortaring AQI positions over the next few months, leading to a period of tribal rule over the city.<sup>198</sup> In August, AQI responded by flooding the city and surrounding areas with fighters from locations across northern Iraq, isolating the city and forcing the leaders of the revolt to flee. Visitors were greeted with the sign, “Welcome to the Islamic Republic of Qaim,” as AQI consolidated its grip on al Qaim and imposed harsh penalties on the population.<sup>199</sup> One report notes that men were publicly executed and one woman was found dead in the street with the sign, “A prostitute who was punished,” around her neck.<sup>200</sup>

Al Qaim seems an unlikely place to start a revolt. One other factor missed in much of the U.S. reporting glosses over its unique geographic position, only noting its

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<sup>196</sup> Hashim, *Iraq's Sunni Insurgency*, 66.

<sup>197</sup> Carter Malkasian, “A Thin Blue Line in the Sand,” *Democracy*, no. 5 (Summer, 2007), 55.

<sup>198</sup> Elliot Blair Smith, “Violence is ‘Off the Chart’ in Area on Iraq Border,” *USA Today*, sec. A, April 19, 2005.

<sup>199</sup> Ellen Knickmeyer and Jonathan Finer, “Insurgents Assert Control Over Town Near Syrian Border; Zarqawi’s Forces Kill U.S.-Allied Iraqis and Impose Strict Law, Witnesses Say,” *The Washington Post*, sec. A, September 6, 2005.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

location as a nexus of smuggling. Lying on the border with Syria, al Qaim became the primary entrance point on the foreign fighter infiltration network early in the war. Al Qaim's position on this infiltration route made it one of the first places in Iraq to receive foreign fighters on their movement into the country, and of all the locations used by transnational Jihadi Salafis in Iraq, al Qaim would have seen their presence the longest. Later, in 2006–07, tribal and coalition efforts to remove AQI's presence caused a shift northwards to alternate infiltration routes—or ratlines—through the Jazeera Desert and in the Rabiyyah-Sinjar corridor.

Al Qaim's location may also provide insight as to why the revolt failed to achieve a lasting effect. The Albu Mahal revolt failed, quite simply, because it lacked support from both the U.S.-led coalition and the Interim Iraqi Government (IIG). In late 2005, the local Sunni tribes were still viewed with suspicion by both the U.S. and the Iraqi government, who failed to grasp the nuances of the Sunni insurgency. Marines based in al Qaim viewed the fighting between AQI and the Albu Mahal as a tribal spat solely over the smuggling trade, rather than an uprising against foreign oppression.<sup>201</sup> But from the perspective of the Albu Mahal, they were in between a rock and a hard place, outgunned by AQI and forbidden to be armed by the U.S. and the GoI. “We didn't have the arms to fight them at that time because the Coalition forces were surrounding us,” notes a tribal *sheikh*.<sup>202</sup> Far away from the corridors of power, al Qaim and the Albu Mahal were considered part of the periphery of Iraq that didn't matter to the Shi'a-led government.

Despite the foiled efforts of the Albu Mahal, other small revolts followed throughout Anbar in 2005. Like the al Qaim uprising, they sputtered and then died quickly as AQI overwhelmed them. In mid-to late-2005 some nationalist tribal leaders in

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<sup>201</sup> Smith, *Violence is 'Off the Chart' in Area on Iraq Border*, 10.

<sup>202</sup> Sheikh Sabah al-Sattam Effan Fahrhan al-Shurji al-Aziz, Principal Sheikh of the Albu Mahal Tribe, as quoted in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 142. Austin Long notes that “al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia was competing for control of revenue sources—such as banditry and smuggling—that had long been the province of the tribes. Under this interpretation, the tribes did not change sides in response to violence towards civilians or their Anbar kinsmen, as press accounts have suggested. While this violence was not irrelevant, it does not appear to have been the central motive for the shift. For example, some began fighting al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia at least as early as the beginning of 2005, well before most of the violence towards civilians and tribesmen in Anbar occurred. The primary motive was not moral; it was self-interested.” Long, *The Anbar Awakening*, 77.

Anbar attempted to push for political action. Under Mohammed Mahmoud Latif, the Anbar People's Council (APC) fought against AQI to ensure the Sunni would be able to freely participate in the December 2005 elections for the national government.<sup>203</sup> In their first operation, they detained and executed 12 AQI fighters, of which nine were considered *emirs*, or leaders.<sup>204</sup> But "undermanned and hamstrung by tribal vendettas, it lacked strength and cohesion," causing the APC to become quickly targeted for destruction by AQI.<sup>205</sup> Key personnel, like Sheikh Nassir al-Fahadawi, were assassinated or, like Latif, were forced to flee the country. As the divide between the Jihadi Salafist insurgents and the Sunnis grew, AQI continued to ratchet up the levels of coercion to beat the two groups back into alignment. By February 2006, the APC was eradicated by AQI.

In Fallujah, Sheikh Aifan Sadun al-Issawi, of the Albu Issa tribe, stood up against AQI after they assassinated a number of the city's prominent *imams* who had attempted to persuade residents that AQI and other foreign *mujahideen* were criminals, intent on interfering with Iraq's internal politics.<sup>206</sup> As a result of his public disavowal of AQI, 37 of his relatives and tribal members were killed, causing his tribe's support to erode underneath him. After an assassination attempt by AQI, Sheikh Aifan fled to Jordan, returning in late 2006 after the *Sahwa* was publicly announced in neighboring Ramadi.

Responding to these localized revolts, AQI responded with further intimidation of the Sunni population, leading to the murder of numerous sheikhs and ISF recruits.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Jon R. Lindsay and Austin G. Long, *Counterinsurgency Theory and the Stabilization of Iraq's Anbar Province* (New Haven, Conn.: Paper presented at Yale University's Program on Order, Conflict, and Violence, November 11, 2009, <http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/ocvprogram/papers/COINAnbar090820.pdf>; Harmony Document IZ-060316-01, *Al Qa'ida in Iraq Situation* Report, 2006, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/aq/pdf/IZ-060316-01-Trans.pdf> (accessed August 7, 2009), 3.

<sup>204</sup> Sheikh Ali Hatim Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman al-Assafi, Heir Apparent to the Paramount Sheikh of the Dulaimi Tribal Confederation, in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 109.

<sup>205</sup> Smith and MacFarland, *Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point*, 42.

<sup>206</sup> Sheikh Aifan Sadun al-Issawi, Fallujah Representative of the Iraqi Awakening Political Party, in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 90–91.

<sup>207</sup> Francis J. West, "Counterinsurgency Lessons from Iraq," *Military Review* LXXXIX, no. 2 (March/April, 2009), 3.

Attacking societal leaders tended to atomize tribal members, moving them towards a state of docility. In Ramadi, often considered the most dangerous part of Anbar during 2005-2006, one author notes:

The assassinations had created a leadership vacuum in Ramadi and, by cutting tribal ties to outside tribal centers, had isolated the city. For their part, the tribes had adopted a passive posture, not wishing to antagonize a powerful Al-Qaeda presence in and around Ramadi.<sup>208</sup>

In a similar vein, Sheikh Aifan comments that in Fallujah, “The situation was getting very bad and people were going [over] to the foreign Arabs. People wanted to live peacefully, so they started to follow al-Qaeda.”<sup>209</sup> A U.S. Marine Corps intelligence report of the time notes that, “Although most al-Anbar Sunni dislike, resent, and distrust AQI, many increasingly see it as an inevitable part of daily life and, in some cases, their only hope for protection against a possible ethnic cleansing campaign by the central government.”<sup>210</sup>

Although geographically and temporally dispersed, this series of revolts against AQI have a number of features in common that are worth examining in depth to understand why the Sunnis rose up against AQI. First, in all these cases, there is a threat by AQI to consume local identity, replacing it with the more universal ideology of the Jihadi Salafist. Not only did a distaste for AQI’s methods exist amongst those who chose to rebel against AQI, but also the view that subordination to AQI would destroy their existing way of life. Here, Sheikh Sabah of al Qaim’s Albu Mahal tribe explains in detail—

The reason for our conflicts and disagreements with al-Qaeda, there are many points that we disagree on with al-Qaeda. The first thing was al-Qaeda tried to isolate and to humiliate the tribals in the areas. . .The other thing they did was trying to stop the opinions of the tribal people, to stop the Iraqis themselves from having any opinions on the ground. The only people that we should listen to were them—to al-Qaeda—and these people

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<sup>208</sup> Smith and MacFarland, *Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point*, 43.

<sup>209</sup> In Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 91.

<sup>210</sup> *State of the Insurgency in Al-Anbar*, I MEF G2 intelligence report, (2006), <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/02/AR2007020201197.html>.

were not even Iraqis. They were foreigners who entered from Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and they called themselves emirs. They wanted to have their word and their opinion over us.

In our personal experiences with them, they dealt violently and toughly with all Iraqi citizens. They accused every Iraqi of being a traitor or a spy for the Americans. And if you weren't a spy for the Americans, then you should listen to them and kill Iraqis, and execute them, and steal money from Iraqis, and then they can think you are better to them than to the Americans.<sup>211</sup>

In effect, this disdain helped tribal leaders to conduct local mobilization against AQI within their tribal networks by framing their revolt as a necessary effort, as AQI dishonored the tribes and imposed modes of living contrary to tribal values.

Second, these revolts were all initiated locally and each was precipitated by a local trigger. The trigger for the Al Qaim tribal revolt was the assassination of the local police chief, who was a member of the Abu Mahal tribe. In the case of Ramadi, it was the assassination of several prominent sheikhs. Likewise, in Fallujah, the assassination of Sunni *imams* who spoke out against the foreign presence of AQI triggered the stand by Sheikh Aifan Sadun al-Issawi.

Finally, resistance was conducted at multiple levels, from the individual level to the tribal level. Early on, familial resistance to AQI's efforts to insert itself into the tribal matrimonial system was met with enough resistance that AQI used coercion rather than persuasion in an attempt to control the population. In Fallujah, Sheikh Aifan's resistance originally began as a sub-tribal uprising, and shortly thereafter was condensed to a few individuals. In al Qaim, an open revolt initially initiated by a few tribal members soon grew to involve the entire Abu Mahal tribe. In Ramadi, the APC was led by several prominent members and leaders of local tribes.

But as much as the immediate threat of exposure through Sunni collaboration with the coalition worried AQI, the long-term threat of Sunni insurrection against them posed the greater danger for the group. A captured AQI document provides insight to the

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<sup>211</sup> Sheikh Sabah al-Sattam Effan Fahren al-Shurji al-Aziz, Principal Sheikh of the Abu Mahal Tribe, in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 140–141.

thinking of the insurgents, and provides their reasoning behind the coercive efforts to maintain the ideological alignment between the group and the local population through force and is worth quoting at length:

So this is the reality we're living in al-Anbar in general, and Ramadi in particular, that is the head sheikhs of some tribes, and symbols of the Islamic Party, sat with the Americans...to fight terrorism and its people. The sheikhs started teaching people about these ideas...so they announced their war on the Mujahidin, it increased during the [October 2005] elections for the new constitution, their danger was so great, that hundreds of people volunteered in the police and the army, and thousands of people participated in the elections, renouncing their religion, and listening to the erratics [sic]. After we took a look at the situation, we found that the best solutions to stop thousands of people from renouncing their religion, is to cut the heads of the sheikhs of infidelity and erratic.<sup>212</sup>

The author understood the ideological divergence advocated by the tribal leaders of Anbar's Sunnis. Equating "the damage caused by those erratic infidels (Tribes Sheikhs, The Islamic Party) [to be] more dangerous than the Shiites," the author later justified the actions of the group as he knew that the more the two diverged, the greater chance the Jihadi Salafist insurgency would disintegrate.<sup>213</sup>

## 2. Hasty Repairs: AQI Shores Up the Foundation

Recognizing this initial setback in Anbar, Ayman al Zawahiri—al Qaeda's number-two man—sent a letter to Zarqawi in October 2005 providing guidance for AQI to follow in order to establish the beginnings of a caliphate in Iraq. Zawahiri reminded Zarqawi that the strongest weapon in the *jihadi* arsenal is "popular support from the Muslim masses in Iraq, and the surrounding Muslim countries."<sup>214</sup> Zawahiri further expanded this imperative by emphasizing that popular support must be maintained and increased in ways that are not only undertaken in accordance with *Sharia* law, but also to "avoid any action that the masses do not understand or approve."<sup>215</sup> Zawahiri went on to

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<sup>212</sup> Harmony Document IZ-060316-01, *Al Qa'ida in Iraq Situation Report*, 1.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>214</sup> Ayman al-Zawahiri, Letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, October 11, 2005, <http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTC-Zawahiri-Letter-10-05.pdf> (accessed March 12, 2009).

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*

offer Zarqawi five separate strategies to help AQI mobilize the Iraqi population: 1) begin laying the political groundwork with the local populace now; 2) unify the *mujahedeen* fighters in Iraq to prevent discord; 3) stay ideologically sound and prevent the drawing of theological distinctions amongst the *mujahedeen* and the Iraqi people; 4) don't attack the Shi'a populace; and 5) minimize excessive, wanton violence due to the importance of the media portions of their campaign.<sup>216</sup> These five strategies would help staunch the loss of legitimacy that AQI was facing and help them reclaim the support of the Sunnis.

Besides Zawahiri's letter, Zarqawi had received other messages from his fellow transnational Jihadi Salafists urging a cessation to his group's heavy-handedness towards the Sunni. Found in the rubble at the site of Zarqawi's death, one letter takes on a tone of gentle rebuke and admonishment. Known as the Atiyah letter after its author, it reminds Zarqawi that—

Military action is a servant to policy. We as people of Islam are people of policy, wisdom, reason, and are good at applying its fundamentals of justice, mercy, good deeds, et cetera....Therefore, unless our military actions are servant to our judicious Shari'a policy, and unless our short-term goals and successes are servant to our ultimate goal and highest aims, then they will be akin to exhaustion, strain, and illusion.<sup>217</sup>

Taking note of AQI's repressive actions against the Sunnis, Atiyah reminds Zarqawi that adapting the movement to local nuances will benefit his efforts:

Winning over the people, bringing them close, being cautious about alienating them, befriending them, helping them, accepting their foibles (which means [accepting] what they possess, including strength, weakness, propriety, impropriety, goodness, and ill; which doesn't negate the continuation of guiding them towards goodness and betterment), molding them, gaining their sympathy at all their levels and ranks, using the utmost caution to not be harsh with them or degrade them or frighten them or be hasty in judging them or even be hasty in reforming them in a way that they might not comprehend, which might cause them provocation, wherein they would turn on us and you with hostile animosity. However, [you should do this] with gentleness, gradual open-mindedness, while overlooking and being quiet about many of their

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<sup>216</sup> al-Zawahiri, *Letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi*.

<sup>217</sup> *Atiyah's Letter to Zarqawi*, (2006), 3, <http://ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/CTC-AtiyahLetter.pdf> (accessed August 7, 2009).

mistakes and flaws, and while tolerating a great deal of harm from them for the sake of not having them turn away and turn into enemies on any level.<sup>218</sup>

We cannot completely know exactly how much Zarqawi agreed with either Zawahari or Atiyah, but it appears that the advice offered didn't make it to the rank and file of AQI as the group continued their campaign to control the population by further acts of murder and intimidation throughout 2006 and igniting an ethnic civil war in the country. However, it does appear that Zarqawi did heed a little of the advice offered by Zawahiri and Atiyah. Attempting to prevent the hemorrhaging of legitimacy, Zarqawi attempted to regain some of the group's lost clout by establishing the Mujahedeen Shura Council (MSC) on April 21, 2006. The MSC was:

... comprised [of] several Sunni groups and was presented as an umbrella organization that included Al-Qaeda but was not headed by it. An Iraqi *mujahid*, Abdallah Rashud Al-Baghdadi, was appointed to head the council, while Al-Qaeda, and Al-Zarqawi himself, were given no special status, in the hope that this would enable additional Sunni Iraqi jihad groups to join the organization.<sup>219</sup>

Ostensibly headed by an Iraqi, the MSC was under de facto AQI control. Under the MSC, AQI attempted to use the umbrella group to control other Iraqi insurgent groups. Furthermore, it established a shadow government within Anbar province, placing AQI agents to control the directors of the province's Department of Education, the Health Department, and the Facilities Protection Service. Using these proxies, AQI could place ghost employees on the provincial payroll to gain funding, prevent collaboration with the central government, and utilize provincial resources to support their operations. Colonel Said Muhammed Muad al-Fahadawi, the Director General Iraqi Special Weapons and Tactics in Anbar province notes that,

After they [AQI] controlled the people by terrorism, by killing, they went back to the groups that were working with them, the jihad or mujahideen groups like the Islamic Army, the 20th Revolution Brigades, the Islamic

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<sup>218</sup> Atiyah's Letter to Zarqawi, 6.

<sup>219</sup> D. Hazan, "MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis no. 336 - Sunni Jihad Groups Rise Up Against Al-Qaeda in Iraq," Middle East Media Research Institute, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1829.htm> (accessed August 11, 2009).

Movement, the Mujahideen Army, and other groups, and told them, “Either you give us your weapons and your vehicles, and you work under our control, or you will not be allowed to shoot a single bullet, even if you are shooting at the Americans.”<sup>220</sup>

But unlike the little Dutch boy, Zarqawi’s effort to staunch the loss of legitimacy was a failure. AQI and the MSC were viewed by the Sunni as an outside agent sent to control them in ways foreign to their traditions. “They enforced some habits that we didn’t have before,” reflects Colonel al-Fahadawi. “Females shouldn’t work. Schools for girls were not allowed. They changed the way we pray. They changed the call to prayer in the mosques.”<sup>221</sup> Widespread disruption of tradition in a society that highly valued the steadiness of tradition and a single-minded obsession with complete control over all aspects of society increased the already growing animosity between AQI and the Sunni.

### **3. The Barriers of Fear Fall: The *Sahwa* Begins**

By the summer of 2006, AQI had quelled numerous Sunni revolts and had destroyed relations so much that the two were bound together by the thinnest of threads. These previous attempts at removing the yoke of AQI, coupled with AQI’s subsequent reprisals, served to bolster the resolve of Sunni tribal leaders. Living under AQI’s tyranny was more of a burden than living with a negotiated settlement with the U.S. and the GoI. The AQI-Sunni relationship was so tense, that the slightest touch would release years of built up tension. That knife that cut the final threads was wielded by a few *sheikhs* in Ramadi.

Much like the previous revolts in Fallujah and al Qaim, local actions by AQI precipitated a Sunni uprising. The sparks for this attempt came from three AQI-initiated events and all demonstrated AQI’s disrespect for local Sunnis. An AQI suicide bombing against Sunni police recruits in Ramadi who were looking for work in the security forces at the behest of their sheikh caused increased anger at AQI. Another spark came when

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<sup>220</sup> In Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 205.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

AQI fighters at a checkpoint dragged the daughter of the head of the Albu Jassim tribe of a car by her hair.<sup>222</sup> Shortly thereafter, tribal leaders put AQI on notice that it was not welcome any more and began to work to split the tribes from AQI's grip. In a separate event, AQI's kidnapping and assassination of Khalid Araq al-Ataymi—also known by his tribal title of Sheikh Abu Ali Jassim and a member of the Anbar People's Council—led to widespread resentment of the group in the province.

The violence unleashed by AQI against the Anbar People's Council was used to create a follow-on group to resist AQI's attempts to control the Sunnis in Ramadi. The Anbar Revolutionaries were formed under the pretext of vengeance by the tribe of Khalid Araq al-Ataymi who was murdered by AQI in such a culturally heinous way.<sup>223</sup> "They [AQI] severed his head, they left him out in the open," notes Sheikh Wissam Abd al-Ibrahim al-Hardan al-Aethawi, the Former First Deputy of the Anbar Salvation Council.<sup>224</sup> Beyond the resentment created with the kidnapping, "Al-Qaeda further angered [Khalid Araq al-Ataymi's] followers by hiding the sheik's body in a field rather than returning it to the family for prompt burial, as is the custom."<sup>225</sup>

These three events were used by tribal leaders to incite their tribe members, framing AQI's actions as the results of their acquiescence to AQI's *Weltanschauung*. Some Anbari sheikhs attempted to persuade other sheikhs who had previously fled to Jordan to return and join efforts against AQI, but were rebuffed. Sensing that they would receive no further help from outside, these local leaders—Sheikh Abdul Sattar Abu Risha, Hamid al-Hayess, Sheikh Ali Hatim al-Assafi and others—came to realize they would "awake" on their own and rise against AQI, subsequently issuing a public

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<sup>222</sup> Sheikh Ali Hatim al-Assafi, Heir Apparent to the Paramount Sheikh of the Dulaimi Tribal Confederation and Head of the National Salvation Front Political Party, in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 109.

<sup>223</sup> West, *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq*, 174.

<sup>224</sup> Quoted in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 55.

<sup>225</sup> Couch, *The Sheriff of Ramadi: Navy SEALs and the Winning of Al-Anbar*, 131.

declaration of war on AQI on September 17, 2006.<sup>226</sup> To add further credibility to the movement, in attendance that day were the local U.S. commander, and the Iraqi media.

Broadcast on Al-Iraqiyah television, one sheikh's offered this stern ultimatum to AQI—

We all say to the terrorists, leave because you do not have a place in Al-Anbar Governorate after now. We have discovered where you get financed from and who orders you to kill our Iraqi cousins. Leave now or you will be killed in an ugly way. We are determined to fight you face to face. God is great.<sup>227</sup>

Following their declaration of war against AQI, the sheikhs formed the Anbar Salvation Council (ASC), a tribal/political group intended to implement their declaration. Sheikh Ali Hatim al-Assafi describes the development and vision of the ASC:

The Awakening [*sahwa*] was basically a conference, and we decided, okay, after this conference, what is it we're going to do? What is the end result of this? So the end result was the Anbar Salvation Council. I'm going to speak frankly. The Anbar Salvation Council was to be in the forefront in the fight against al-Qaeda, and to lead Anbar Province, and to have people from that council appointed to the governorship, and to lead the government.<sup>228</sup>

The sheikhs immediately followed their open declaration with both political and military action. On September 27, the sheikhs held an initial meeting with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and further meetings with Maliki and U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad in October on the issue of replacing Anbar's provincial government with the ASC.<sup>229</sup>

Each tribe was left on their own to decide how to implement this mass revolt against AQI within their tribal areas. "Each tribe knew who was a terrorist, so he was

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<sup>226</sup> Sheikh Ali Hatim al-Assafi, quoted in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 110–111; Lindsay and Long, *Counterinsurgency Theory and the Stabilization of Iraq's Anbar Province*, 35.

<sup>227</sup> "Iraqi Al-Anbar Tribes Vow to Fight Terrorist Groups at Conference," *BBC Monitoring Middle East - Political Supplied by BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, September 21, 2006.

<sup>228</sup> Sheikh Ali Hatim al-Assafi, quoted in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 111.

<sup>229</sup> Amit R. Paley, "Government Ousts Chief Judge in Hussein Trial," *The Washington Post*, sec. A, September 20, 2006; Amit R. Paley, "Bomb Kills 14 in Iraqi City that Bush had Lauded as Safe," *The Washington Post*, sec. A, October 8, 2006.

either killed, given to the government, to the police, banished, whatever,” notes Sheikh Wissam Abd al-Ibrahim, one of the founding members of the ASC.<sup>230</sup> Anbari tribes began to form tribal organizations to provide local security and began to hunt down AQI in their neighborhoods. The establishment of the ASC elicited AQI to declare the tribes heretics, and soon open fighting emerged between the two groups.<sup>231</sup>

In Western eyes, Sheikh Abdul Sattar Abu Risha was widely recognized as the prime catalyst for change. However, he was a lower level tribal sheikh, who whose primary activities dealt with smuggling and banditry.<sup>232</sup> Not the first choice to lead the Awakening, Sattar’s utility to other Anbari tribes in the Awakening movement lay in the fact that as a “gangster,” he was used to a life of violence and could be an effective leader in the fight against AQI, precluding other more politically savvy sheikhs from having to dirty their hands.<sup>233</sup> As the front man for the Awakening, his declaration of war against AQI on 14 September 2006 “touched a responsive nerve among the population and legitimized a hundred bottom-up partnerships among local leaders (Iraqi battalion commanders, police chiefs, and tribal leaders) and U.S. commanders at battalion level and below.”<sup>234</sup>

#### **4. Grasping for Straws: The Islamic State of Iraq**

Sensing the need to achieve even more legitimacy, AQI and the MSC formed the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) on October 15, 2006, in an attempt to place an Iraqi face onto the transnational Jihadi Salafist movement. Geographically, the ISI incorporated the

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<sup>230</sup> Sheikh Wissam Abd al-Ibrahim al-Hardan al-Aethawi, Former First Deputy of the Sahawa al-Anbar/Sahawa al-Iraq, quoted in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 58.

<sup>231</sup> AQI’s response included the assassination of a number of Anbar Salvation Council members. Sheikh Abdul Sattar Abu Risha was killed in September 2007 at his farm. Several lesser sheikhs were killed in a bombing at the Mansour Hotel in June 2007, along with Fasal al-Gaoud, a former Anbar governor and Albu Nimr sheikh who had worked to try to gain coalition support for earlier tribal revolts. Hashim, *Iraq’s Sunni Insurgency*, 65-66; Long, *The Anbar Awakening*, 84; Sharon Behn, “Al Qaeda in Iraq Targets Former Sunni Backers,” *The Washington Times*, sec. A, March 19, 2007.

<sup>232</sup> Long, *The Anbar Awakening*, 80.

<sup>233</sup> Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 131, 135.

<sup>234</sup> West, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Iraq*, 3–4.

Sunni-dominated provinces of Baghdad, Anbar, Diyala, Salah ad Din, Ninewah, Babil and Wasit. The ISI was ostensibly formed “to unite the Sunni jihad fighters and prevent civil war among them, so that Allah's word would reign supreme.”<sup>235</sup> Politically and militarily, the ISI was alleged to have “the joint support of a host of new tribal partners and mujahideen factions, including the Al-Fatihin Army.”<sup>236</sup> In an effort to combat the ASC, the ISI declared Ramadi as its capital.

This latest step in the evolution of Jihadi-Salafism in Iraq went beyond previous innovations, converting the organization from one whose purpose was to integrate various insurgent military efforts to one whose sole purpose was to establish political control over the Sunnis. Brian Fishman notes that this radical move by AQI can be attributed to two factors—an attempt to gain further control over the Sunni insurgency and an interpretation of current events.<sup>237</sup> While the MSC had been a failure in its efforts to unite the Sunni insurgency, the establishment of an Islamic state would allow them to legitimately destroy those institutions who rejected its rule under the principle of *takfir*, as “rebellion against true Islamic rule is generally prohibited among Muslims.”<sup>238</sup>

In the run up to the 2006 U.S. Congressional elections, it appeared to observers both inside and outside of Iraq that the U.S. could suddenly pull out of Iraq. Based on the Jihadi-Salafist experience in Afghanistan, where chaos ensued amongst the *mujahideen* after the Soviet withdrawal, it appears that AQI was attempting to establish the necessary political infrastructure to capitalize on the ensuing chaos following a U.S. withdrawal. Interestingly, one of the policy options gaining clout at the time was the division of Iraq into three relatively autonomous regions based on ethno-sectarian lines. By proclaiming the existence of the ISI, AQI made the public claim that it would rule the Sunni region. But, as one analyst notes, “the AQI leadership appears to have misunderstood the level of animosity felt by Iraqi Sunni Arabs towards any attempt to weaken the territorial integrity

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<sup>235</sup> Hazan, *MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis no. 336 - Sunni Jihad Groups Rise Up Against Al-Qaeda in Iraq*.

<sup>236</sup> Kohlmann, *State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq: August 2007*, 4.

<sup>237</sup> Fishman, *Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned from Inside Al-Qa'ida in Iraq*, 4–6.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

of Iraq.”<sup>239</sup> As evidenced earlier, the pull of Iraqi nationalism still weighed heavily on the Sunnis even after the removal of Saddam and the Ba’ath.

Following its creation the ISI established a cabinet, with the previous MSC figurehead, Abu Abdallah Al-Rashid Al-Baghdadi as its leader, while Sheik Abu Mamza al-Muhajer, a.k.a. Abu Ayyub al-Masri, remained the *éminence grise* of the organization. Other cabinet members included a prime minister and ministers for war, *Sharia* affairs, oil, security, information, health, public relations and even agriculture and fisheries. While the cabinet performed an executive function, the MSC was expanded and became the pseudo-legislature for the ISI.<sup>240</sup>

On the surface, the ISI looked like a near copy of GoI’s current structure, but it differed in one fundamental respect. As a self-proclaimed state, the ISI had no capability to actually govern. Fishman notes that although “AQI claimed responsibility for political leadership over much of Iraq, but had neither the *will* nor the *capability* to actually provide for the population’s basic needs [emphasis added].”<sup>241</sup> The failure to use actions to back up their words further contributed to the hemorrhaging of AQI’s legitimacy. By being unable to establish a legitimation mechanism that produced a return of tangible benefits from the Sunni’s meager investment in the legitimacy of the transnational Jihadi Salafist cause, AQI alienated itself from the population and found itself on the outside looking in.

As much as AQI believed that the ISI would take hold amongst the Sunni, it was rejected by the Sunnis out of hand, as it continued policies of exclusion that had long been a hallmark of AQI. What soon followed was a war of communiqués, as both the ISI and indigenous Sunni insurgents began utilizing propaganda to condemn each other.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> "Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre - Al Qaeda in Iraq," Jane's, <http://jtic.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC/viewGroups.do?changeView=true> (accessed January 7, 2010).

<sup>240</sup> Evan F. Kohlmann, *State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq, 2006* (New York: globalterroralert.com, 2006), <http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/1206/iraqinsurgency1206.pdf> (accessed December 15, 2009).

<sup>241</sup> Fishman, *Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned from Inside Al-Qa'ida in Iraq*, 10.

<sup>242</sup> This series of dueling communiqués was played out primarily on internet forums monitored by Western researchers. A summary of the discourse between AQI/ISI and the IAI can be found in Ibid. Fishman, *Dysfunction and Decline: Lessons Learned from Inside Al-Qa'ida in Iraq* and Kohlmann, *State of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq: August 2007*.

AQI's vitriolic propaganda attacks and statements about the local irredentist insurgent groups exposed the group's hubris and arrogance. If the average Sunni noted AQI's arrogance when it came to imposing their own self-styled version of *Sharia*, the attacks against other Sunni insurgent groups further revealed the group's true nature by attacking what many Sunnis considered legitimate.

## 5. The Spread of the *Sahwa*

Unlike previous uprisings against AQI, the Ramadi-based *Sahwa* movement held fast. Buoyed by its effectiveness in rooting out AQI in Anbar and the proclamation of the ISI, the movement spread like wildfire throughout Sunni-held areas. The Sunni split with AQI moved eastward across Iraq from homogenous Sunni areas in Anbar to the more mixed Sunni-Shi'a provinces of Baghdad, Diyala, and Salah ad Din as word spread of the Anbari's success. This diffusion is evident based on an analysis of significant activities (SIGACTS)<sup>243</sup> captured by the U.S.-led coalition and represented in Figure 3. Violence dropped off first in al Anbar in 2006–2007, followed by Diyala, Salah ad Din, and Baghdad in 2007–2008, with Ninewah seeing only a minor decrease in activity over 2007–2008.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> SIGACTs are violent actions which include IED attacks, small arms fire incidents, assassinations, bombings, vehicle borne IED attacks, suicide attacks, indirect fire attacks, ambushes and kidnappings. The data is entered into a database based on location, time and date.

<sup>244</sup> This is likely due to a number of reasons. First, al Anbar is predominantly Sunni and sectarian violence incited by the Shi'a against Sunnis would have led to Sunni-led reprisals taking place *outside* of al Anbar. Second, the mixed Sunni-Shi'a provinces of Diyala and Baghdad decreased as Awakening-style movements spread into those provinces over the latter half of 2007, with Salah ad Din following suit over the same time. Ninewah's slight decrease in activity reflects the fact that Sunni insurgents fled Baghdad for Ninewah as Surge forces inundated Baghdad with their presence.

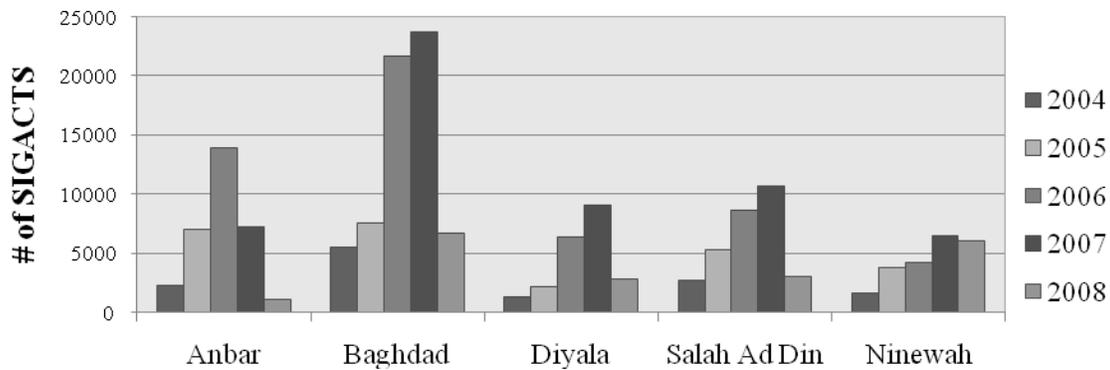


Figure 3. SIGACTs by Province, 2004–2008.<sup>245</sup>

Within the Sunni insurgency, the break between AQI and the tribal leaders was imitated by indigenous Sunni insurgent groups. The propaganda war between AQI and the IAI soon exploded into public hostility, and on May 2, 2007, the IAI founded the Reformation and Jihad Front (RJF) to serve as an autochthonous counter to the foreign-led ISI. The RJF combined the IAI, the Mujahideen Army, a splinter group of Ansar Al Sunnah, and the Al-Fatihin Army. This Iraqi Salafist conglomeration hoped to provide an indigenous umbrella group that would serve as an attractive ally to those Sunni insurgents who had become victimized by AQI's brutality.

Open fighting soon broke out between AQI and Sunni insurgent groups, contributing to 2007's spike in SIGACTs in Baghdad, Diyala and Salah ad Din. In the Sunni enclave of Ameriyah in Baghdad some of the most notable insurgent on insurgent activity took place between local elements of AQI and the IAI in May, precipitated by the kidnapping of two prominent local residents. The level of animosity between the local IAI cell was so intense, they contacted the local U.S. unit to ask them to stay out of the way of their fight with AQI.<sup>246</sup> Over the next few days, U.S. forces began collaborating with the IAI insurgents—now renamed the Baghdad Patriots—against the local AQI

<sup>245</sup> Data provided by Will Marm, e-mail message to Joseph Harrison, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Army Geospatial Center, Alexandria, Va., September 9, 2009.

<sup>246</sup> Joshua Partlow, "For U.S. Unit in Baghdad, an Alliance of Last Resort," *The Washington Post*, sec. A, June 9, 2007.

forces. The Baghdad Patriots were soon reinforced with members of the 1920<sup>th</sup> Revolutionary Brigades, who had recently turned on AQI.<sup>247</sup>

As the *Sahwa* movement moved to Diyala and Salah ad Din provinces, the same sequence of events was repeated. In June 2007, elements of the IAI and the 1920<sup>th</sup> Revolutionary Brigades had begun working with U.S. forces to clear out AQI fighters in Baqubah, the provincial capital of Diyala.<sup>248</sup> In June 2007 in Tikrit, 130 tribal sheiks formed their own *Sahwa* council, working together to create police unit to protect the population against AQI.<sup>249</sup> North of Balad, an AQI insurgent named Abu Tariq wrote in his diary on October 15, 2007, about the deleterious effects of the popular revolt of local tribes—

There were almost 600 fighters in our Sector before the tribes changed course 360 degrees under the influence of the so-called Islamic Army (Deserter of Jihad) and other known believer groups. Many of our fighters quit and some of the m joined the deserters...but things started getting worse ever since, and as a result of that the number of fighters dropped down to 20 or less...<sup>250</sup>

In the wake of these combined actions between the newly formed allies of former insurgents and U.S. forces against AQI, local Sunni militia groups were formed to provide local indigenous security to prevent the return of AQI. Throughout the summer of 2007, these local Neighborhood Watches and Concerned Local Citizens programs in Diyala were wedded with similar programs in Babil and Baghdad provinces and became formalized as the Sons of Iraq (SOI) program—a grass-roots local security force designed to foster security in Sunni-controlled areas. By August 2008, there were approximately 94,000 SOI on Coalition payrolls, with the intent to transfer the program to the Iraqi

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<sup>247</sup> Richard A. Oppel Jr. and others, "Number of Unidentified Bodies found in Baghdad Rose Sharply in May," *The New York Times*, sec. A, June 2, 2007.

<sup>248</sup> John Ward Anderson, "Dozens of Insurgents Killed in Iraq Offensive; Bombmaking Material found in Diyala Province," *The Washington Post*, sec. A, June 21, 2007; John Ward Anderson and Salih Dehima, "Offensive Targets Al-Qaeda in Iraq; Blast Near Mosque Kills 60 in Baghdad," *The Washington Post*, sec. A, June 20, 2007.

<sup>249</sup> John F. Burns and others, "U.S. Arming Sunnis in Iraq to Battle Old Qaeda Allies," *The New York Times*, sec. A, June 11, 2007.

<sup>250</sup> *U.S. Military Translation: Diary of an Insurgent*, (2008), [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/pdf/diary\\_eng\\_021008.pdf?sid=ST2008021001990](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/pdf/diary_eng_021008.pdf?sid=ST2008021001990); Sudarsan Raghavan, "Diary of an Insurgent in Retreat; Al-Qaeda in Iraq Figure Lists Woes," *The Washington Post*, sec. A, February 10, 2008.

government. Under the GoI plan, 20% of these SOI would be transferred into the Iraqi Security forces (ISF) and with the remainder given some form of public or private employment.<sup>251</sup> As tribal engagement grew in its effectiveness from the bottom-up, higher headquarters wanted to capitalize on the success. Small reconciliation cells were created by Multi-National Corps–Iraq and its subordinate divisions during 2007 “to manage tribal engagement efforts and recruit tribal members into local provisional police and the Iraqi security forces.”<sup>252</sup>

### C. CONCLUSION

If the discrediting of the Ba’athist backed secular nationalist current of the Sunni insurgency in 2003–04 can be considered the first split in the Sunni insurgency, then the split between the transnationalist Jihadi Salafis and the mainstream insurgency must be viewed as the second split. As a result of this divorce, the population became liberated from the grip of the insurgency, repelled by the horrific violence imposed by AQI. The balance, which seemed so unpromising to the GoI and the U.S.-led coalition in 2004, had swung the opposite way, when the Sunni population and the transnational Jihadi Salafists split over gross ideological and cultural disparities. With the establishment of the ASC in Anbar in late 2006 and early 2007 and the spread of the *Sahwa* movement in 2007, we see the move of the Sunni population towards the state and away from the insurgent. Figure 4 depicts this shift utilizing elements of McCormick’s diamond model.

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<sup>251</sup> A similar program, the Daughters of Iraq, was developed specifically to prevent the use of female suicide bombers by insurgents. DoI were deployed to facilitate the searching of females at ISF checkpoints. As of March 2009, there were more than 900 Iraqi women involved in the DoI program. United States. Dept. of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: Report to Congress, March 2007*, 20–21.

<sup>252</sup> Thomas R. Searle, "Tribal Engagement in Anbar Province: The Critical Role of Special Operations Forces," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. 50 (3rd Quarter, 2008), 66.

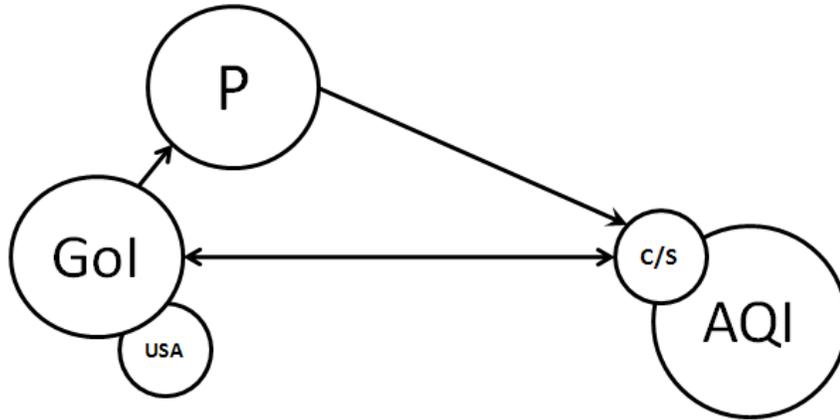


Figure 4. Insurgent/Population Alignment, 2006–2007.<sup>253</sup>

What was most damaging for AQI was their lack of cultural alignment with Iraq’s Sunnis. Analyzing the decline of the ISI, the author of a “lessons learned” document notes that one of the key problems that the ISI faced was that it faced an uphill battle against a number of Iraqi socio-cultural factors.<sup>254</sup> First, the foreign fighters didn’t speak the Iraqi dialect of Arabic.<sup>255</sup> This contributed to the divide by highlighting the presence of foreigners in the insurgency. Non-local speakers were easy to point out by coalition interpreters once captured, thus becoming a liability to local Sunni insurgents. Secondly, the foreign fighters had a poor knowledge of Western Iraq. “The *mujahid* doesn’t know the cities’ entrances and exits,” and “*al-mujahid*’s lack of knowledge about Iraq, the Iraqi people and how to behave will obviously undermine him,” the author notes.<sup>256</sup> The lack of familiarization with Iraqi culture often resulted in the rejection of the use of foreign fighters and to their subsequent sequestering in non-residential areas as a measure to keep the infrastructure of the Sunni insurgency from detection by government and U.S. security forces.

<sup>253</sup> Diamond Model of Insurgency from Gordon McCormick, lecture at the Naval Postgraduate School 2009.

<sup>254</sup> Harmony Document NMEC-2007-612449, *Analysis of the State of ISI*, 11.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

Compounding the cultural differences between AQI and the Sunnis was the gross lack of correspondence between the ideologies of the Sunni population and AQI. “Most [of the mainstream insurgents and the tribes] were not interested in pursuing AQM’s [al Qaeda in Mesopotamia (AQI)] grandiose goal of a theocracy or caliphate,” notes Hashim.<sup>257</sup> Long further emphasizes the point: “al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia’s transnational and fundamentalist goals were at odds with the local or national goals of the tribes.”<sup>258</sup> Examining the ideological division between the Sunni nationalist Islamists/Iraqi Salafists and the transnational Jihadi Salafists, in another captured document an ISI member notes that the “one of the most dangerous things facing the Islamic State is the other Jihadi squads that are following a false path. Their leadership instigates the laymen against the soldiers and the leadership and also the curriculum of our State.”<sup>259</sup> He further urges the recipient to kill the leaders of these groups, “due to their spreading into other areas with the support of the crusader,” and to do it quietly as not arouse a backlash by the mainstream insurgency.<sup>260</sup>

Besides a lack of familiarity with the mainstream insurgency, AQI and the ISI failed to understand the prominent role of tribal structures and authority in Iraqi society. By attempting to subsume the tribal authority structures of Iraq’s Sunnis, AQI and the ISI contributed to their downfall by rejecting local centers of power. As resurrected by Saddam Hussein in the years following the 1991 war, tribes were resurgent in Iraqi social life and occupied positions of authority within society, which were viewed and accepted as legitimate by the Sunni population. By attempting to actively displace the authority structure of the tribes by forced intermarriage and through the murder of tribal leaders, AQI showed no respect for the population they were trying to gain control of, decreasing the balance in their legitimacy bank with every action they did in an attempt to battle

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<sup>257</sup> Hashim, *Iraq’s Sunni Insurgency*, 64.

<sup>258</sup> Long, *The Anbar Awakening*, 77.

<sup>259</sup> Harmony Document 191107, *Request for Assassination of the Leadership of Opposition Groups*, [http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/Combined%20Orig\\_Trans/191107%20Greatest%20Threat\\_comb.pdf](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony/pdf/Combined%20Orig_Trans/191107%20Greatest%20Threat_comb.pdf) (accessed August 7, 2009).

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

hundreds of years of Sunni Iraqi tradition. Additionally, AQI tried to displace the tribes from traditional forms of occupation and revenue, notably banditry and smuggling.<sup>261</sup>

Before launching an insurgent campaign, Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, leader and strategist of al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), admonishes the would-be insurgent to do his homework—

The leadership must undertake an exhaustive study of the situation, of conditions, variables, and trends in the region, and then determine whether the time for action and to begin a successful guerilla war has arrived or not. It is vital to examine all the issues very carefully....It is necessary — this being the case—for the mujahidin to pay attention to all the details that could affect negatively the conduct of operations.<sup>262</sup>

Zarqawi's TWJ and its successor AQI, failed to heed al-Muqrin's advice. Their failure to conduct this 'intelligence preparation of the battlefield' began to cost them as early as 2004. Polling data indicates a schism between the religious-nationalist message of the former regime-based insurgency and that of Islamist groups such as AQI. In a poll conducted by ABC News, 49% of Iraqi respondents desired a democratic form of governance as opposed to only 21% who desired an Islamic state, "where politicians rule according to religious principles."<sup>263</sup> Similarly, the same poll noted that only 14% surveyed desired politicians who were religious authorities.<sup>264</sup> Although AQI and the Sunni religious nature might have converged to a degree, their views on the long-term goals of the insurgency were miles apart. "In Iraqi tribal society," notes David Kilcullen, "custom (*aadat*) is at least as important as religion (*deen*) and its dictates, often pre-Islamic in origin, frequently differ from those of Islam."<sup>265</sup>

Examining the reasons behind the Sunni tribes' change of heart, West remarks that—

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<sup>261</sup> Long, *The Anbar Awakening*, 77.

<sup>262</sup> Abd al-Aziz al-Muqrin, *Al-Qa'ida's Doctrine for Insurgency: "A Practical Course for Guerrilla War" Translated and Analyzed by Norman Cigar*, trans. Norman L. Cigar (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2009), 104–105.

<sup>263</sup> Gary Langer, *ABC News Poll: Iraq – Where Things Stand* (New York: ABC News, 2004), <http://abcnews.go.com/images/pdf/949a1IraqPoll.pdf> (accessed August 3, 2009).

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>265</sup> Kilcullen, *Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt*.

[t]he Sunnis grudgingly concluded that Americans were not soft sugar cake and that the Shi'ite-dominated government could not be overthrown. It was better to join with the strongest tribe and cut a deal with Baghdad than remain under the control of the murderous Al-Qaeda with its vision of returning to a 9th-century caliphate.<sup>266</sup>

It was as if Sunnis in Iraq were tired of being caught in the crossfire between the coalition and AQI and finally had enough. All across Iraq, at roughly the same point in time, Iraqis finally grew weary of having their doors kicked in by coalition forces, looking for the al Qaeda operative living next door. Iraqis became tired of sending their children to school every day in fear they would never return because of a suicide bomber on the bus. In essence, Iraqis subconsciously utilized McCormick and Giordano's formula of expectations and determined that the future costs and benefits of aligning with the government were better than those of the present costs and the expected benefits of aligning with AQI, thus moving the second star in line with the first.

Although the indigenous *Sahwa* movement was a crucial event in contributing to the demise of AQI, it cannot stand alone by itself in explaining the decline of violence. In order for the peace between the GoI and the Sunnis to last, it requires leadership from the highest levels of the GoI. The Awakening was successful in reducing the animosity built up between the Sunnis and the Shi'a-led GoI so that "the possibility of developing a future sense of unified community [was] enhanced."<sup>267</sup> The Sunnis always saw themselves as Iraqis, never believing in the notion that Iraq could only succeed by devolving into ethnicity-based regions under loose federal control. By "awakening" to political reconciliation—long thought of as anathema to AQI and its local Islamist supporters—the Sunni Awakening served to provide recognizance to the GoI that the Sunnis were truly rejecting AQI to the fullest. As this evolution happened, AQI's influence began to wane. While this decline started out slowly, U.S. actions in 2007 combined to transform this decline from a growing trickle to a torrent. Additional factors served to accelerate the decline of AQI and it is to those factors that we now turn.

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<sup>266</sup> West, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Iraq*, 10–11.

<sup>267</sup> Andrea Kathryn Talentino, "The Two Faces of Nation-Building: Developing Function and Identity," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17, no. 3 (2004), 568.

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## IV. THE ACCELERANTS

While the initial splits between AQI and the Sunnis served to mark the beginning of AQI's demise, a number of factors served to act as levers widening the gap between AQI and the Sunni. As these levers were applied, AQI's decline accelerated over 2007. For the practitioner, it is important to note that the majority of these accelerants did not originate in 2007. Rather they were the result of efforts undertaken by the U.S. and the Government of Iraq (GoI) as early as the summer of 2003. These accelerants—such as the adaptation of the U.S. military to counterinsurgency operations and the increasing capability of the Iraqi government—took time for their effects to build to a level that presented itself in the causal chain of events. Like a farmer's crop, these accelerants bore fruit after being sown and tended for months and, in some cases, years. In contrast, other accelerants—changes in strategy and leadership, the surge, and the Shi'a cease-fire—were applied in the near-term to a situation already retreating from the abyss, quickly demonstrating their effects. This chapter examines these factors and seeks to describe the magnitude of the effect each had in the decline of AQI.

### A. INCREASED IRAQI GOVERNMENTAL CAPACITY

Early in the Iraq War, the government of Iraq (GoI) lacked any shred of capacity or legitimacy. Forecasts regarding its ability to assume the functions of state looked bleak following the year-long reign of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Early forms of indigenous government institutions lacked legitimacy primarily because they were comprised largely of exiles, rather than Iraqis who were more autochthonous. In 2003, one Iraqi said, “we want someone who suffered with us, who went hungry with us, who lived with use, who ate from the same plate as us. This is what we lived through. Not someone who lived abroad for forty years, who wants to rule us and comes saying ‘I will rule you.’”<sup>268</sup> This government of outsiders, when coupled with the ascension of the Shi'a, soon became a mechanism to settle old scores. David Kilcullen notes that by

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<sup>268</sup> As quoted in Antoon and others, *About Baghdad*.

2005–06, “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>269</sup>

In spite of these early setbacks, the ability of the Iraqi government to provide governance has increased dramatically since that time. By late 2006, the GoI had stabilized, enabling it to focus on governing Iraq and ending the insurgency. This transition from a team of quislings under Bremer to a relatively sovereign government offered the Sunnis an alternative to rule by AQI in a fundamentalist Islamic “state.” Although not a completely pristine state, free of corruption and sectarianism in a Western fashion, the marginal changes brought about by the Maliki government in 2006 increased the government’s ability to attract the Sunni rank and file. This ability to attract the Sunnis can be attributed to increased governmental stability, increased Iraqi sovereignty, and the growing capacity of the Iraqi security forces.

Governmental stability increased sharply after the installation of Iraq’s first permanent post-Saddam government in May 2006 following the December 2005 parliamentary elections. Prior to this, the GoI (in the form of the Interim Iraqi Government) was essentially a caretaker apparatus, charged with keeping things stable while the constitution was written ushering a new permanent government. The period between the election and the formation of a government was one marked by a focus on political jockeying rather than governing. In fact, it seems that the weak GoI response to the aftermath of the bombing of the Golden Dome mosque in Samarra in February 2006 can be attributed to the focus on political maneuvering in Baghdad amongst Iraq’s political parties.

Having been nominated as Prime Minister on April 21, 2006, Nouri al-Maliki “recognized that the country had been without an effective government for nearly five months since the elections and committed himself to forming a ‘national unity’ government within a three-week period.”<sup>270</sup> Sworn into office on May 20, 2006, the GoI

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<sup>269</sup> Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, 127.

<sup>270</sup> Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007), 445.

was finally set into place after more than three years of effort. Pressured by the U.S. to function as a working government, the GoI embarked under Prime Minister Maliki's leadership in acting as the sovereign government of Iraq.

One of the largest tasks facing Maliki was stemming the burgeoning sectarian and insurgent violence around the country. In order to accomplish this, Maliki established a plan for national reconciliation as a way to bring insurgents into the political process.<sup>271</sup> This effort to reach out to the Sunni insurgency resonated with the Anbar Salvation Council. According to Sheikh Ali Hatim Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman al-Assafi, the Heir Apparent to the Paramount Sheikh of the Dulaimi Tribal Confederation and a member of the Anbar Salvation Council, Maliki "did not look at himself as being Shiite. He stood with us, regardless of his sect."<sup>272</sup> Maliki's stance was a far cry from earlier manifestations of post-Saddam Iraqi rule that had alienated the Sunnis, and it was noticed by the Anbaris, offering a viable alternative to AQI's fundamentalist rule in Anbar.

Iraqi sovereignty also increased with the installation of the Maliki government. With a permanent government in place in Baghdad, U.S.-led coalition could begin ceding aspects of sovereignty that it had maintained control over back to the central government. One of the key mechanisms for increasing Iraqi sovereignty was the transfer of provinces to the GoI. The process of PIC (Provincial Iraqi Control) utilized four primary criteria to determine if a province was prepared to transition from coalition to Iraqi control: the threat level, the capabilities of Iraqi security forces to ensure security and local order, a provincial government capable of overseeing security operations, and Multi-National Forces-Iraq's (MNF-I) ability to reinforce provincial security forces.<sup>273</sup> As shown in Table 4, MNF-I began transitioning provinces to Iraqi control beginning in July 2006, with the southern Shi'a provinces, followed by the Kurdish provinces, leaving the restive

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<sup>271</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 446.

<sup>272</sup> Quoted in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009*, 115.

<sup>273</sup> "The Iraqi Army: Taking the Lead," Dept. of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/home/dodupdate/iraq-update/Handovers/> (accessed March 5, 2010).

central provinces in coalition control until 2008.<sup>274</sup> This gradual approach was designed to give the GoI greater control in a manner that they could handle, rather than transitioning every province at once.

<u>2006</u>		<u>2007</u>		<u>2008</u>	
Muthanna	Jul 06	Sulaymaniyah	May 07	Qadisiyah	Jul 08
Dhi Qar	Sep 06	Dahuk	May 07	Anbar	Sep 08
Najaf	Dec 06	Irbil	May 07	Babil	Oct 08
Maysan	Apr 07	Karbala	Oct 07	Wasit	Oct 08
		Basra	Dec 07		

Table 4. Provinces under Government of Iraq Control, 2006–2008.<sup>275</sup>

An example of Iraqi sovereignty being exercised after PIC is offered by the reaction to an attack on local police forces in the province of Najaf—

When the local An Najaf police were unexpectedly fired upon, they assessed the situation to be beyond their means to control. The provincial governor then requested assistance from the National Command Center (NCC), which alerted and deployed additional units from outside the province. Once those units arrived, an additional call for support was sent. The NCC requested helicopter and airplane support from Coalition forces, which also sent a Quick Reaction Force to assist. The outcome was a decisive victory by the ISF.<sup>276</sup>

This example of post-transfer security demonstrates the capability of the central Iraqi government to act on the behalf of local and provincial governments, ensuring Iraqi sovereignty is maintained prior to requesting coalition support.

Finally, the growing capacity of the Iraqi security forces increased over time to a point where the Iraqi military could conduct its own operations at the tactical level with lesser American support. The increase in Iraqi units in the lead for operations is indicated in Table 5. In addition to growing tactical-level capability, governmental capability

<sup>274</sup> As of January 1, 2009 with the implementation of the 2008 Status of Forces Agreement, all provinces were transitioned to Iraqi control.

<sup>275</sup> United States. Dept. of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: Report to Congress, March 2009* (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of Defense, 2009), 31, [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/Measuring\\_Stability\\_and\\_Security\\_in\\_Iraq\\_March\\_2009.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/Measuring_Stability_and_Security_in_Iraq_March_2009.pdf) (accessed March 14, 2009).

<sup>276</sup> United States. Dept. of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: Report to Congress, March 2007*, 24.

increased at the strategic level as the GoI gained control over an increasing number of Iraqi Army units. By February 2007, the Iraqi Ground Forces Command had assumed command and control over 6 of 10 Iraqi Army Divisions from the various Multi-National Divisions of MNC-I.<sup>277</sup> Demonstrating this growing ability to control its forces, the MoD was able to successfully deploy five of seven battalions ordered to Baghdad in February 2007, in contrast to the previous August, when the MoD was unable to deploy military units to Baghdad to support Operation Together Forward.<sup>278</sup>

	<u>Oct. 2005</u>	<u>May 2006</u>	<u>Aug. 2006</u>	<u>Feb. 2007</u>
Division HQs	1	2	5	8
Brigade HQs	4	14	25	31
Battalion	23	57	85	93

Table 5. Iraqi Army Units in the Lead for Operations, 2005–2007.<sup>279</sup>

Although the interaction between AQI and the Sunnis forced a separation, this did not automatically mean that the new Iraqi state had an irresistible attraction. Since 2006, there were marginal increases in governmental legitimacy, as the GoI struggled to establish itself as a functioning government. Increases in sovereignty and ability of security forces to act on behalf of the GoI to protect the population assisted in increasing the stature of the GoI in the eyes of the Sunni. While still viewed as primarily Shi’a, by standing up and increasing its nationalist sentiment the GoI’s “Iraq for Iraqis” message resonated with the Sunnis. Overall, the rising capability of the GoI to govern Iraq led to the Sunni accepting the olive branch put out by the central government, seeing it as a better alternative, even if Shi’a-led, than the caliphate offered by AQI.

<sup>277</sup> United States. Dept. of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: Report to Congress, March 2007*, 22–23.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>279</sup> United States. Dept. of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: Report to Congress, August 2006* (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of Defense, 2006), 43, <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/Security-Stability-ReportAug29r1.pdf> (accessed March 4, 2009); United States. Dept. of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: Report to Congress, March 2007*, 22.

## **B. POCKETS OF ADAPTATION: U.S. MILITARY ACTIONS IN IRAQ, 2003–06**

The U.S. military came into the Iraq War ill-suited to conduct large-scale direct counterinsurgency operations with a host-nation partner. Developed since the 1970s to conduct maneuver warfare on the Central European Plain and on NATO's northern flank, the U.S. Army and Marine Corps had long embraced the principles of maneuver warfare as their core capability, developing personnel policies, budgeting, programming and development efforts to ensure the centrality of this method of warfare. Although the U.S. military developed a "softer" side as a result of the Clinton-era forays into peace operations, the arrival of the Bush Administration heralded a return to using the military for conventional operations. To accomplish this, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld pushed the Department of Defense (DoD) towards "transforming" the military's capabilities to focus on "tak[ing] action from a forward position and, rapidly reinforced from other areas, defeat adversaries swiftly and decisively while conducting an active defense of U.S. territory."<sup>280</sup> This effort, undertaken in the midst of waging the Global War on Terror, focused primarily on mitigating the costs (both political and fiscal) of boots-on-the-ground operations with informational and technological dominance. Along with this came the promise that through information-age technology, the military would be able to "employ precise military means to create specific political 'effects,'" writes David Ucko.<sup>281</sup>

This trend towards conventional operations and leveraging information-age technology continued the preference for the U.S. military to prefer major combat operations rather than stability-type missions like peace keeping and counterinsurgency. In line with this preference, the U.S. military's efforts to topple the Ba'ath regime were impeccable and showcased the capabilities of the U.S. military in major combat operations, toppling the regime in weeks. However, with the rise of the Iraqi insurgency

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<sup>280</sup> United States. Dept. of Defense, *Transformation Planning Guidance* (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, 2003), 4, [www.defense.gov/brac/docs/transformationplanningapr03.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/brac/docs/transformationplanningapr03.pdf) (accessed February 18, 2010).

<sup>281</sup> David H. Ucko, *The New Counterinsurgency Era: Transforming the U.S. Military for Modern Wars* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 53.

over 2003–04, the U.S. military’s bias against stabilizing operations was exposed for the world to see, as evidenced by the failure to acknowledge the presence of an insurgency, instead preferring to note that “freedom's untidy”<sup>282</sup> and that the activities in Iraq were merely perpetrated by “pockets of dead-enders.”<sup>283</sup>

Amongst tactical units employed in the invasion, operations to counter the emerging insurgency reflected principles of overwhelming force necessary for the invasion. Heavy-handed tactics were the order of the day in 2003–04 as units attempted to cope with rising casualties and a restive population in areas where the insurgency bloomed, most notably, in Sunni areas. Units in the Sunni triangle conducted large scale cordon-and-sweep operations, a tactic that soon became “a staple of operations at the platoon, company, and battalion levels,” in the words of the U.S. Army’s official history of the time.<sup>284</sup> These operations increased in both frequency and size over mid- to late-2003, contributing to exacerbate the growing insurgency, as described in Chapter II, as units collected and detained males from their late-teens to their 50s and 60s.<sup>285</sup> Eventually through a process of trial-and-error—

By early August, however, evidence emerged that these large-scale operations were in some ways counterproductive. Instead of generating widespread support for the capture of those connected to the Saddam regime, Coalition forces found that their tactics fostered resentment within segments of the Iraqi population, specifically among Sunni Arabs who were fearful of their future in Iraq after Saddam.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> "Defense.Gov News Transcript: DoD News Briefing - Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers," Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2367> (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>283</sup> "Defense.Gov News Transcript: Secretary Rumsfeld Media Availability with Jay Garner, June 18, 2003," Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=2758> (accessed February 18, 2010).

<sup>284</sup> Donald P. Wright and Timothy R. Reese, *On Point II: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom, May 2003-January 2005: Transition to the New Campaign* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2008), 318.

<sup>285</sup> In addition to the widespread resentment of U.S. forces because of unwarranted detentions, these operations indirectly contributed to the Abu Ghraib scandal of 2004 by overloading the already swamped detention system.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

The process of operational adaptation did not remain confined to units in Iraq. As the war continued on and DoD scheduled units to redeploy to Iraq for a second tour, some in the military saw that counterinsurgency operations in Iraq would be the new norm for the short-term, requiring a fresh approach than those utilized on previous tours.<sup>287</sup>

Unfortunately, there was no official guidance to draw from. In early 2004, the most current official guidance on counterinsurgency was published in 1986 and reflected the particulars of counter-guerilla operations under the doctrine of AirLand Battle, a doctrine that had been replaced with full-dimension operations in 1993 and full-spectrum operations in 2001.<sup>288</sup>

This lack of applicable guidance led to certain units improvising on the ground. Facing the future of repeated tours to Iraq, career soldiers understood that they had to get it right, or be faced with spending a lifetime in Iraq. Rather than being a wide spread phenomenon that effected all units equally, pockets of adaptation existed within the U.S. Army and Marine Corps units in Iraq, as each unit grappled with the problem of conducting effective counterinsurgency operations with a force built largely for major

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<sup>287</sup> Thomas Ricks documents this process of self-reflection in *Fiasco*. “There was also a quiet and uncomfortable awareness that the U.S. military had committed several errors in 2003-04,” he writes. In stark contrast to the previous years, by 2005, “the U.S. effort was characterized by a more careful, purposeful style.” Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 414–416.

<sup>288</sup> Although the doctrinal framework offered in FM 90-8 was formulated under the overarching concept of AirLand Battle, the manual does offer advice for military units conducting counterinsurgency operations, pointing out that tactical intelligence is the key factor in defeating the guerilla, and that the military commander must ensure that “only the minimal firepower needed to accomplish a given mission is employed.” Where FM 90-8 falls short is that it only focuses on the military component of counterinsurgency, reflecting the Zeitgeist of its writing when the DoD assumed that civilian agencies would be in the lead for COIN campaigns as its recent experience in El Salvador had shown. United States. Dept. of the Army, *Field Manual 90-8, Counterinsurgency Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1986), 3–8.

conventional operations.<sup>289</sup> Despite the lack of official guidance, units and individuals had a wealth of experience to draw on, ranging from previous tours in Iraq and Afghanistan to reminiscences from the stability operations in the 1990s under the Clinton administration.

Two examples of tactical adaptation in Iraq that stand out are U.S. military efforts in Tal Afar in 2005 and Ramadi in 2006. Although the case of Tal Afar has been widely touted as being the “gold standard,” tactical adaptation was widespread in Iraq as Russell notes.<sup>290</sup> These two cases highlight the effect of the learning on the fly utilizing direct observations and past experience as guidelines in a situation without doctrinal guidance.

In the spring of 2005, the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment returned to Iraq on their second deployment. The regiment had served in Anbar under the 82nd Airborne Division on their first tour from April 2003 to May 2004 and was sent initially to South Baghdad and then to Ninewah province on their second tour. Having been largely neglected by the Coalition, the Regiment’s history notes that the area “had become a highway for foreign fighters entering Iraq and moving into Mosul and down the Sunni Triangle towards Baghdad.”<sup>291</sup> Under COL H.R. McMasters, the Regiment utilized a markedly different approach than that adopted on their first tour. Prior to its deployment, the regiment undertook a training scheme that focused on scenarios not too dissimilar than the Regiment

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<sup>289</sup> Based on the case studies offered by Russell, it appears that while both the U.S. Army and Marine Corps ultimately reached the same level of competency in COIN, Marine Corps units adapted faster than their Army counterparts, likely stemming from two primary factors. First, Marine units were deployed on shorter tours, and deployed more frequently than their Army peers. This seems to allow units more opportunities to disengage and develop new tactics, techniques, and procedures while at home. Secondly, the Marine Corps seems to foster a more innovative culture. This seems like a mechanism to compensate for the smaller size of the service to allow the service to stay relevant given the smaller amount of resources it receives. Similarly, these two factors also seem to indicate why SOF appears to adapt faster than their Army counterparts.

<sup>290</sup> The notion of the gold standard of Tal Afar is found in a 2006 article in *The New Yorker* by George Packer. However, this standard was a wide-spread phenomenon as Russell points out. In Chapters 3-5 of his dissertation, Russell offers a multitude of cases describing the process of tactical adaptation, showing a high degree of variance in geographic location, unit type, component, and service. George Packer, "Letter from Iraq: The Lesson of Tal Afar," *The New Yorker* 82, no. 8 (Apr 10, 2006), 49. James A. Russell, "Innovation in the Crucible of War: The United States Counterinsurgency Campaign in Iraq, 2005-2007" (PhD dissertation, King’s College, University of London).

<sup>291</sup> "3rd ACR Regimental History," [http://www.hood.army.mil/3d\\_acr/Unit%20Lineage/Regimental%20History.aspx](http://www.hood.army.mil/3d_acr/Unit%20Lineage/Regimental%20History.aspx) (accessed February 23, 2010).

utilized in training for its Bosnia deployment several years earlier.<sup>292</sup> In September 2005, the Regiment implemented a counterinsurgency plan that would soon become widely-known as “clear, hold, build.” After clearing the city of insurgents, the Regiment’s approach utilized a number of aspects that would soon become standard: dialogue with local tribal leaders and key members of Tal Afar’s social network, the establishment of joint patrol bases around the city manned with U.S. and Iraqi forces, utilizing barriers to control the movement of the population and insurgents, and the use of targeted projects to rebuild infrastructure.<sup>293</sup>

The experience of the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division displays a similar case of tactical adaptation. Having replaced 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR in Tal Afar, the Brigade served as a vector to spread the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR’s best practices elsewhere in Iraq. In June 2006, the Brigade was shifted to Ramadi in Anbar Province. Having been deployed to Iraq in 2003–04, where it conducted operations in Southern Iraq, the unit’s pre-deployment training stressed the adoption of a variety of counterinsurgency tactics and procedures.<sup>294</sup> Additionally, as a Germany-based unit, the Brigade’s senior non-commissioned officers had experience conducting stability operations in the Balkans.<sup>295</sup> However, the transition with the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR in Tal Afar in January 2006 as the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR redeployed to the United States likely had the effect of showing how the “clear, hold, build” approach could succeed and were instrumental to the Brigade’s future success in Ramadi. The four months spent in Tal Afar allowed the Brigade to “develop and refine various TTPs [tactics, techniques and procedures] that would be used in Ramadi...such as operating out of combat outposts, local leader engagement and community relations, and civil-military operations.”<sup>296</sup> For

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<sup>292</sup> The training described by Packer is remarkably similar to that undergone by the author in preparation for the regimental deployment in support of SFOR 7 in Bosnia, during his assignment with the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR in 1998–2000.

<sup>293</sup> For examples of counterinsurgency practices implemented by the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR, see David R. McCone, Wilbur J. Scott and George R. Mastroianni, *The 3rd ACR in Tal’Afar: Challenges and Adaptations* (Carlisle Barracks, Penn.: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/of-interest-9.pdf> (accessed February 23, 2010); Packer, *Letter from Iraq: The Lesson of Tal Afar*, 49.

<sup>294</sup> James A. Russell, *Innovation in the Crucible of War: The United States Counterinsurgency Campaign in Iraq, 2005–2007*, 206.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

1/1 AD, their adaptation came at precisely the right moment in time. These efforts bolstered Sunni confidence in their efforts against AQI operatives in their midst. As mentioned in Chapter III, 1/1 AD's new approach allowed them to offer a hand of assistance to the Anbar Salvation Council, allowing the *Sahwa* movement to take hold.

Special operations forces assisted other Army and Marines Corps forces with acquiring population-centric counterinsurgency practices. With their cultural knowledge and additional training in foreign internal defense, Special Operations Forces initially led this grass-roots strategy of tribal engagement in Iraq.<sup>297</sup> Both the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR and 1/1 AD benefited from this effort, as did other Army and Marine Corps units across Iraq. As early as January 2004, the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group began conducting tribal engagement with the *sheikhs* of Anbar as an indirect economy-of-force approach to defeat Sunni insurgents in the province. Through their persistent and diligent work, tribal engagement allowed SOF in Anbar to “creat[e] local security forces that could, with backup from U.S. and Iraqi forces, defend their local areas against AQI.”<sup>298</sup>

Adaptation not only occurred at the tactical level as field commanders improvised, experimented and adapted, but at the strategic level as well. In late 2005, MNF-I created the COIN Academy north of Baghdad at Camp Taji. The COIN Academy was developed to change the way commanders in the field were conducting operations, in an effort to standardize practices and bring incoming units up to the level of success achieved by the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR in Tal Afar. General Casey commented that up until this point, “If a commander had it, the unit had it, but if the commander had it halfway, then the unit got it halfway.”<sup>299</sup> Over a five day period of instruction, incoming brigade, battalion, and company commanders were steeped in classic counterinsurgency techniques and current practices in Iraq in an effort to imbue them with the knowledge on how to fight the insurgency in a manner markedly different than that conducted in 2003–04.

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<sup>297</sup> Searle, *Tribal Engagement in Anbar Province: The Critical Role of Special Operations Forces*, 63.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>299</sup> George Casey as quoted in Thomas E. Ricks, “U.S. Counterinsurgency Academy Giving Officers a New Mind-Set; Course in Iraq Stresses the Cultural, Challenges the Conventional,” *The Washington Post*, sec. A, February 21, 2006.

Building off of pockets of successful counterinsurgency operations, this strategic-level initiative in Iraq, contributed to a growing awareness—and hesitant acceptance—of COIN best practices across the country, as all officers heading to command in Iraq were required to attend the course. However, because of the uneven rotation of units to and from theater, this initiative would take time for its effects to be felt on the battlefield. A year after its founding, the vast majority of units would have been through the course, priming the situation for the convergence of the surge, new strategic leadership, and the creation and implementation of a holistic top-down counterinsurgency strategy. The techniques developed and used in these pockets of adaptation would soon be *de rigueur* in 2007 with the implementation of an integrated and fully resourced counterinsurgency strategy grounded firmly in a fresh understanding of classical practices and codified in doctrine.

This process of adaptation to the nuances of counterinsurgency operations occurred over months and years as U.S. forces came to grips with fighting an insurgency in Iraq. One author notes that in early 2006 the military was not adapting quickly, indicating that only 20% of commanders in Iraq understood counterinsurgency operations, while the remaining 80% were either struggling with the shift away from the conventional operations or still trying to fight the insurgency with a conventionally.<sup>300</sup> What is important for the matter at hand was the U.S. forces were able to change their earlier approach to the insurgency and evolve over time so that U.S. forces were able to accelerate the Sunni-AQI split in Anbar at the time when the Sunnis needed assistance to keep the schism open and prevent it from being closed as it had in previous attempts.

### **C. REVISED COUNTERINSURGENCY DOCTRINE AND STRATEGY**

Going hand-in hand with the bottoms-up process of adaption was the top-down process of institutional change. This process of institutional change proceeded at a slower pace than the process of adaptation in the field. Further removed from daily operations, military institutions did not see the need to change as much as those units in

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<sup>300</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 24–25.

the trenches. Like tactical adaptation, strategic changes were implemented once there was motivation and recognition of a clear need for change. Unfortunately for the United States, it took three years to recognize at the highest levels that there needed to be a change to the strategic approach in Iraq.

Over the course of the war, U.S. and Coalition forces implemented a wide variety of strategies in Iraq to counter the insurgency. The strategic guidance given to security forces ranged from a nonexistent strategy under Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez to an extremely integrated and robust counterinsurgency focus under General David Petraeus. Under LTG Ricardo Sanchez, Combined Joint task Force 7 (CJTF-7) produced very little in terms of strategic guidance to subordinate commanders in regards to countering the insurgency.<sup>301</sup> From mid-2004 until December 2006, the stated strategy of MNF-I<sup>302</sup> could be summed up in the oft-repeated statement of President Bush during the time, “As the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down.”<sup>303</sup> As a result, U.S. forces began to focus on creating a capable Iraqi government and “[turning] over security to the Iraqi

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<sup>301</sup> With no overarching plan to provide unity of effort, subordinates were left to apply methods and techniques as they saw fit, and the differences were stunning. In Mosul, the operations by the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division were sensitive and nuanced, while in stark contrast, operations by the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division were aggressive and fairly indiscriminant. The 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne’s operations in Anbar and the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division’s operations in Baghdad were somewhere in between. Ricks notes that “the result was that each sector felt like a separate war, with different approaches and rules, showing a lack of coordination that runs against the repeated findings of theorists and practitioners of counterinsurgency.” Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, 226.

<sup>302</sup> Following the turnover of Iraq’s sovereignty from the CPA to the Interim Iraqi Government on June 28, 2004, CJTF-7 was elevated from a three-star command to a four-star field command and subsequently given the name of Multi-National Forces–Iraq. As of January 1, 2010, MNF-I has been renamed U.S. Forces–Iraq (USF-I) to denote the unilateral nature of the command. This latest transition also merged three major commands, Multi-National Force–Iraq, Multi-National Corps –Iraq and Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq to reflect the growing normalization of security relations between the United States and Iraq.

<sup>303</sup> George W. Bush, "President Addresses Nation, Discusses Iraq, War on Terror, June 28, 2005," The White House, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/06/20050628-7.html> (accessed February 20, 2009).

security forces as soon as possible.”<sup>304</sup> This strategy was based on the belief held at the time by senior military officials that the U.S. presence was inflaming the insurgency.<sup>305</sup>

While the services had limited impact on the overall strategic objectives of MNF-I, in the United States, the military services were attempting to solve the dearth of counterinsurgency doctrine. Following his command of the Multi-national Security transition Command–Iraq (MNSTC-I), General Petraeus was assigned as the commander of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Armed with his experience as a division commander in Iraq and as the lead trainer of the Iraqi security forces, General Petraeus took on the challenge of updating the hastily produced interim field manual on counterinsurgency, FMI 3-07.22. The revised manual, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, was developed with the collaboration of not only the armed services, but also with the input of the interagency community and also civilian non-governmental organizations.<sup>306</sup> By the summer of 2006, drafts of the manual were released to the field for comments, and in mid-December 2006, the manual was officially released as Army and Marine Corps doctrine. Nearly four years into the war, the U.S. military began to formally understand that this war was different.

The military’s efforts to update their counterinsurgency doctrine paralleled with the Administration’s development of a new strategy for Iraq. Sensing that something was rotten in Baghdad, the administration began developing a secret strategy review

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<sup>304</sup> Woodward, *The War within: A Secret White House History, 2006-2008*, 130-1. According to a Department of Defense report to Congress in mid-2005, “The development of the ISF to a level at which they can take over primary responsibility for their own security is the threshold condition.” United States. Dept. of Defense, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: Report to Congress, July 2005* (Washington, D.C.: Dept. of Defense, 2005), 11, <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jul2005/d20050721secstab.pdf> (accessed March 4, 2009).

<sup>305</sup> Although Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice offered that the U.S. would be conducting its efforts in Iraq with an eye toward clearing, holding and building, military efforts on the ground continued to operate under the transition strategy. A staff officer in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne at the time reflected the thinking of the time—“We have to turn this over, let them do it their way. We’re like a friggin’ organ transplant that’s been rejected. We have to get the Iraqi Army to where they can hold their own in a friggin’ fire-fight with insurgents, and get the hell out.” Quoted in Packer, *Letter from Iraq: The Lesson of Tal Afar*, 49. For the beliefs of senior military officers, see General Abizaid’s comments in Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006–2008*, 5.

<sup>306</sup> For a detailed account of the development of FM 3-24, see Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008*, 394.; Robinson, *Tell Me How this Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq*

beginning in the summer of 2006.<sup>307</sup> That fall, a number of reports emerged, all coming to the general consensus that only drastic action would prevent the failure of U.S. efforts in Iraq. These reports came from a wide variety of military, legislative, and public venues.

Commissioned in late September 2006 by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pentagon's strategy review was to study U.S. strategy in Iraq and determine, "what decisions America must make in order to win 'the long war.'"<sup>308</sup> After a few months, this hand-picked group—which included Colonel H.R. McMasters of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACR, and Colonel Pete Mansoor, who had helped to author FM 3–24—offered the assessment that the U.S. stood at a fork in the road and that it could either go big, go long or go home.<sup>309</sup>

Wary of the statements coming from the White House, Iraq Study Group (ISG) was formed by Representative Frank Wolf of Virginia to "to bring 'fresh eyes' to our country's ongoing operations in Iraq, assess the efforts under way, and report to the American people...how to bring about success in Iraq...[and] explaining to the American public the ramifications of failure of our mission in Iraq."<sup>310</sup> After months of interviews and deliberations, the ISG recommended that the U.S. begin a gradual withdrawal of

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<sup>307</sup> The review was held in secret in order to prevent perceptions of the Bush administration's dissatisfaction with the current status of the war from affecting the congressional elections in the fall of 2006. This sense of growing unease regarding the direction Iraq was heading and the efforts to change it are well documented by a number of authors, who also focus on a different perspective of the administration's efforts to change course in Iraq, detailing the strategy review from a number of different perspectives. For the perspective of the administration, see Woodward, *The War Within*. For the perspective from the military in general and its senior officers, see Ricks, *The Gamble*, Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends*, and West, *The Strongest Tribe: War, Politics, and the Endgame in Iraq*, 488.

<sup>308</sup> Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006–2008*, 158–59.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 203–204.

<sup>310</sup> "Rep. Wolf Issues Statement on Creation of Bi-Partisan Iraq Study Group," *US Fed News*, March 15, 2006.

combat forces from Iraq and to embed “substantially more U.S. military personnel in all Iraqi Army battalions and brigades...to accelerate the development of a real combat capability in Iraqi Army units.”<sup>311</sup>

Likewise, in the search for a way out of a situation that was widely being compared to the “quagmire” of Vietnam, independent think tanks began developing options for the United States. Most prominent of these was the American Enterprise Institute, where Fredrick Kagan assisted retired General Jack Keane in writing the report, “Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq,” which would operationalize a plan put forth by Kean to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld that would surge ground troops into Iraq to stabilize the violence.<sup>312</sup>

These reviews and the release of a new doctrinal approach to counterinsurgency all came to a head in late 2006, with President Bush making the final decision to shift U.S. strategy away from a policy of transition. In his address to the nation on January 11, 2007, President Bush noted that, “It is clear that we need to change our strategy in Iraq...So America will change our strategy to help the Iraqis carry out their campaign to put down sectarian violence and bring security to the people of Baghdad.” President Bush further remarked that, “a successful strategy for Iraq goes beyond military operations.”<sup>313</sup> As a part of President Bush’s “new way forward,” the transitional strategy was changed to one that reflected the principles embedded in FM 3-24. A National Security Council document from the same month highlights the operational shifts of this new strategy; rather than focusing on transferring responsibility to Iraqis and paying little attention to the populace, the new strategy’s “primary mission is helping Iraqis provide security to the

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<sup>311</sup> David E. Sanger, David S. Cloud and Michael R. Gordon, “Iraq Panel to Recommend Pullback of Combat Troops,” *The New York Times*, sec. A, November 30, 2006; James A. Baker and others, *The Iraq Study Group Report* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2006), [http://media.usip.org/reports/iraq\\_study\\_group\\_report.pdf](http://media.usip.org/reports/iraq_study_group_report.pdf) (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>312</sup> Frederick W. Kagan, *Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 2006), [http://www.aei.org/docLib/20070111\\_ChoosingVictoryupdated.pdf](http://www.aei.org/docLib/20070111_ChoosingVictoryupdated.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2009). Keane’s meeting with Rumsfeld and the plan to surge ground forces is detailed in Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006–2008*, 130–38.

<sup>313</sup> George W. Bush, “President’s Address to the Nation, January 11, 2007,” The White House, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html> (accessed July 22, 2009).

population.”<sup>314</sup> With this strategy, the bottom-up efforts of the military to adapt to countering the Iraqi insurgency met with top-down approval. For the first time, the U.S. strategy in Iraq was held together by a way of doing business that the Army and Marine Corps were willing to officially endorse.

This strategy for the U.S.-led Coalition and the new doctrine on how to implement it assisted the decline of AQI and the Sunni insurgency in a number of ways. First, the strategy showed the U.S. was serious and would follow the invasion through to its logical end—creating a viable, lasting state of Iraq. By committing to a resource intensive population-centric counterinsurgency effort, the strategy corrected previous tactical and strategic gaffes made by the U.S.-led coalition in the years after the 2003 invasion. The new Presidential strategy and its inherent endorsement of the principles enshrined in FM 3-24 allowed senior commanders to develop a new strategic framework, which focused on partnering with Iraqis, rather than attempting to offload security responsibilities as fast as possible to the nascent Iraqi security forces.

Second, the new strategy served to officially endorse approaches undertaken by the minority of tactical commanders in the field in previous years that had chosen to break with the kinetic-focus of military operations. Incorporating techniques developed and validated by commanders in pockets of adaptation around Iraq, the “new way forward” mandated the application of these efforts across the country in 2007. Additionally, the doctrine reinforced the notion that commanders had to operate differently in each sector to account for the particulars of the population.

#### **D. STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP CHANGES, 2007**

Operating hand-in-hand with the revised strategy in Iraq was the changes implemented in leadership at the operational, regional, and strategic levels. Convinced that the new strategy could not be implemented by those committed to the older transition strategy, the Bush administration launched an effort to remove the existing commanders

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<sup>314</sup> United States. National Security Council., *Highlights of the Iraq Strategy Review: Summary Briefing Slides* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, 2007), Slide 10, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/iraq/2007/iraq-strategy011007.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2010).

and governmental officials who led the earlier transition effort. In near simultaneous announcements, the leadership of the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, MNF-I and U.S. Central Command were all changed in an effort by the administration to reverse what it perceived as a failing effort at stabilizing Iraq. Following months after the post-election ascension of Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense, the Bush administration signaled a clean break with past practices in Iraq.

Generals Abizaid and Casey, who felt that the U.S. presence in Iraq was exacerbating the insurgency, were replaced by Admiral William J. Fallon and General David Petraeus, respectively, indicating the administration's complete commitment to its "new way forward." In addition to changing the military leadership in Iraq and the Middle East region, the Bush administration changed its governmental representation in Baghdad, replacing administration insider Zalmay Khalilzad with Ryan Crocker, a veteran State Department foreign service officer and one of the "State Department's most respected voices in the Middle East."<sup>315</sup> Commenting on the overhaul of leaders, one administration official noted that "the idea is to put the whole new team in at roughly the same time, and send some clear messages that we are trying a new approach."<sup>316</sup>

One of the key objectives of this effort at emplacing the right politico-military team in Baghdad was to remove much of the enmity that had been long present between the U.S. embassy in Baghdad and the MNF-I headquarters, replacing it with a greater level of unity of effort across the U.S. governmental agencies operating in Iraq. Previous politico-military interactions in Baghdad between ambassadors and generals had been rocky from the beginning. The most notable of them was that between Ambassador L.

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<sup>315</sup> Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "Bush is Expected to Shift U.S. Ambassador in Iraq to U.N." *The New York Times*, sec. A, January 5, 2007.

<sup>316</sup> Michael R. Gordon and others, "Bush to Name A New General to Oversee Iraq," *The New York Times*, sec. A, January 5, 2007.

Paul Bremer and Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez.<sup>317</sup> By replacing the driver and the map, it was hoped that the destination would change from one of utter chaos to one of acceptable success.

The intent behind such massive leadership changes was to achieve an effect much akin to Spanish football club Real Madrid's *Galácticos* (superstars). In 2000, Real Madrid embarked on a policy to buy the best players in the world in an attempt to make the club the world's top club.<sup>318</sup> Considered risky at the time, Real Madrid continued this policy for the next seven years, going on to win not only the Spanish domestic league title twice, but also the European title.

Likewise, the leadership team of Crocker, Petraeus and Odierno in Iraq and Gates in Washington, D.C., provided the best integration of politico-military strategy seen in the Iraq War. What was remarkably different between this group of leaders and previous cohorts was the level of personal familiarity and shared experiences amongst them. Testifying in the United Kingdom's Iraq Inquiry, Lieutenant General Sir Graeme Lamb, the deputy MNF-I commander in 2006-07, noted the symbiotic effect of the near simultaneous installation of strategic and operational leadership at MNF-I and MNC-I—

There was a show again for the command of 2003. So it was Petraeus, Odierno, Martin Dempsey and myself all back in town. So there was a depth of experience that— and trust, which is not—which is not given. It can't be taken, it can only be given, a relationship of trust which I sensed would bear well, and it did, in what was going to be challenging times.<sup>319</sup>

Similarly, Ambassador Crocker's comments on the Petraeus-Odierno relationship reflect the amicable nature of the strategic-operational partnership between the two:

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<sup>317</sup> For more on this relationship see L. Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); Ricardo S. Sanchez and Don T. Phillips, *Wiser in Battle: A Soldier's Story* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008); and Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*.

<sup>318</sup> Ironically, the end result was similar. While the leadership team of Crocker, Petraeus and Odierno in Iraq and Gates in Washington, D.C., provided the best integration of politico-military strategy seen in the Iraq War, Real Madrid went on to win not only the Spanish domestic league title twice, but also the European title." The Galácticos Era," <http://www.madridgalacticos.com/the-galacticos-era/> (accessed February 25, 2010).

<sup>319</sup> Graeme Lamb, "Testimony to Chilcott Inquiry, December 9, 2009," Iraq Inquiry, <http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/41885/20091209pmlamb-final.pdf> (accessed December 15, 2009).

I have noticed when we are doing a campaign review or something like that the quality relationship between the two is such that [Lieutenant General] Ray [Odierno] has no hesitation saying “Let me give you a different take on that,” and [General] Dave [Petraeus] has no problem saying, “Good point.”<sup>320</sup>

Like the officers and soldiers at the tactical levels, who were able to adapt over time to the nuances of countering the Iraqi insurgency, the leadership team appointed to oversee Bush’s “new way forward,” also had a wide swath of experiences that they too brought to the table. The period of reflection in the dark days of the Iraqi War allowed them to mull over the strengths and weaknesses of approaches undertaken in the early years of the war, a luxury not afforded to the team of Casey and Khalilzad, who were often in the middle of complex issues on a daily basis. The time offered to the counterinsurgency *Galácticos* was not wasted. The reflection increased the resolve of these commanders to get it right, as this would likely be the United States’ last chance at achieving an acceptable level of stability in Iraq, now that the November congressional elections indicated the waning of popular support for the war.

Having literally written the book on the subject, the counterinsurgency *Galácticos* had already mapped out their intentions to restore unity of effort in Iraq as a means of implementing the new strategy. Having observed previous mistakes in Iraq, the counterinsurgency *Galácticos* strove to make unity of effort present at every level of this new counterinsurgency campaign. Keeping in mind FM 3-24’s advice that, “the U.S. Ambassador and country team, along with senior HN [host nation] representatives, must be key players in higher level planning; similar connections are needed throughout the chain of command,”<sup>321</sup> giving Crocker equal say in the campaign plan for Iraq.<sup>322</sup> Additionally, Petraeus and Crocker attempted to make the maxim of unity of effort stick by placing their offices in the Republican Palace next to each other, intending to “foster coordination and communication between the top military and civilian officials in

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<sup>320</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008*, 132.

<sup>321</sup> United States. Dept. of the Army, *Field Manual 3-24, Counterinsurgency* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2006), 1–22.

<sup>322</sup> Robinson, *Tell Me How this Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq*, 117.

Iraq.”<sup>323</sup> This relationship even caused Crocker to intervene in the construction process of the new U.S. embassy in Baghdad to redesign the ambassador’s suite to maintain the relationship and foster political-military cooperation between future commanders and ambassadors.<sup>324</sup>

The overall effect of these efforts to change the military leadership was that it assisted in changing the direction of the Iraq War by establishing a command team for the war that not only had a better handle on counterinsurgency than their predecessors, had greater familiarity and personal trust amongst each other, but also reinforced the principle of unity of effort, often found lacking in earlier years of the insurgency.

#### **E. THE “SURGE”: INCREASED GROUND FORCES AROUND BAGHDAD**

The primary hallmark of the Bush administration’s “new way forward” was that it provided additional resources in terms of personnel and material to MNF-I to implement its population-centric counterinsurgency plan. When combined with a revised concept of operations rooted in a common doctrine and directed by a unified politico-military team, the additional resources offered by the “surge brigades” were able to convince the Iraqi population in and around Baghdad that the U.S. was committed to the Government of Iraq. However, despite the temporal speed implicit in the term “surge,” the effect of increased troop strength manifested itself slowly. In actuality, troop strength in Iraq gradually increased over a 5-month period, rather than acting as a bolus of security forces. The first troops earmarked as “surge brigades” began arriving in Iraq in late January 2007 with a brigade arriving in Iraq once a month until late May, as depicted in Table 6.

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 152.

Brigade	Arrival Date	Employment Location
2/82 ABN	Jan. 07	Baghdad
4/1 ID	Feb. 07	Baghdad
3/3 ID	Mar. 07	Southern Baghdad
4/2 ID (SBCT)	Apr. 07	Diyala
2/3 ID	May 07	Southeast Baghdad

Table 6. Iraq Surge Brigades.<sup>325</sup>

The 30,000 soldiers and marines that made up the surge gave the operational warfighting command, MNC-I, the capability to properly allocate forces to conditions on the ground. The increased density of forces in a given area allowed commanders to have smaller, more manageable sectors than they had previously been responsible for, allowing them to focus on areas and lines of operations they were unable to previously do because of a lack of manpower.

As a part of the new counterinsurgency strategy, Iraqi and coalition security forces interacted more with the population, using the best practices of their predecessors, which had been enshrined in FM 3-24. By increasing the “surface area” of forces by moving off of major bases and dispersing themselves amongst the population in Joint Security Stations (JSS) more enemy contact would occur as more opportunities for attack by insurgents would occur. The disposition of U.S. ground units in 2007 is depicted in Figure 5.

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<sup>325</sup>"DoD Announces Force Adjustments, January 11, 2007," Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=10387> (accessed February 18, 2010).

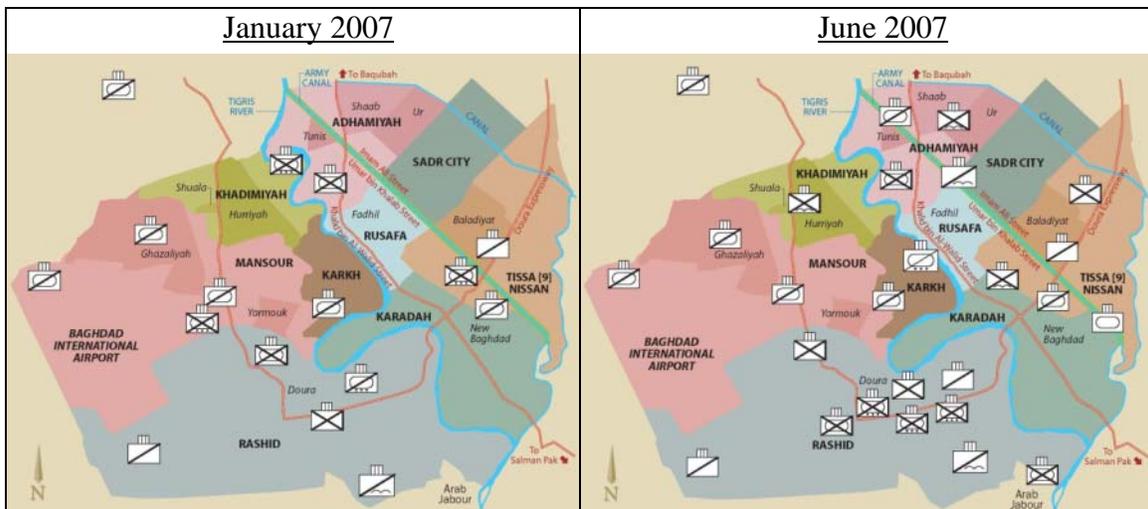


Figure 5. Disposition of U.S. Units in Baghdad, 2007.<sup>326</sup>

The focus on Baghdad was based on the levels of sectarian fighting that occurred there in 2006 and also as a means to counter AQI's strategy to isolate the capital through the use of various "belts."<sup>327</sup> The remaining two brigades and two Marine Corps battalions were deployed to the outskirts of Baghdad. By controlling the routes in and out of the city, the hope was to stem the flow of "accelerants"—military equipment, fighters, and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED)—into Baghdad where they were used to support AQI's operations in the capital to disrupt U.S. and Iraqi efforts. The disposition of U.S. units in the areas around Baghdad before and during the surge is depicted in Figure 6.

<sup>326</sup> "Disposition of U.S. Brigades in Baghdad before the Surge - January 2007," Institute for the Study of War, <http://www.understandingwar.org/map/disposition-u-s-brigades-baghdad-surge-january-2007> (accessed February 18, 2010); "Disposition of U.S. Brigades in Baghdad - June 2007," Institute for the Study of War, <http://www.understandingwar.org/map/disposition-u-s-brigades-baghdad-june-2007> (accessed February 18, 2010).

<sup>327</sup> A map discovered in December 2006 by U.S. forces depicted AQI's campaign plan for Baghdad and was utilized by MNC-I to guide its operations in 2007. Jennifer Griffin, "Zarqawi Map Aided Successes Against Iraqi Insurgency," Fox News, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,312343,00.html> (accessed February 24, 2010).

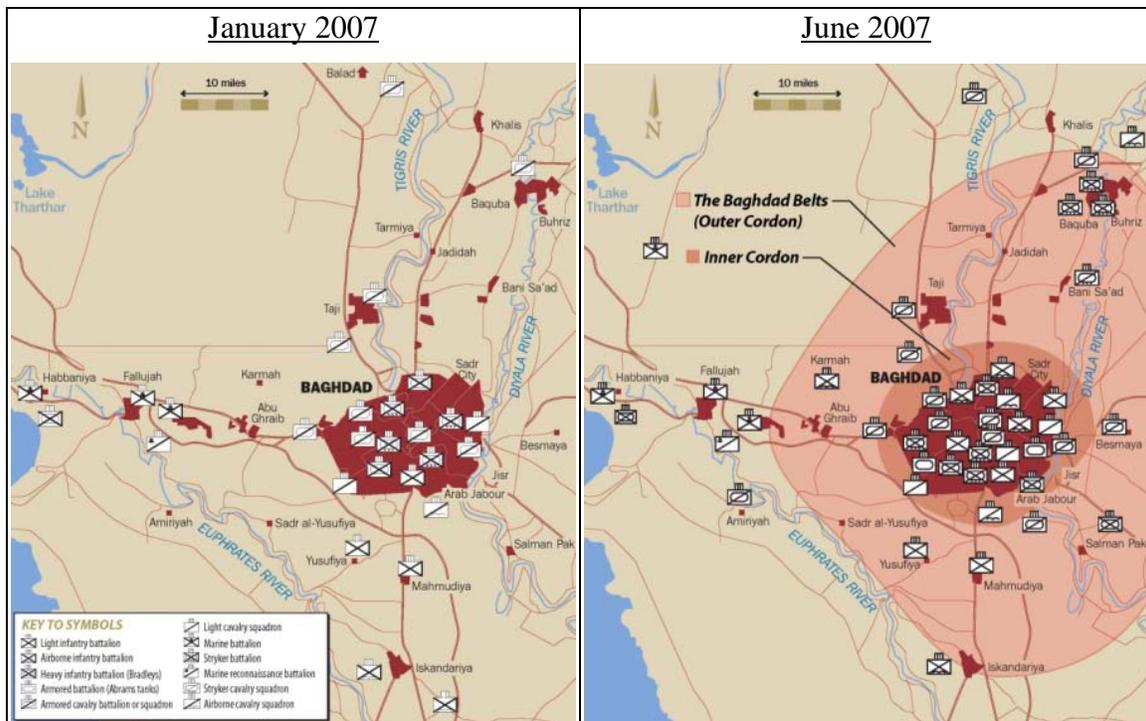


Figure 6. Disposition of U.S. Units Around Baghdad, 2007.<sup>328</sup>

As the final brigades arrived, MNC-I embarked on a number of clearing operations to remove AQI fighters from the population. Operation Fardh al-Qanoon (Restoring the Law) took up where Operation Together Forward—the failed effort to stem the violence in 2006—left off. Beginning in February 2007, the operation utilized the concept of “clear, control, and retain” and focused on maintaining a long-term security presence in cleared neighborhoods. To that end, it incorporated a number of features from the recently adopted FM 3-24, and utilized techniques developed and successfully employed earlier in Tal Afar and Ramadi including combat outposts, joint security stations, forcing Iraqi and U.S. security forces to get out amongst the population to ensure stability.

On the outskirts of Baghdad, MNC-I launched Operation Phantom Thunder in June 2007 to disrupt AQI bases and staging areas in the belts around Baghdad. This

<sup>328</sup> "Disposition of U.S. Brigades in Iraq before the Surge - January 2007," Institute for the Study of War, <http://www.understandingwar.org/map/disposition-u-s-brigades-iraq-surge-january-2007> (accessed February 18, 2010); "Disposition of U.S. Brigades in Iraq - June 2007," Institute for the Study of War, <http://www.understandingwar.org/map/disposition-u-s-brigades-iraq-june-2007> (accessed February 18, 2010).

corps-level offensive had its subordinate divisions conducting simultaneous operations in Baqubah, in Arab Jabour, south of Baghdad; and in the area between Baghdad, Lake Thar Thar and Fallujah, and area previously neglected by Coalition forces. Following Phantom Thunder, MNC-I launched Operation Phantom Strike, an Iraq-wide series of operations designed to capitalize on the success of Phantom Thunder and pursue remaining insurgents, who were on the run following their expulsion from the sanctuaries around Baghdad. Beginning in August 2007, Phantom Strike utilized “quick strike raids against remaining extremist sanctuaries and staging areas...precision targeting operations against extremist leadership and...missions to counter the extremists' lethal accelerants of choice, the IED and the vehicle-borne IED.”<sup>329</sup> The geographical and temporal dimensions of Operations Phantom Strike and Phantom Thunder are depicted in Figure 7.

The 2007 troop increase has been widely touted as the primary factor in the decline of AQI and the Sunni insurgency. But as this thesis has pointed out, there were numerous other factors that logically played a greater role when examined *in toto*. The surge narrative falls apart in two major ways. First, like a shot of Novocain, the surge only had a localized effect. The deployment of 30,000 additional troops was concentrated in and around Baghdad. Other areas of the country received no additional forces. As the surge forces were only dedicated to Baghdad and the belts, the direct causal argument of the 2007 troop surge is extremely weak in affecting the insurgency in the *entire* country. Other factors must explain the demise of AQI in Sunni strongholds of Salah ad Din, At Tamim, and Ninewah provinces, chief among these appear to be a revised counterinsurgency strategy and increased GoI capacity to conduct security operations.

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<sup>329</sup> "Defense.Gov News Transcript: DoD Press Briefing with Lt. Gen. Odierno on Ongoing Security Operations in Iraq from the Pentagon Briefing Room, Arlington Va., August 17, 2007," Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4023> (accessed February 25, 2010).

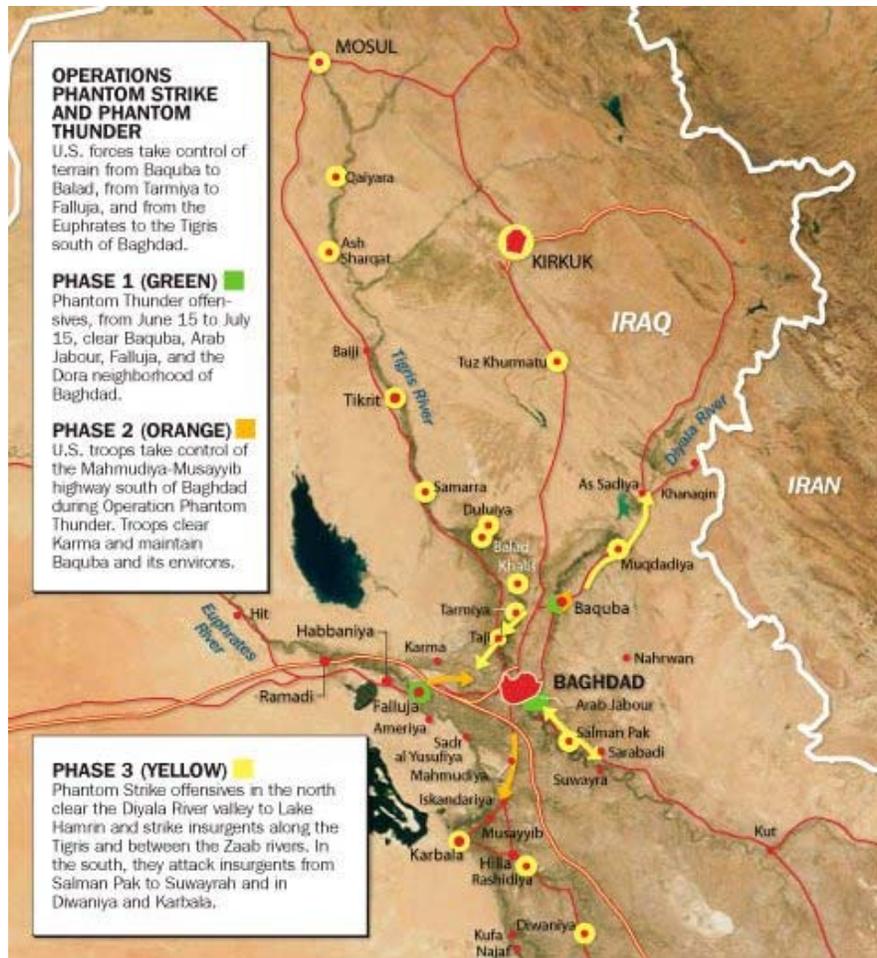


Figure 7. Operations Phantom Strike and Phantom Thunder.<sup>330</sup>

Secondly, the surge theory fails to account for the degree to which its success depended on the Awakening. The ability to conduct effective operations in an insurgency requires a great deal of precise intelligence. The incoming surge forces did not incorporate a greater deal of intelligence assets beyond that which was organic. The success of Operations Fardh al-Qanoon, Phantom Strike and Phantom Thunder was largely due to the intelligence provided by local Sunnis and former insurgents. The fidelity of knowing who was who in the insurgent universe was provided by the Sunnis who had previously been at odds with the Coalition and the GoI. Without having this

<sup>330</sup> "Operations Phantom Strike and Thunder," Institute for the Study of War, <http://www.understandingwar.org/map/operations-phantom-strike-and-phantom-thunder-phases> (accessed February 25, 2010).

level of granularity at the lowest level, these offensives would surely have pushed the population further away from the U.S. and the GoI. The success of MNC-I's summer offensives would likely have been much less had they not been preceded by the rejection of AQI by the Sunni populace. Without the Awakening, the offensives of 2007 would likely have been something like those seen earlier in the war.

Despite this, the troop surge did have an effect on the decline of AQI. First, the coalition was able to actually hold terrain after clearing in order to maintain security. Previous offensive operations had Coalition forces following AQI around Iraq, displacing the group and causing it to move elsewhere, only for Coalition forces to follow into new areas. Low troop levels in 2003–2006 meant that MNC-I would have to leave only minimum forces in an area after it was cleared. However, with a sustained increase in U.S. forces coupled with larger Iraqi Security Forces, MNC-I was able to conduct offensive operations to clear AQI from its sanctuaries and have enough U.S. and Iraqi troops to hold the area afterwards. Stemming from this ability to properly clear and hold terrain, a second way by which the troop increase contributed to the decline of AQI was that it offered enough troops to pursue AQI after it had been moved out of its areas of operation. Unlike previous offenses in earlier years, the MNC-I operations of 2007 could not have been conducted without moving forces within the country, leaving areas unsecured and open for AQI to move into.

#### **F. JAISH AL-MAHDI CEASE-FIRE**

Although this thesis deals specifically with the Sunni insurgency, the Shi'a insurgency cannot be removed completely from the equation. As intimated earlier, Zarqawi's strategic plan to incite sectarian violence presupposed a massive retaliation by the Shi'a against the Sunni. Thus, the unilateral cease-fire announced by Muqtadah al-Sadr on August 29, 2007, which suspended the activities of his militia, Jaish al-Mahdi, must factor into any explanation regarding the reduction of violence in Baghdad and other provinces with a Shi'a population.

The ceasefire was instituted by Sadr to strengthen his group externally and internally. Externally, the ceasefire was established to prevent an intra-Shi'a civil war

between JAM and ISCI (the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, formerly known as SCIRI), which had culminated in heavy fighting between the two organizations in Karbala in the late August 2007 during the Shabaniyah festival that marked the birth of the twelfth Imam. By deescalating first, Sadr was able to establish himself as an honest broker amongst the Shi'a, giving his movement a broader appeal, all the while casting ISCI as the antagonist. Internally, the ceasefire acted as a test to see which JAM units remained loyal to him and which ones were splintering away from JAM. Over the previous year, JAM had been increasingly implicated in acting as death squads, in spite of Sadr's dictates to only focus JAM military activity against the U.S.-led coalition. The cease fire allowed him to reassert his authority and deny membership to those who defied the order.

But, while the decrease of overall violence is easily explained by incorporating this accelerating factor, the effect on AQI's demise is more indirect. From the Sunni perspective, the unilateral JAM ceasefire removed an immediate threat that had been harrying them in Baghdad and in other mixed Sunni-Shi'a provinces. It is no exaggeration to say that the Sunni feared JAM; "the Sunni population of Iraq almost universally blamed Muqtadah and the Mehdi Army for any sectarian attack on them," notes journalist Patrick Cockburn.<sup>331</sup>

In a sense, Zarqawi's gambit to use anti-Shi'a violence to bring the Sunni into his camp worked. As the civil war raged in Baghdad, Sunnis had grudgingly accepted AQI into their midst as a hedge against Shi'a death squads. But, with the removal of the JAM threat from the balance of power equation needed for Sunni survival, more incentive was given to the Sunnis to rearrange the security arrangements that they had developed over the fast four and a half years. In effect, Sadr's ceasefire—and its later extension—reversed the escalation of violence that had become common place in post-Saddam Iraq as identity was recast along sectarian lines. For those Sunnis on the fence in mixed Sunni-Shi'a areas this likely provided the additional impetus to join the revolt against AQI that had begun in earnest the year prior. Lacking a Shi'a threat, Anbar's recovery

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<sup>331</sup> Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada Al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle for Iraq* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 184.

from the brink of chaos began to make headway in late 2006, serving as an example of what could be for those Sunnis still stuck between AQI and JAM.

## **G. BURNOUT OF THE IRAQI CIVIL WAR**

It is extremely difficult to find the starting point of the ethno-sectarian violence that marked the Iraqi Civil War that raged in 2006, but two events serve as markers to delineate distinct phases. The first marker was the suicide bombing of the Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf on August 29, 2003, which killed a number of Shi'a worshippers and the leader of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim. This bombing marked the beginning phase of AQI's attempt to instigate a civil war in Iraq. The second marker was the February 22, 2006 bombing of the al-Askari mosque in Samarra, the third holiest site of Shi'a Islam. Widely considered to be conducted by AQI operatives, the bombing of the mosque set off a round of ethno-sectarian violence that would begin to abate a year later. Within five days of the bombing, the GoI reported that 379 people had been killed and 458 wounded.<sup>332</sup>

However, AQI is not entirely to blame for the rising levels of ethno-sectarian violence—after all, it takes two to tango, and the Shi'a are just as culpable in inciting sectarian hate. The Shi'a response to the AQI-backed sectarian campaign indirectly appeared with the appointment of Bayan Jabr as the Minister of the Interior. A member of SCIRI and former exile, Jabr was deeply distrustful of Iraq's Sunnis on the suspicion of their collective involvement with the former regime.<sup>333</sup> Jabr's position as a high-ranking member of SCIRI allowed him to incorporate members of the Badr Brigade, SCIRI's military wing, into the Ministry of the Interior, giving the militia de facto official blessing to the illicit activities of kidnapping, murder, and torture.<sup>334</sup> Acting as "death squads," these MoI-backed militias freely roamed Baghdad under the guise of official

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<sup>332</sup> "Iraq Erupts into Fresh Violence," Al-Jazeera, <http://english.aljazeera.net/archive/2006/02/2008410115126904733.html> (accessed March 9, 2010).

<sup>333</sup> Victoria Fontan, *Voices from Post-Saddam Iraq: Living with Terrorism, Insurgency, and New Forms of Tyranny* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2009), 146.

<sup>334</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 449.

duties to conduct a wide range of atrocities.<sup>335</sup> By May 2006, when Jabr was appointed as the Minister of Finance in the Maliki government, “Shiite militias had been broadly incorporated into government security units [and] Interior Ministry forces were widely believed to be carrying out political murders on a large scale, running a network of detention and torture centers.”<sup>336</sup>

Throughout the spring and summer, ethno-sectarian violence continued to rage as the Shi’a responded to Sunni provocations and Sunnis responded to Shi’a actions, as each side saw itself as a victim. Death squads would make forays into Sunni enclaves in response to AQI’s campaign of suicide bombing in Shi’a areas.<sup>337</sup> Much of the violence in Baghdad occurred in mixed Sunni-Shi’a neighborhoods and also along the seams between existing Sunni and Shi’a enclaves. As the violence continued, both Sunnis and Shi’a moved from these areas to sectarian enclaves. In Hurriyah, a Sunni enclave in 2003, Shi’a militias not only governed the area, but turned to real estate sales as well. Deborah Amos notes that, “the thugs-turned-real-estate-agents rented out apartments they had emptied. Shiite families who had been expelled from other neighborhoods in Baghdad moved in.”<sup>338</sup>

By the time of the Bush administration’s “New Way Forward,” the effect of the previous year’s ethno-sectarian violence had already been written on the map of Baghdad. Much like the “white flight” that altered the ethnographic composition of American cities after World War II, this resettlement changed the ethnic makeup of Baghdad dramatically. Where Sunnis were diffused across the city in 2003, by 2007 they were either established in enclaves or they had migrated to other Sunni dominated locations inside Iraq or displaced abroad. The civil war transitioned a once-mixed

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<sup>335</sup> Ken Silverstein, “The Minister of Civil War: Bayn Jabr, Paul Bremer, and the Rise of the Iraqi Death Squads,” *Harper’s Magazine* 313, no. 1875 (August, 2006), 67.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>337</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008*, 173.

<sup>338</sup> Deborah Amos, *Eclipse of the Sunnis: Power, Exile and Upheaval in the Middle East* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010), 37.

metropolis into a city with sharp ethno-sectarian divides, as depicted in Figure 8. “Baghdad became a Shiite-dominated city for the first time in its long history,” notes Amos.<sup>339</sup>

The inadvertent effect of the ethnic cleansing in the civil war was that it limited the duration of the civil war. By forcing residents into sectarian enclaves, it became harder to get into a neighborhood to accomplish ethnic killings and violence. While it may seem that enclaves became a “target-rich environment” for sectarian violence, it also established a line where U.S. and GoI forces could begin inserting themselves in an attempt to stop sectarian violence in Baghdad by establishing Joint Security Stations throughout the city as depicted in Figure 8. As a consequence of establishing local security outposts in Baghdad, General Petraeus’ counterinsurgency strategy for Baghdad froze the ethnic lines within the city. Many Sunni enclaves like Adhamiyah and Doura were walled off as a part of the counterinsurgency strategy in order to protect the Sunni population from roving Shi’a militias who were intent on encroaching into the Sunni areas.<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Amos, *Eclipse of the Sunnis: Power, Exile and Upheaval in the Middle East*, 35.

<sup>340</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008*, 173.

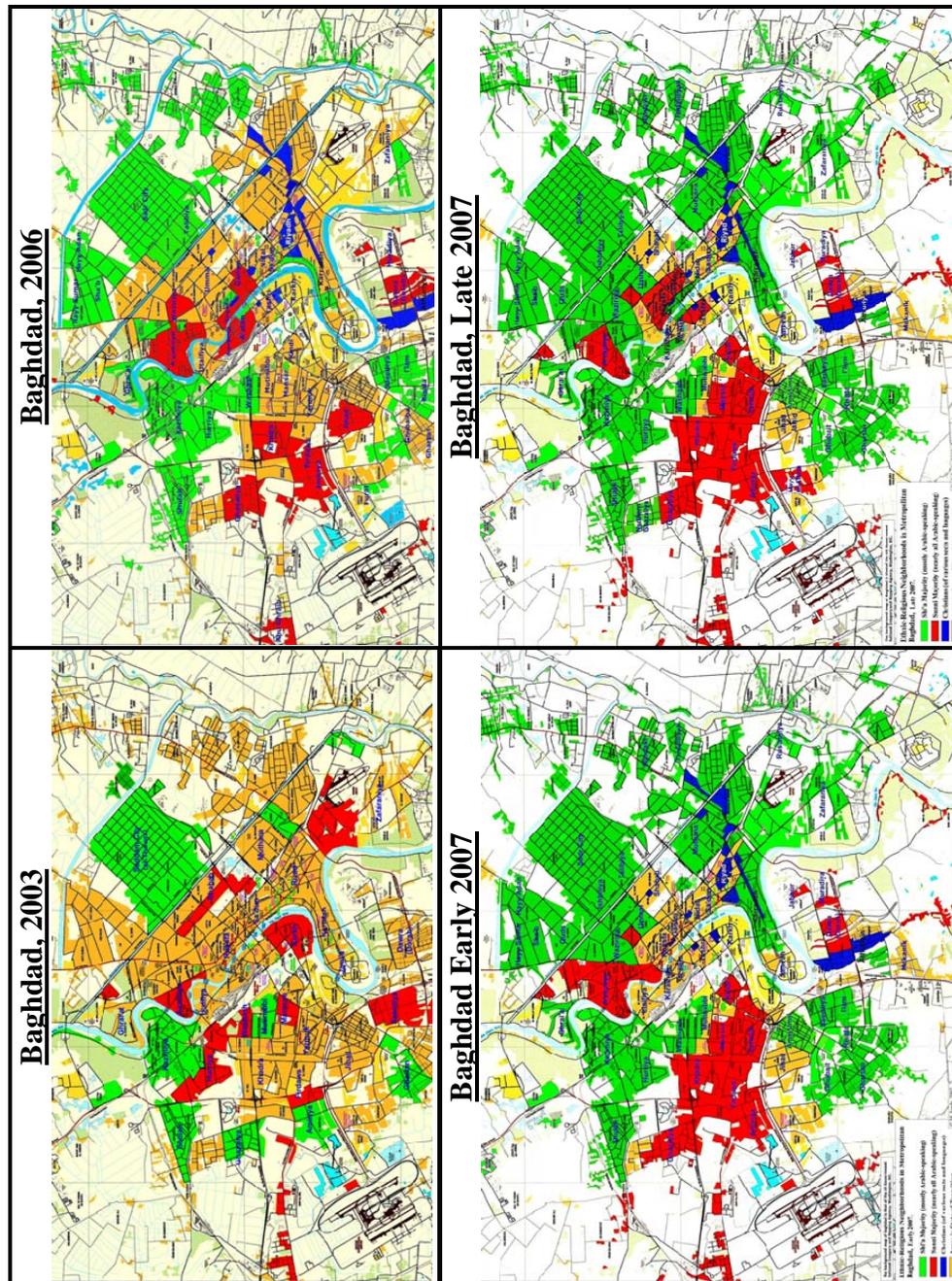


Figure 8. Ethnic Groups in Baghdad, 2003–2007.<sup>341</sup>

<sup>341</sup> Michael Izady, "Ethnic Groups in Baghdad, Iraq in 2003," Columbia University, [http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Baghdad\\_Ethnic\\_2003\\_lg.jpg](http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Baghdad_Ethnic_2003_lg.jpg) (accessed March 2, 2010); Michael Izady, "Ethnic Groups in Baghdad, Iraq in 2006," Columbia University, [http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Baghdad\\_Ethnic\\_2006\\_lg.jpg](http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Baghdad_Ethnic_2006_lg.jpg) (accessed March 2, 2010); Michael Izady, "Ethnic Groups in Baghdad, Iraq in Early 2007," Columbia University, [http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Baghdad\\_Ethnic\\_2007\\_early\\_lg.jpg](http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Baghdad_Ethnic_2007_early_lg.jpg) (accessed March 2, 2010); Michael Izady, "Ethnic Groups in Baghdad, Iraq in Late 2007," Columbia University, [http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Baghdad\\_Ethnic\\_2007\\_late\\_lg.jpg](http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Baghdad_Ethnic_2007_late_lg.jpg) (accessed March 2, 2010).

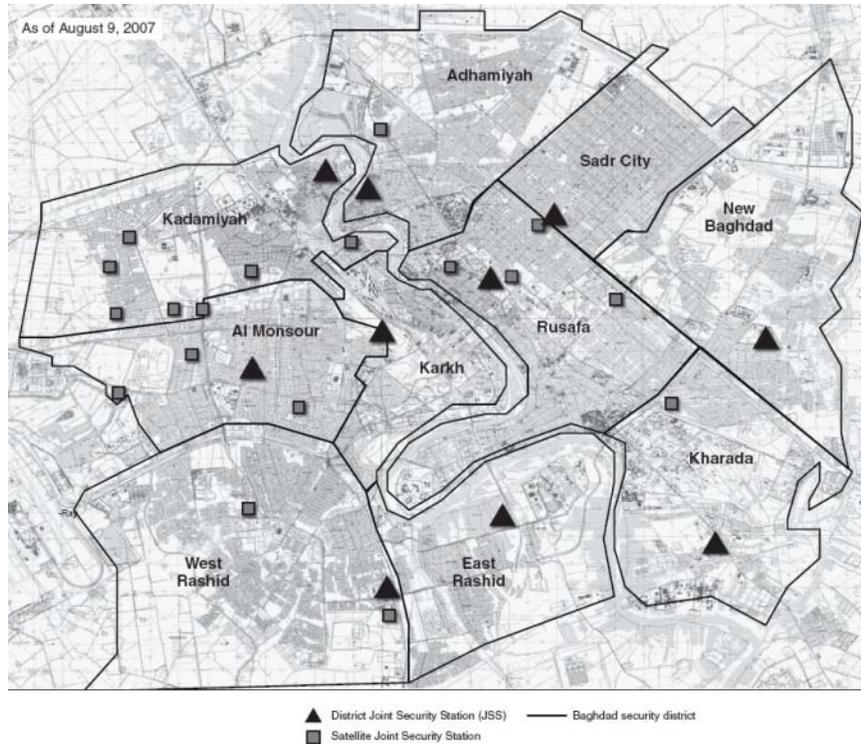


Figure 9. Joint Security Stations in Baghdad, August, 2007.<sup>342</sup>

For AQI, the effect of the Sunni flight from Baghdad was that the group had fewer places to hide and operate in over time. The remaining Sunni enclaves (depicted as red in Figure 4) became the focus of U.S. efforts to stem the sectarian violence, bringing more attention to the last vestiges of AQI's safe areas. Hardening these enclaves with barriers to protect the Sunni population from Shi'a death squads also isolated AQI from its support zones in the Baghdad belts. Cut off and isolated, AQI's presence in Baghdad greatly diminished over 2007, as local Sunnis joined neighborhood vigilante groups such as the Knights of Adhamiyah—the local manifestation of an Awakening-like movement—turning on AQI in an attempt to remove the thorn in their side.

<sup>342</sup> "Map of Joint Security Stations in Baghdad, as of August 9, 2007," Multi-national Division - Baghdad, [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/images/baghdad-jss\\_gao070809.jpg](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/images/baghdad-jss_gao070809.jpg) (accessed March 2, 2010).

## H. “INDUSTRIAL COUNTERTERRORISM”

Although the counterinsurgency strategies of Sanchez, Casey, and Petraeus varied widely in respect to how military forces would be utilized in the years following the U.S. invasion, they maintained the common component of counterterrorism. The purpose of this effort was to attrite the core of the insurgency, specifically those deemed “irreconcilable.” This counterterrorism strategy implemented by the U.S. ostensibly allows it to buy time while credible and capable Iraqi security forces could be developed. By cutting away at the irreconcilable core of AQI, the counterterrorist approach acted in a manner to reduce the ability of the AQI to conduct attacks on the population. The approach undertaken by special operations forces (SOF) became known as “industrial counterterrorism”,<sup>343</sup> whose sole purpose was to “to unravel Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia and other insurgent groups from the inside out,” by squeezing each new arrest for details about the chain of command.<sup>344</sup>

This method introduced counter-network strategies advocated by John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt in their book, *Networks and Netwars*, namely that “it takes a networks to fight networks.”<sup>345</sup> To develop their own network to counter AQI, SOF were not only decentralized, but also leveraged the capabilities of the U.S. interagency community and coalition partners. This network of friends provided the means to counter the network of AQI. By decentralizing and integrating SOF with the resources of the interagency community, the resultant organization was one where information was rapidly incorporated, analyzed and disseminated, allowing the organization to have an unparalleled tempo of operations. Although the reorganization of forces played a significant role in developing the ability to conduct a counterterrorism campaign with ruthless efficiency, it was by incorporating 24/7 surveillance and utilizing covert

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<sup>343</sup> Mark Urban, *Task Force Black: The Explosive True Story of the SAS and the Secret War in Iraq* (London: Little, Brown, 2010), 91.

<sup>344</sup> Mark Bowden, "The Ploy," *The Atlantic Monthly* 299, no. 4 (May, 2007), 56.

<sup>345</sup> John Arquilla and David F. Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corp., 2001), 15.

techniques that made the difference to previous manhunting efforts used in capturing former Ba'ath party leaders early in the war.<sup>346</sup>

SOF conducted nightly raids on AQI cells all in an effort to destroy the group. Intelligence collected on each raid would be immediately analyzed by teams of experts in Iraq and the United States and used to portray the AQI network, illuminating new targets for the next night, in a cycle known as F3EA—find, fix, finish, exploit and analyze. This cycle provided and synthesized information from a variety of sources to portray the entire AQI network. Armed with this understanding, SOF aimed to collapse the network—“the aim was to go after the middle men of their network.”<sup>347</sup> This effort was based on the premise that removal of critical nodes in a network would cause widespread disruption of the organization. The ultimate goal was to unravel the network, member by member, exploiting every possible lead, to disrupt and ultimately to dismantle the network. After Zarqawi's death, SOF continued to hammer away at the AQI network.

A number of sources have recently emerged that give some on the effectiveness of the industrial counterterrorism approach. In his book *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006-2008*, reporter Bob Woodward claims that the biggest factor in contributing to the decline of violence in Iraq in 2007 were operations to “locate, target and kill key individuals in extremist groups such as al Qaeda, the Sunni insurgency and renegade Shi'a militias.”<sup>348</sup> Woodward reports that “a number of authoritative sources say the covert activities had a far-reaching effect on the violence and were very possibly the biggest factor in reducing it.”<sup>349</sup> One author notes that one SOF unit had “achieved remarkable results, accounting for the death or capture of perhaps 70 percent of high

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<sup>346</sup> Urban, *Task Force Black: The Explosive True Story of the SAS and the Secret War in Iraq*, 83.

<sup>347</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>348</sup> Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History, 2006–2008*, 380.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*

value targets [in AQI].”<sup>350</sup> Likewise, another author makes the claim that the counterterrorism approach led to over 14,500–15,500 AQI operatives being killed or captured between 2003 and 2008.<sup>351</sup>

However, there are issues with analyzing the relative strength of this claim on two grounds. First, in the publicly available captured AQI documents in the Harmony database, this point is never mentioned. Second, the authors all derive their information from government sources, in effect basing their claims on a single source. For the researcher, the paucity of credible information needed to prevents any grounded judgment as to analyze the effect of this factor in the demise of AQI.

Yet, in spite of this, it is possible to infer that this factor had a modest causal effect based on the assumption that leadership can have a regulating effect on an organization, keeping it in balance between the goals of its leaders and supporters. If AQI’s rank and file were comprised of former criminals and social outcasts as offered by the Anbar chief of police—“I can tell you about the Iraqi people, because I know them. The lowlife elements, the criminals, the basest of the base, were the only ones working with these terrorist organizations...Society did not respect this person to begin with, because they were dirty, and they were lowlives”<sup>352</sup>—we can assume that many members of AQI were on the fringes of the social network. Faced with this societal rejection, joining AQI would offer the benefit of providing status (especially if Salafi thought was propagated in Saddam’s prisons) to counteract their social isolation. With the removal of leaders that maintain some level of control on their subordinates through influence and charisma (a Weberian source of authority in non-state structures), we can safely assume that the regulating influence of the leader was removed from the network over time as a result of counter-leader/counterterrorist targeting. This would contribute to subordinates changing their tactics on the ground without being regulated by their superior. In this

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<sup>350</sup> West, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Iraq*, 5.

<sup>351</sup> Urban, *Task Force Black: The Explosive True Story of the SAS and the Secret War in Iraq*, 270–271.

<sup>352</sup> Major General Tariq Yusif Mohammad al-Thiyabi, Provincial Director of Police in Al-Anbar Province, as quoted in Montgomery and McWilliams, *Al-Anbar Awakening, Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives, From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, 182.

case, this may be one reason why we see more ethno-sectarian violence after the death of Zarqawi and why AQI failed to realize the effect of its repression on the Sunni.

Like many of the accelerants portrayed in this chapter, the effect of industrial counterterrorism took time and a degree of synergy with other factors to completely manifest itself as a contributor to AQI's demise. As noted previously the effect of the civil war's burnout, combined with the solidifying of ethnic lines in Baghdad prevented the movement of AQI in the city. In turn, this led to an increased effectiveness of SOF as AQI leadership became less experienced in clandestine techniques than their older predecessors who had been captured. Trapped in Sunni enclaves, AQI operatives were no longer able to meet directly and resorted to utilizing electronic communications to communicate to each other, which were exploited by SOF, providing more information with which to target AQI.<sup>353</sup>

## I. CONCLUSION

This chapter has laid out an argument that a multitude of accelerating factors contributed to the decline of AQI in 2007. For the practitioner seeking to utilize similar techniques elsewhere, it is critical to understand that none of these accelerants led to the decline of AQI on their own. Rather, it was the combination of these widely disparate accelerants that contributed to AQI's decline by entering the causal chain at the right moment in time, with a degree of synergy not seen if implemented individually. As this chapter has shown, these factors cannot be completely isolated as they were influenced by other accelerants, often being strengthened, and not weakened, by the presence of others. Removal of any of these factors, and the outcome would likely have been similar to the bleakness seen in the infamous intelligence assessment of Anbar in September 2006.<sup>354</sup>

Like the principle of interest, increased time made these effects more valuable to the U.S.-led Coalition. Attempts to cash these various factors in at a point earlier than

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<sup>353</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006–2008*, 193.

<sup>354</sup> *State of the Insurgency in Al-Anbar*, I MEF G2 intelligence report.

2007 would have resulted in limited utility and their quick rejection. It took the awareness of the Sunnis that their future did not lay with that offered by AQI. Even if the Sunni were ready to wholeheartedly reject AQI in early 2005 after the initial murmurs of revolt in Al Qaim, the U.S. military would not have been able to completely capitalize on this development, as the institution had not yet been converted to see the benefits of a classical counterinsurgency strategy. Additionally, the Iraqi Army lacked capacity to partner with the U.S. military the way it did in the summer of 2007. The Iraqi government in 2005 was still forming and developing its constitution, focused on developing the political future of Iraq rather than ending the insurgency. The convergence of the surge, tactical innovation, increasing GoI capacity, and other accelerants with the small, but slowly growing divide between AQI and the Sunni served to widen the existing wedge, leading to the gap being split wide open in a matter of months rather than years. These are not isolated causes that can be simply mimicked elsewhere. The implementation of these factors must be understood in their context to be of future value.

## V. INSURGENT GROWTH AND DECLINE: A THEORY

*Our military theory was born through a study of our own experiences in the jihadi current, as well as through enduring and living in the field throughout the various stages. This is how I produce practical theories...these kinds of theories...are written for the battlefield. The details in their ideas have been accumulated in the field and during hours of reflection with the Mujahidun warriors when they rested.*

—Abu Mus’ab al-Suri<sup>355</sup>

The Iraq War has the potential to further our understanding of the dynamics of insurgencies. The failure of AQI to take root within the Sunni population and mobilize them to create a fully-fledged Islamist state is likely the most important dynamic to study. The immediate policy question to be answered is whether this failed insurgency can be replicated elsewhere. This thesis has suggested that a set of preexisting conditions were not only necessary, but were the primary causes of the rapid decrease of violence in Iraq in 2007, manifesting itself as a disparity between AQI and the Sunni’s vision for Iraq, AQI’s lack of cultural understanding regarding Iraq’s Sunnis, and poor access to the Sunni’s social network.

With these three conditions in mind, the body of propositions described in this chapter seeks to explain basic conditions under which insurgent groups have the greatest potential to grow or decline, based on how they are viewed by the population—those whom the insurgent seeks to mobilize against the state. Whereas social movement theorists like Doug McAdam have previously developed models of social mobilization, this theory seeks to illuminate the specific *conditions* under which those models can take place by examining the relationship between both parties involved in group mobilization—the insurgent and the populace. A theory regarding insurgent mobilization will allow students and practitioners of insurgency and counter-insurgency to take human behavior observed in the past, and make a basic prediction the *potential* behavior of

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<sup>355</sup> Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, *The Military Theory of the Global Islamic Resistance Call*, as quoted in Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus’ab Al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 347–348.

actors involved in future events.<sup>356</sup> The purpose is not to create an inviolable law of insurgency, but more of a guideline to help evaluate efforts to initiate or counter an insurgency based on pre-existing differences between the population and the insurgent.<sup>357</sup> These factors—ideological alignment, cultural alignment and social embeddedness—assist in helping potential sponsors of insurgencies to assess the viability of an insurgent movement, in addition to assisting counterinsurgents to be better adept and countering them.

This chapter intends to explain how insurgencies respond to the differences between insurgents and a target population. In this way, it dovetails with the work done in social movement theory. Doug McAdam presents a three-part political process model describing the growth of social movements in his book, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. He posits that social movements require favorable political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and strategic framing in order to

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<sup>356</sup> I make this distinction to emphasize the potential for *growth* and not tie these variables to *success*. The variables presented here speak to growth, which, while an essential element of insurgent success, does not guarantee the outcome of an insurgency. Instead, the ultimate outcome of an insurgent movement is based on the various interactions between the population, the state and the insurgent.

<sup>357</sup> Here I may be going out on a limb amongst conventional historians by advocating that there may be such thing as regularities in history, but nonetheless, I press on. The explanatory power of a theory should seek to transcend one event—the Iraq War in this case—and extend to others. As such, it should remain a degree of abstractness and generalization in order to explain patterns that can be applied to similar cases. However, there are caveats: “The danger,” remarks Ludwig von Bertalanffy, the progenitor of general systems theory, “is oversimplification: to make it conceptually controllable, we have to reduce it to a conceptual skeleton—the question remaining whether, in doing so, we have not cut out vital parts of the anatomy. The danger of oversimplification is the greater, the more multifarious and complex the phenomenon is.” While insurgencies are no doubt complex endeavors, the intent here is to develop a theory based on what is *believed* to be true across a great number of insurgencies—making this theory not an argument over fact, but over an interpretation of facts—and predict how a particular insurgent (or counter-insurgent) group will be received amongst a given population. If the relationship is potentially tenuous, this can provide the counter-insurgent the ability to insert himself into the chasm of differences between the population and insurgent—providing he is closer to the population than the insurgent is—and appeal to the population as a better alternative to the insurgent. Likewise, this theory may be able to determine a basic probability of success for an insurgent movement based on his higher degree of unity and commonality with a given population. Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory; Foundations, Development, Applications* (New York: G. Braziller, 1969), 200.

generate mobilization.<sup>358</sup> The political process model does much to explain collective behavior in terms of opportunity, means and motives, but in some ways the model is incomplete in explaining the rise of social movements. McAdam assumes that the insurgent rises from the midst of a populace, which is not always the case. For instance, what are we to make of the current view of the Global War on Terror as a “global Islamist insurgency,”<sup>359</sup> and the role that transnational actors play in fomenting and exacerbating local grievances?<sup>360</sup> The most pertinent question for the practitioner of insurgency is how do we explain the failures of social movements and insurgencies initiated by individuals from outside of the society? The failures of AQI and Che Guevara appear to indicate that a necessary pre-condition for the political process model is that, at some level, the insurgents must share some common characteristics with the population, but which ones?

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<sup>358</sup> Political opportunities, as described by McAdams, are those moments in time that “undermine the stability of the entire political system of by increasing the political leverage of a single insurgent group.” With the state weakened or through the elevation of the challenger by long-term socioeconomic changes, these moments serve to lower the costs associated with collective action by the challengers against the state. Mobilizing structures are those resources of the challenger’s community that “enable insurgent groups to exploit [political] opportunities.” These organizational and community networks provide the means to generate long-term solidarity for the insurgent and access a broader portion of the community for support. Finally, the transforming effect of strategic framing helps the insurgent denote favorable shifts in political opportunity to facilitate collective action. This functions as a means for the insurgent to “collectively define [the population’s] situation as unjust and subject to change through group action,” providing impetus for mobilization. Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1999), 40–43.

<sup>359</sup> “Many [of the active insurgencies in the world today] have little to do with pan-Islamic objectives, and often pre-date the global *jihad* by decades or centuries,” writes David Kilcullen. “But [using] the links provided by tools of globalization like the Internet, global media and satellite communications, a new class of regional or theater-level actors has emerged. These groups do have links to the global *jihad*, often act as regional allies or affiliates of Al Qaeda, and prey on local groups and issues to further the *jihad*.” These regional affiliates “comprise a loosely aligned confederation of independent networks and movements, not a single unified organization. Global players link and exploit local players through regional affiliates—they rarely interact directly with local players, but sponsor and support them through intermediaries. Each theater has operational players who are able to tap into the global *jihad*, and these tend to be regional Al Qaeda affiliates,” or other organizations such as Hezbollah. David J. Kilcullen, “Countering Global Insurgency,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28, no. 4 (2005), 601–602.

<sup>360</sup> David Kilcullen posits that Al Qaeda’s military strategy is to provoke an American military response so as to incite the *ummah* (Muslim community) to rise up against apostate regimes and establish an Islamic caliphate. To achieve this Kilcullen hypothesizes that AQ is using a model where “AQ moves into remote areas, creates alliances with local traditional communities, exports violence that prompts a Western intervention, and then exploits the backlash against that intervention in order to generate support for its *Takfiri* agenda.” Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, 36.

McAdam's variables are extremely important in defining insurgent growth, but what is missing is an explanation of *how* the insurgent is able to facilitate access to mobilizing structures and strategic framing. There is little in the literature beyond the notion that insurgents must translate their universals into the vernacular that explains how they can gain and maintain a degree of popular support that enables them to carry out their aims. Faced with the prospects of a group of transnational insurgents who aim to set the world afire, what are their chances of succeeding? Similarly, what are the chances of the efforts of the U.S. to utilize Unconventional Warfare (UW)<sup>361</sup> to achieve its foreign policy goals? The three variables presented in this theory serve as facilitators for the political process model, allowing the insurgent to leverage McAdam's political process model to their fullest extent and will attempt to make some sense of these pressing questions.

#### A. THE INSURGENT'S DILEMMA

Insurgencies are contests over political power in a given locality and result in a struggle between three parties—the sovereign ruler, the would-be sovereign, and the ruled. Insurgencies are not only waged over local grievances, but they are also waged by the local population. The telluric nature of this contest is one that drives all factors involved in insurgencies. This characteristic, which is particularly peculiar to insurgencies than is found in other types of conflict, is defined by the German jurist Carl Schmitt as, “the tie to the soil, to the autochthonous population and to the geographic particularity of the land—mountain-ranges, forests, jungles, or deserts.”<sup>362</sup>

In the beginning, insurgencies involve a nucleus of a committed few, all with desires to challenge the *status quo* of the state. Without growing from this small number

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<sup>361</sup> Unconventional Warfare is defined as “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt or overthrow an occupying power or government by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary and guerrilla force in a denied area.” Unlike previous vague definitions, in this sense, UW is not countering an insurgency nor conducting any military operation with indigenous forces, but using U.S. support to foment one. Briefing by LTC Mark Grdovic, USASOC G-3X at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California on 3 September 2009, slides in the author's possession.

<sup>362</sup> Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan: Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political* [Theorie des Partisanen: Zwischenbemerkung zum Begriff des Politischen], trans. G. L. Ulmen, 2nd ed. (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2007), 21.

to a united collective, there is little hope for the insurgent to seize power and replace the existing governmental regime. Understanding this, the insurgent must develop a method to entice them to make the move to his side.

However, the obstacles are numerous. The stakes for the insurgent are very high—success will see him exercising power, whereas failure will see him hang, as an actor seeking to transform the system outside the limits of the law. Because the insurgent seeks to transform the system from without, this approach makes every action conducted by the insurgent illegal according to the state.<sup>363</sup> This initial position is daunting for the insurgent—“the range of collective actions open to a relatively powerless group is normally very small. Its program, its form of action, its very existence are likely to be illegal, hence subject to violent repression,” note the Tillys.<sup>364</sup> The would-be insurgent faces a perplexing dilemma—with the costs of action so high, how can the insurgent transition from a few people sitting around the café table to a movement that can topple the existing regime? By gaining the support of the people, after all, insurgencies are not only political phenomena, but relational phenomena as well.

## **B. INSURGENT GROWTH THROUGH ALIGNMENT: A THEORY**

I contend that the ability of McAdam’s political process model to produce growth in social movements and insurgencies is contingent upon three factors that must be aligned between the insurgent and the population he is trying to gain support from: ideology, culture, and social embeddedness. These three factors provide the insurgent with the ability to access the two variables of McAdam’s that are in the control of the insurgent, namely mobilizing structures and strategic framing. A causal mechanism for this theory of alignment and mobilization is depicted in Figure 10. Trust and legitimacy are created—or destroyed—through the combination of these three factors, which in turn

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<sup>363</sup> Whereas a resistance movement has legal standing in the eyes of the Geneva Conventions, the insurgent has no legal standing in national or international law.

<sup>364</sup> Charles Tilly, Louise Tilly and Richard H. Tilly, *The Rebellious Century, 1830-1930* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 283.

serve as the basis for the growth of popular support. Without trust between the insurgent and population, legitimacy cannot be attained. When viewed as illegitimate, the insurgency will wither on the vine.

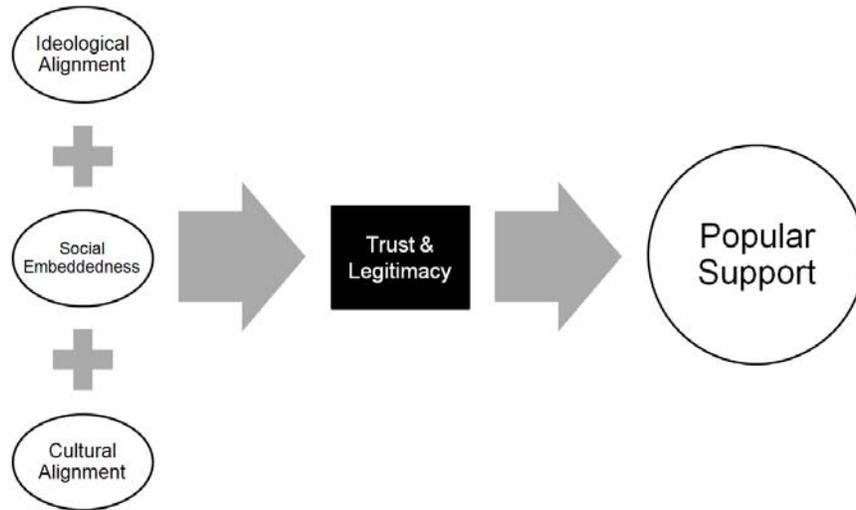


Figure 10. Alignment Theory.

### 1. Ideological Alignment

Insurgency theory tells us that an insurgent first needs a cause, which should be able to “attract the largest number of supporters, and repel the minimum number of opponents.”<sup>365</sup> “Each classical armed struggle, indeed, arises from a core of those driven by a dream,” writes J. Bowyer Bell.<sup>366</sup> “A strong underground movement, a mass movement, must have an appeal to the masses as well as their support,” notes Feliks Gross.<sup>367</sup> The cause, then, is the *sine qua non* of the insurgent movement. In order to maximize the appeal of the cause, it stands that the cause must be aligned as much as possible with the population, incorporating their grievances to the maximum extent possible. Chalmers Johnson notes that the cause “needs a general ideological appeal that

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<sup>365</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Washington, D.C.: Praeger Security International, 2006, 1964), 19–20.

<sup>366</sup> J. Bowyer Bell, *Dragonwars: Armed Struggle and the Conventions of Modern War* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 127.

<sup>367</sup> Feliks Gross, *The Seizure of Political Power in a Century of Revolutions* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958), 337.

will bring the [insurgent movement] the support of the people.”<sup>368</sup> Likewise, an insurgent’s ideology serves to “rally people around the movement...[and] steels and disciplines underground members,” writes Molnar.<sup>369</sup>

Seeing the importance of ideology in social movements and insurgencies, in this theory, ideological alignment refers to the degree to which the ideology of the insurgent group matches with that of the population.<sup>370</sup> In order to be considered highly aligned, there must be a great amount of congruence between the political aims, ideals, principles and doctrines of the insurgent and those of the population. The ideal of high alignment would see a situation where the population and insurgent share the same worldviews on governance while a gross disparity exists between the population and the state; similarly, the ideal of low alignment would be the inverse situation. Ideological alignment contributes to the development of trust by offering a political design that depicts how the population will be ruled in the future. A vision that promotes a democratic vision will tend to beget future trust, notes Sztompka, whereas those visions that promote an autocratic future will likely lead to decay of the political system over time.<sup>371</sup>

Regardless of the future political vision, it is worth noting that “trust is a precondition for political order.”<sup>372</sup> In the early stages of the insurgency, the specifics matter little, as the cause remains a barely perceptible idea amongst the population only pointing to change from the existing *status quo*. The message must be diffuse enough to capture the attention of the mass of the population; however, amongst the committed few, the ideology is more specific indicating a concrete designs for the future.

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<sup>368</sup> Chalmers A. Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1982), 147.

<sup>369</sup> Andrew R. Molnar, *Human Factors Considerations of Undergrounds in Insurgencies* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 69.

<sup>370</sup> An analysis of the ideologies driving the population and those driving the insurgency serves as a measurement of ideological alignment. Divergent views would represent a low evaluation of alignment and as such, the state and the population are likely to be highly aligned in this situation. The population is likely rather happy with the ideology of the state as it fits within their view of how they should be governed, although other grievances may exist between the two.

<sup>371</sup> Piotr Sztompka, *Trust: A Sociological Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 139–150.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

What makes ideological alignment critical in social movements and insurgencies is a function of the scale of the effort; where small groups may conduct a *coup d'état* with relative ease to gain control of state power, insurgencies must “throw before [the people] a picture of a better tomorrow, a release from the old, feudal social conditions of oppression and exploitation.”<sup>373</sup> This picture of a better life is often couched in terms of a systematic body of concepts that guides a group of people regarding how a political system, party or organization should be organized, function and rule. It is this future vision that contributes to the development of trust by committing the insurgent to a specific expectation. As the challenger and would-be king, the insurgent must demonstrate that the political designs he has for the population are better than those offered by the existing state.

However, for a general ideology to take root, it must be recast in a new light, specifying the ideology to the population. Galula notes that, “the insurgent must, of course, be able to identify himself totally with the cause, or more precisely, *with the entire majority of the population theoretically attracted by it* [emphasis added].”<sup>374</sup> However, the adaptation of ideology to local nuances cannot take place without an understanding of the target audience, and with that we turn to the necessity of cultural alignment.

## 2. Cultural Alignment

Cultural alignment refers to the degree to which the cultural norms of behavior and values of the insurgent matches with that of the population.<sup>375</sup> In many homogenous societies where the insurgent movement is from the same ethnic and people group of the

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<sup>373</sup> Gross, *The Seizure of Political Power in a Century of Revolutions*, 337.

<sup>374</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, 20.

<sup>375</sup> Cultural alignment is measured by the degree to which the insurgent is representative of the population in terms of sharing language, informal values and norms of behavior. Shared language provides unhindered communication of the insurgent’s messages to the population, while shared values and norms of behavior serve to bind the insurgent and populace together in a shared community, highlighting commonalities. Collective action would be impossible without maintaining shared norms and values to serve as the impetus for united efforts instead of haphazard, disjointed action. In this manner, informal norms and values provide a sense of unity and predictability for both parties in addition to fostering mutual understanding.

population, this alignment is naturally very high. However, in heterogeneous societies, or those situations where the insurgents are a third party and are not indigenous, cultural alignment would likely be low due to the insurgent's inability to inherently understand the nuances of indigenous norms and beliefs.

Returning to Galula's previous statement, we can see that sharing the identity of the population is imperative. Mao further emphasizes the point by warning of the dangers of not having cultural alignment—"The moment that [a] war of resistance *dissociates itself from the masses of the people* is the precise moment that it dissociates itself from hope of ultimate victory [emphasis added]."<sup>376</sup> Cultural alignment is an important factor in the growth of popular support for the insurgent. "In various parts of the world, those [insurgents] who refuse, even subconsciously, to organize in response to tribal factors, the national character and local practice, the existing social forms and values, mostly find their crusade in difficulty," writes Bell.<sup>377</sup>

Cultural alignment assists the insurgent by establishing the basics of trust. "There are normative obligations to trust," writes Peter Sztopka, "and there are normative obligations to be trustworthy, credible, and reliable. One locus of both types of obligations are social roles, demanding specific conduct from their incumbents."<sup>378</sup> These social roles are largely defined by the cultural context of the population. Insurgents with greater degrees of cultural alignment with the population would have a higher potential to build trust by having "inside knowledge," which acts as a proof of identity regarding social norms, values and roles.

What makes this alignment so critical—and quite possibly more important than ideological alignment—for the insurgent is that by incorporating the *identity* of the population into the cause, respecting it, and not attempting to overtly challenge the

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<sup>376</sup> Zedong Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare: Translated and with an Introduction by Samuel B. Griffith*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Praeger, 1961), 44.

<sup>377</sup> Bell, *Dragonwars: Armed Struggle and the Conventions of Modern War*, 148.

<sup>378</sup> Sztopka, *Trust: A Sociological Theory*, 66.

group's socio-cultural *status quo*, the insurgent has enmeshed himself so much into the population that the insurgent's identity is seen as synonymous with that of the populace.<sup>379</sup>

Identity building is not only crucial for the insurgent's immediate concerns of mobilization, but also for his long-term goal as the would-be ruler—to stabilize the state after imposition of his political control over the populace, the insurgent' must build communal bonds to assist in establishing political controls. He must “develop links between citizens, encourage participation and use personal associations to cross societal divisions that may exist over such issues as ethnicity or religion.”<sup>380</sup> Strengthening group identity serves to divide groups, further reinforcing in-group bonds and diminishing out-group bonds, thereby facilitating greater support for the culturally aligned insurgent and sapping the state's popular support. However, the development of linkages upon which to build identity requires a third variable—social embeddedness.

### **3. Social Embeddedness**

Social embeddedness describes the insurgent's location within the social network of the targeted population, and can be identified by his kinship and social ties, both formal and informal. Social embeddedness allows the insurgent to build a shared identity by utilizing his cultural alignment with a given social network. Without it, an insurgent will be unable to pull people together “by connecting prospective participants to an opportunity for mobilization and enabling them to convert their political consciousness

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<sup>379</sup> This cultural alignment must be perceived as real by the population, not manufactured. This holds for the counter-insurgent as well. In examining the Shi'a Intifada of 1991 in Iraq, Amatzia Baram notes that the Intifada “provided evidence that ideology and state-sponsored culture, even when accompanied by some political and economic benefits but short of real Sunni-Shi'a equality, were insufficient to create patriotic unity even among the Arabs of Iraq.” Baram, *Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991–96*, 19–20.

<sup>380</sup> Talentino, *The Two Faces of Nation-Building: Developing Function and Identity*, 563.

into action.”<sup>381</sup> Furthermore, networks serve a disseminative function and allow insurgents to circulate information on opportunities for actions, points of contact, and the culturally-adapted ideological vision.

The location of an insurgent’s position within the social network and the extensiveness of his ties to the social network provide him with the ability to extend influence within the network. Centrality notes the relative place the insurgent has within society, be it on the fringes or deep in the center of the network. The notion that prior social ties serve as the foundations of movement recruitment is considered a near ironclad rule in the study of social movements, and as such, insurgents with dense intra-network connections potentially have multiple opportunities to increase recruitment. Dense ties allow the insurgent to provide additional impetus to gain popular support by allowing him to showcase the fact that his network of existing support allows for “a reduction of the practical costs attached to participation,”<sup>382</sup> because the effort is spread over a wider amount of individuals.

Here social embeddedness is a necessary condition for the formation of trust. Trust is, after all, a two-way relationship at the very least. Without being a part of the social network, the insurgent will not be able to build any trust. It is this point that often spells trouble for non-native insurgent movements, as evidenced by the experience of al Qaeda in Iraq and Che Guevara’s misadventures in the Congo. In contrast, insurgencies, which are indigenously based, enjoy a greater deal of social embeddedness as they arise from local movements, thus giving them a greater advantage than non-indigenous based insurgencies.

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<sup>381</sup> Florence Passy, "Social Networks Matter. But How?" in *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, eds. Mario Diani and Doug McAdam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 24.

<sup>382</sup> Mario Diani, "Introduction: Social Movements, Contentious Actions, and Social Networks: "From Metaphor to Substance"?" in *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, eds. Mario Diani and Doug McAdam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 8.

### C. VARIABLE INTERACTION

For the insurgent to have the maximum potential for growth, I maintain that all three of these variables must be aligned with the population. The misalignment of any of these factors will lead to less potential for mobilization, and in some cases, will ensure the demise to the insurgent's movement. These three factors are permuted in a typology in Figure 11, and when combined in a Venn diagram each of these factors contributes to the growth of an insurgency in various ways. The degree of potential support and further growth is indicated by the darkness of the overlapping area in each circle. When all three factors align, the insurgent's potential for growth is at its zenith.

*Type I* represents a condition where the would-be insurgent has no chance at all of mobilizing the population, even in the face of favorable political opportunities. In this situation, the insurgent is ignorant of indigenous beliefs, customs and values, has no informal or formal ties within the social network of the population, and has an ideology unpalatable with that maintained by the masses. This isolation creates a situation where the insurgent has no relation on which to develop trust and legitimacy between himself and the population. Lacking similarities with the population at large, it is easy for individuals to self-radicalize into “bunches of guys” as posited by Sageman<sup>383</sup> and to create what Della Porta refers to as “spirals of encapsulation.”<sup>384</sup> Here the insurgent is so different from the population that his ability to influence it through shared identity and relationships is nonexistent.

*Type II* represents a situation where insurgents are located within the fabric of society and are representative of the population's customs, values and norms of behavior, but the insurgent's ideological vision is viewed as anathema to those held by the general population, resulting in low levels of legitimacy and a decline of his movement. His links with the population at large and shared culture give him means to the ability to frame messages that culturally resonate with the population, but his ability to fully

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<sup>383</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 116.

<sup>384</sup> Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 12.

influence the population is hindered by the lack of concurrence over the political vision. Similarly, the absence of ideological unity prevents him from developing a full measure of trust. This difference serves to draw a sharp line between the insurgent and the population, where the population is not fully accepting of the insurgent. This situation is commonly observed in domestic politics within democratic societies, where numerous minor political groups represent a myriad of ideologies that often fail to achieve any substantial share of the vote.

*Type III* situations are those in which the insurgent shares cultural norms and a belief in a shared ideology. This provides the insurgent with the ability to frame their insurgent movement in ways that provide a maximum of resonance with the population in effect creating a sense of innate solidarity and unity. By properly understanding and incorporating the population's ethos into his cause and political endstate, the insurgent creates "acceptance of, and commitment to, the processes of the [future] state [espoused by the insurgent]—belief in their legitimacy, a sense of ownership in their representation, and even pride in their development."<sup>385</sup>

But this potential to build a shared identity and establish trust with the population never presents itself to the insurgent, as the insurgent in Type III situations has no tangible links with the population. This lack of personal connections prevents him from being able to fully maximize his ability to influence the population and build trusting relationships. These situations are often manifested by outside sponsorship of exile-based insurgent groups to bring about regime change, and as such, usually fail in their efforts.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Talentino, *The Two Faces of Nation-Building: Developing Function and Identity*, 564..

<sup>386</sup> For more on the subject of the use of exiles to spearhead efforts toward regime change, see Martin Smith, "The United States' use of Exiles in Promoting Regime Change in Cuba, 1961 and Iraq, 2002–3," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 15, no. 1 (2004), 38–53,

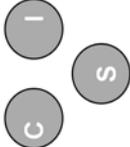
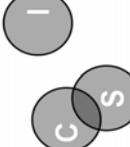
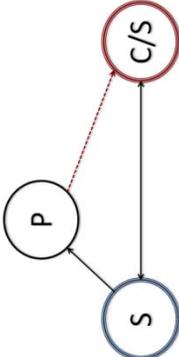
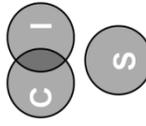
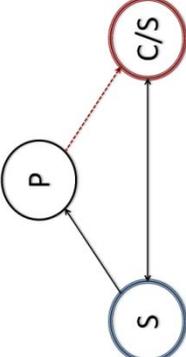
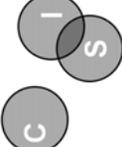
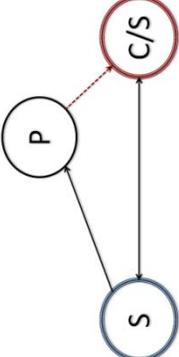
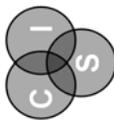
Type	Ideological Alignment	Cultural Alignment	Social Embeddedness	Variable Alignment	Level of Trust & Legitimacy	Level of Growth	Actor Alignment
<b>Type I</b>	N	N	N		Lowest	Decline	
<b>Type II</b>	N	Y	Y		Lower	Marginal Decline	
<b>Type III</b>	Y	Y	N		Moderate	No Growth	
<b>Type IV</b>	Y	N	Y		Higher	Marginal Growth	
<b>Type V</b>	Y	Y	Y		Highest	Maximum Growth	

Figure 11. Typology of Alignment

*Type IV* depicts a scenario where the insurgent is embedded in the social network and shares the same ideological worldview, but lacks an understanding or sharing of the population's culture and codes of behavior. The potential for growth in this situation would stand to be marginal due to the linkages and the shared ideology, but the lack of shared culture prevents full resonance for framing, leading to high levels of initial growth as excitement for the insurgent builds. However, over time, growth reaches a built-in limit as the insurgent remains culturally different than the population.

*Type V* represents a scenario where the insurgent is culturally and ideologically aligned with the population and is socially embedded in the population. Here the insurgent can leverage his cultural and ideological alignment to develop resonance with the population through strategic framing and his embeddedness provides him with access to the population to create trust relationships at the micro-level, which assist with gaining access to McAdam's mobilizing structures. Additionally, through these relationships, the insurgent has a greater ability to use diffusion and brokerage to grow his movement. The combination of these three variables—ideological alignment, cultural alignment, and social embeddedness—allows the insurgent to overcome the difficulties faced in Type II and Type III, and Type IV, giving him access to personal relationships with the population with which to utilize the strengths of his ideological and cultural alignment to effectively build trust along those links.

#### **D. STRATEGIC INTERACTION: THE STATE, INSURGENT, AND ALIGNMENT THEORY**

Understanding the importance of alignment for the insurgent, how does this affect the state? If, as previously noted, and insurgency is a battle between the state and insurgent over the allegiance of the population, then it holds that the alignment of the state and the population is important for the state as well.<sup>387</sup> In light of varying levels of alignment, what is the potential for the state or the insurgent to win at the start of contentious politics? Figure 12 offers a degree of insight as to how varying levels of

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<sup>387</sup> This is true to a degree; because the state is already in power and ostensibly has control over the tools of force, alignment between the state and population can be slightly less important for the state than for the insurgent.

insurgent and state alignment with the population might interact. Here, the potential outcome of the interaction between the state's relationship with the population and the insurgent's relationship with the population is depicted in the intersection of the vertical and horizontal cells.<sup>388</sup>

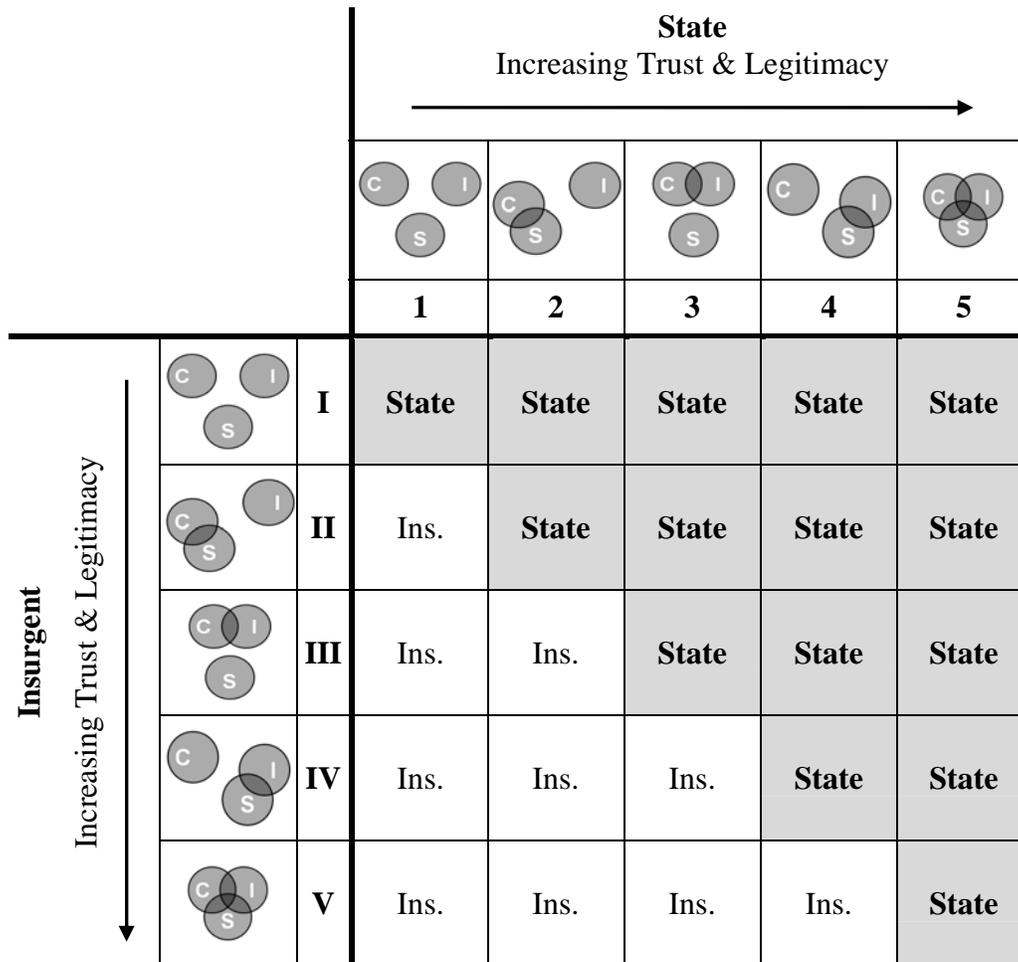


Figure 12. State/Insurgent Interaction

With these interactions, a major assumption is made: when both parties have the same degree of alignment with the population, it is assumed that the state will have the ultimate advantage. This assumption is made on the fact that the state largely has a resource advantage over the insurgent and the fact that it is the state and not the

<sup>388</sup> The result is based on each parties *potential* at the start. We must remember that legitimacy is in constant flux after an insurgent begins his movement or the state tries to quash the insurgent.

challenger. It assumed that offered a choice between two evils, the lesser evil will be chosen; in short for the population, the *status quo* is better.

But, how does the interaction between the state and insurgent progress beyond a base of potential? As suggested earlier, the degree to which the insurgent is fully aligned gives him a natural boost to his level of trust. But more work must be done for the insurgent to defeat the state and seize power, as trust and legitimacy is a perception that is always in a constant state of flux. “Faith without works is dead,”<sup>389</sup> said the apostle James. Like faith, so goes trust, we might add. This is a helpful reminder that the insurgent must link his words to actions, in order to increase the perceived benefits for the population to reap upon joining the insurgent’s movement. Legitimacy comprises a sum of perceptions of the insurgent’s actions; the population rates those seeking legitimacy ultimately on their performance.<sup>390</sup> Early on, the insurgent has the advantage over the state as, in contrast to the state, the insurgent’s “pretensions cannot as easily be contrasted with their performance.”<sup>391</sup> With telluric ties to the population, the insurgent receives an initial level of preferential treatment by the population, as he cannot be judged on his performance at first, but only by his promises. This foothold of trust and legitimacy gives him an initial influx of recruits and other tangible support along with further acquiescence for his actions, but will not last long. Initially all the insurgent has

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<sup>389</sup> James 2:20 (New American Standard Bible).

<sup>390</sup> Imagine that legitimacy is a bank, where the level of legitimacy can rise or fall over time. The undecided population has two of these legitimacy banks—one for the insurgent and one for the state—for each of the parties to invest legitimacy into. As the insurgent and the state fight over the allegiance of the population, their actions lead to various credits and debits from the bank. Naturally, the population—as the object of the contest—seeks to maximize its benefit and lend its support to the side that has a greater balance in the population’s legitimacy bank. The insurgent is always weaker than the counterinsurgent, thus his need to strengthen himself through the legitimation of his cause by the population. The insurgent can only make promises to the population in his opening moves, as he is still a nascent body, with a high degree of weakness. On the other hand, the state has the resource advantage. This asymmetric advantage maintained by the state is evident in the state’s superior resources, ability to work in the open, established governing mechanisms, and in international recognition of the state as the sovereign authority for its territory. With this advantage, the state has the capacity, in theory, to rapidly fill up the population’s legitimacy bank through a shrewd application of resources to show that they have not only the ability, but also the will to address popular grievances. Faced with this inherent disadvantage, it is only by gaining and *maintaining* the backing of the population, that the insurgent can have any chance of winning by reducing the advantages of the state. This last part is of the utmost importance, for if the insurgent does not maintain alignment and embeddedness with the population over time then support will begin to dwindle. For what the population gives, the population can take away.

<sup>391</sup> Scott and Clark, *Insurgency*, 54.

is the promise of future returns on the population's investment. In the movie *Boiler Room*, the main character, stock broker Seth Davis, spends his days cold-calling both the wealthy and the mediocre, pressuring them to purchase initial public offerings exclusive to Davis' firm. When some investors get flighty and have second thoughts, Davis uses every technique he can to persuade them to keep their money in the company, piling on promise after promise in order to buttress the initial promise he made. Like Davis, the insurgent leadership knows that their cause is all about seizing power and the use of the population is a tool to that end. The insurgent is then forced into a position of multiple promises. If he doesn't produce some sort of legitimate actions, then he has no ability to offer further promises to gain continued investment by the population. Without action on the part of the insurgent to build legitimate performance into his efforts to maintain trust with the population, the cause becomes a hollow, trite slogan lacking the ability to push the population to action, and the movement falters.

#### **E. CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT**

By examining the relationship between the would-be ruler and his potential population, alignment theory enhances McAdam's political process model, indicating specific common preconditions needed between the insurgent and populace needed for the political process model to produce insurgent growth. Would-be insurgents can utilize the theory presented here to serve as a foundational analysis to evaluate the potential for the population to jump to their side in the event of the right political opportunity structures. Likewise, for the counterinsurgent, the model can also show the degree of potential support the state may receive from the population in addition to identifying potential fault lines needed to split the population from the insurgent. While the common perception dictates that physical security is critical at its heart, an insurgency is not a martial endeavor, but a political one, and offering a dream (and moving towards it) will likely induce the population to flock to one particular side or another rather than trying to destroy the insurgent physically.

Further research is needed on a number of fronts. First, one of the challenges to utilizing a single case is in determining whether or not the basic mechanisms can be

extended beyond the case or whether they are too unique. The theory presented here is based on the experience of AQI, limiting its applicability. Although a rough survey of other insurgencies seem to indicate a level of validity, alignment theory should be extended to other cases to test it and to further refine it. Because insurgencies rely on the human component in order to achieve power, we must conclude that the differences between people can have an effect on its outcome. Applying alignment theory to other cases where the insurgents are indigenous or non-indigenous can provide greater fidelity in determining the weight of the variables.

Secondly, mechanisms for inducing alignment should be examined. Can an insurgent move from one type of alignment to another? Can all types of alignment be achieved over time by an insurgent or state? These questions can help us to understand the difficulties involved in beginning an insurgency or countering it. Initially, it appears that the answers are in the affirmative in all cases, save one. Movement from Type II alignment to Type V would require the insurgent to grow ties with the population. Similarly, to move from Type III alignment to Type V alignment, it appears that the insurgent must restructure his ideology towards one that works for the population. Transitioning from Type IV to Type V appears nearly impossible, but may occur over time as the insurgent and population develop a shared culture and identity. The question remains, though is regarding movement from Type I alignment to Type V alignment—is this impossible, or does the insurgent need a specific detailed plan and a brilliant mind to carefully orchestrate a plan of total alignment?

This theory speaks to the relationship between the insurgent and the population he wishes to mobilize. It posits that in order to maintain the future support of the population, the initial cause of the insurgency must resonate with the population and the insurgent should be in alignment with the population to the greatest extent possible. If he is slightly off, the resultant misalignment will have a long-term effect; geometrically, a few degrees of separation between two lines results in ever increasing distance between them the further from the point of origin. One can surmise that the degree of separation is proportional to the length of time until cracks begin to show without the input of

additional wedges. As seen in the case of Iraq, this alignment made all the difference to the outcome of the conflict. No matter how much money, time and guns an insurgent has, without the people he is nothing.

## VI. CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction, the study of military history is a necessary component of the military professional's trade. It serves as an adjunct to experience in developing an understanding of military operations and planning. In regards to the latter, "The past must be studied as the basis for, and a guide to, the study of the future. To make a sound prediction one must project the past into the future. If the past is ignored, as many would ignore it, then there is not firm foundation for sound forecasting [and] sound planning."<sup>392</sup> The detailed study of the demise of AQI can offer vital lessons to be applied in Afghanistan. Yet, there is a catch. Every situation contains unique conditions to account for when applying techniques and methods from the past. "History is an unforgiving laboratory," notes historian Zachary Shore. "Its experiments can be run only once, and never again under precisely the same conditions."<sup>393</sup> Failure to understand the contextual factors of the past will likely result in unintended outcomes when applied to different conditions. That being said, this thesis has attempted to provide not only the context within which AQI rose to such prominence that it was vilified by the Bush Administration, but also the reasons why the group fell so quickly in 2007.

The crucial event for the reader to understand is that AQI had little in common with those on whose behalf it was trying to establish the Caliphate. While the U.S.-led coalition was seen by many Iraqis—Sunni and Shi'a alike—as an occupier, the Sunni saw AQI as another occupier. This view is perhaps rooted in the way that the Sunnis saw the state of things in Iraq. Inculcated through the Tikriti Ba'ath program to develop a unique brand of nationalism that placed Iraq first and the Arab world second, the Sunni viewed those outside the Iraqi tent with considerable suspicion. In hindsight, it is easy to see that the Sunni rejection of AQI occurred because of the group's failure to adapt their views to local views. This misalignment of vision, culture, and weak ties to the Sunni population

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<sup>392</sup> Charles L. Bolte, "The Role of Land Forces in Future Warfare," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 75, no. 1 (January, 1949), 21.

<sup>393</sup> Zachary Shore, *Blunder: Why Smart People Make Bad Decisions*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), 167–168.

at large promoted distrust between the two. Had AQI been more familiar with the ideological views and cultural mores of a relatively secular and nationalist society, AQI might not have sown the seeds of its future destruction.

For those seeking to impose the same result on future insurgents, the Sunni-AQI split cannot be understated. Above all other factors contributing to AQI's rapid fall in 2007, the rift stands alone as the prime cause. Without it, the relationship between AQI and the Sunni surely would have stood firm in the face of the threat posed to Sunnis by the Shi'a in the government and those militias seeking retribution for Ba'ath rule. But while this initial tear set the tone for what was to come, the rate at which the Sunni-AQI schism widened was the result of additional forces helping to rip the two apart.

Ultimately, for the United States, we must be more frank in admitting how much our efforts can bear on an insurgency. Barring any future instances of armed, contentious domestic politics, the U.S. will always be a third party to any insurgency, attempting to shore up (or even create) the state, or tear it down. While this thesis has highlighted their insufficiency, the multiple efforts employed by the U.S. to defeat AQI were, in fact, necessary components of any counterinsurgency campaign *in a highly unstable state*. The change in strategic leadership brought with it new ideas on how to conduct a wide-ranging, holistic counterinsurgency campaign needed to combat a raging insurgency in a nascent state. The "surge" in ground forces gave military commanders a force large enough to not only clear insurgent-held areas, but also to maintain state control after insurgents had fled. The ability to implement such ideas was only possible once the military force convinced itself it needed to change from its time-honored traditions of enemy-centric combat. The increasing state competence and capability provided the population with a glimpse of what was possible if they sided with the government. A campaign to destroy those who could never be reconciled with the ideas of the state kept pressure on the insurgent, causing him to make mistakes. Without these elements, the Sunni rejection of AQI would likely have seen more repression of the Sunnis in order for AQI to gain their compliance.

But what made these U.S.-led initiatives work? Like the principle of interest, increased time magnified the investments of a number of efforts, making them more

valuable to the U.S.-led Coalition. Attempts to cash these various factors in prior to 2007 would have resulted in limited utility and their quick rejection, further inflaming the situation in Iraq. It took the awareness of the Sunnis that their future did not lay with that offered by AQI to truly make these accelerants work to their maximum effectiveness. Even if the Sunni rank and file were ready to reject AQI in early 2005 after the initial murmurs of revolt in Al Qaim, the U.S. military would not have been able to completely capitalize on this development, as the institution had not yet been converted to see the benefits of utilizing a classical counterinsurgency strategy. Likewise, the attrition of AQI by the SOF campaign of industrial counterterrorism had not yet been fully felt. Additionally, the Iraqi Army lacked capacity to partner with the U.S. military the way it did in the summer of 2007. The Iraqi government in 2005 was still forming and developing its constitution, focused on developing the political future of Iraq rather than ending the insurgency. The convergence of the surge, tactical innovation, increasing GoI capacity, and other accelerants with the small, but slowly growing divide between AQI and the Sunni served to widen the existing wedge, leading to the gap being split wide open in a matter of months rather than years. The military practitioner must see that these are not isolated causes that can be simply mimicked elsewhere. The implementation of these factors must be understood in their context to be of future value to those undertaking a counterinsurgency campaign.

Rather than looking at the past through the eyes of the victorious, we should strive to look at things through the eyes of the vanquished. If we choose only to base our future operations on our own experiences, we inadvertently limit ourselves in the future. An Army guide to military history notes that “the victors reorganize on the basis of considerable self-esteem, attributing their success to better organization, equipment, training and leadership, while the vanquished reorganize on the basis of considerable humility, analyzing events and determining and eliminating weaknesses with the intention of defeating the recent enemy.”<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> United States. Dept. of the Army, *The Writing of American Military History: A Guide* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956), 12.

In this manner, now that the shock has worn off, AQI has begun to look at the past in order to reassert its control in Iraq. In a document posted to al-Hanein (a prominent Jihadi Salafist internet forum) in late-February 2010, the author—allegedly an Iraqi who hails from Husaybah, a town near al Qaim—blames the loss of Sunni support on a deliberate media campaign that framed AQI as oppressors. In *A Strategy to Strengthen the Political Position of the Islamic State of Iraq*, he notes that “there was no truth to the claim by the enemy from the fact that the Awakening emerged as a result of so-called mistakes committed by the Mujahideen,” instead blaming the Awakening on nationalist insurgents such as Abu Abed of the Knights of Baghdad.<sup>395</sup> As a part of learning from their setbacks, the author lays out a five-point plan on how AQI can recover from the losses of 2007.<sup>396</sup>

Of these recommendations, two appear to be most germane to this thesis as they are efforts that address the perceived causes of AQI’s decline. The first is the call for AQI and the ISI to develop a counter-movement to the Awakening. The purpose of these “Jihadist Awakening Councils” is much like those of their U.S. and GoI backed counterparts—to to form local tribal-based security forces to protect the population from the GoI and the U.S. military.<sup>397</sup> According to the author, this will allow the ISI to expand its influence by winning the loyalty of tribal leaders, starting a community-building program thereby reassuring the Sunni of the ISI’s intentions.<sup>398</sup> The Jihadist Awakening is designed to build up the legitimacy of the ISI by earning the trust of the population through Islamic exhortation rather than financial motivation or coercion. What this reveals is that the rift between the Sunni and AQI is truly the heart of AQI’s decline in 2007, as this thesis has argued.

The second strategic recommendation that reinforces the findings of this thesis is that the increased effectiveness of the Iraqi Security forces dealt a blow to the loss of the

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<sup>395</sup> *A Strategy to Strengthen the Political Position of the Islamic State of Iraq* (2010), 10, [http://www.archive.org/download/Dirasa\\_dawla\\_03/khouta.pdf](http://www.archive.org/download/Dirasa_dawla_03/khouta.pdf) (accessed March 23, 2010).

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, 39–41.

AQI's and the ISI's legitimacy. In an effort to reestablish the legitimacy of the ISI through the erosion of the GoI's legitimacy, the author calls on his peers to target the GoI's highly trained units.<sup>399</sup> As these units show the ability of the GoI to exert its own sovereignty, they pose a threat to the ISI. With their removal, AQI and the ISI can easily show the world that the Iraqi security forces are propped up by the U.S.-led coalition, thereby pointing out the illegitimacy of the GoI.

These efforts by AQI to eliminate their weaknesses reflect the warning posed earlier and further reinforces many of the conclusions in this thesis. What should stand out to the military practitioner seeking to apply U.S.-centric counterinsurgency tactics to future campaigns is that the narratives of published jihadist strategy documents or in captured documents lack any mention of the accelerating factors mentioned in this thesis—additional troops, changes in U.S. leadership, counterinsurgency doctrine, counterterrorism efforts, and the lessened Shi'a threat—as contributing to AQI's demise. Instead, the evidence continues to point to popular rejection of the Jihadi-Salafi project in Iraq.

What then are the future prospects of the transnational Jihadi-Salafi movement elsewhere? If Iraq is to be any indicator, it appears that the movement will likely continue to sow the seeds of its destruction wherever it goes. The ideology of the movement is so limited that it lacks the ability to adapt to local variances—it alienates, rather than incorporates. Any move to accommodate indigenous beliefs will likely result in its advocates being rejected as apostates, further marginalizing the movement from the local population. In many ways, the transnational Jihadi-Salafi movement acts like Cervantes' starry-eyed hidalgo, Alonso Quixote, oblivious to what is going on around them. Rather than accept their rejection by the Sunni, movement instead sees what it wants to see—that the schism was not the result of their ideals and actions, but by the betrayal of the Sunni, “those people who betrayed God and our master Muhammad by

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<sup>399</sup> *A Strategy to Strengthen the Political Position of the Islamic State of Iraq*, 36.

allying with the crusaders and the Jews.”<sup>400</sup> Like Don Quixote blaming his misfortunes on some evil enchanter, Jihadi-Salafis routinely look outside of themselves for the source of their calamities. Pushed by their worldview, Jihadi-Salafis strive to make manifest their ideals, insisting that they can indeed establish a utopian-like caliphate.<sup>401</sup> But the like all utopias, the dreams of the Jihadi Salafis are unacceptable in a world where absolutist ideals rarely endure. In addition to seeing the world in ways alien to others, the transnational Jihadi-Salafis lack any substantial ties to the populace of the *ummah*. Although the quests of both Don Quixote and the Jihadi-Salafis are undertaken to recapture an idealized lost love—Dulcinea del Toboso for one, and the *ummah* for the other—the object of their affection remains oblivious to their efforts. As a result, both characters seek solace amongst their closest companions and refuge in the wilderness, unwelcome anywhere. The end result is that Azzam’s caravan will continue to wander. While it wanders, it’s lack of tangible roots and ideological resonance with the population will allow it to be slowly being picked off one by one, like the British patrol in the 1934 film, *The Lost Patrol*, hounded and pursued wherever it goes.

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<sup>400</sup> Asad Misr as quoted in Will McCants, *Lamenting Loss of Anbar, Apprehensive of Jihad’s Future in Iraq*, Jihadica.com, 2008, <http://www.jihadica.com/lamenting-loss-of-anbar-apprehensive-of-jihads-future-in-iraq/> (accessed October 29, 2009).

<sup>401</sup> It is interesting to note that the author of *A Strategy to Strengthen the Political Position of the Islamic State of Iraq* spends an entire chapter arguing that the insurgents in Iraq should unify as the establishment of a caliphate in Iraq is capable of being made real. See Chapter 1 of *A Strategy to Strengthen the Political Position of the Islamic State of Iraq*.

## APPENDIX

To “map” the flow of the Sunni insurgency over time, this series of figures portrays the significant activities described in Chapter 3 from 2004 to 2008. The images were developed using the SIGACT data set provided by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and ArcGIS 9.3 by ESRI.

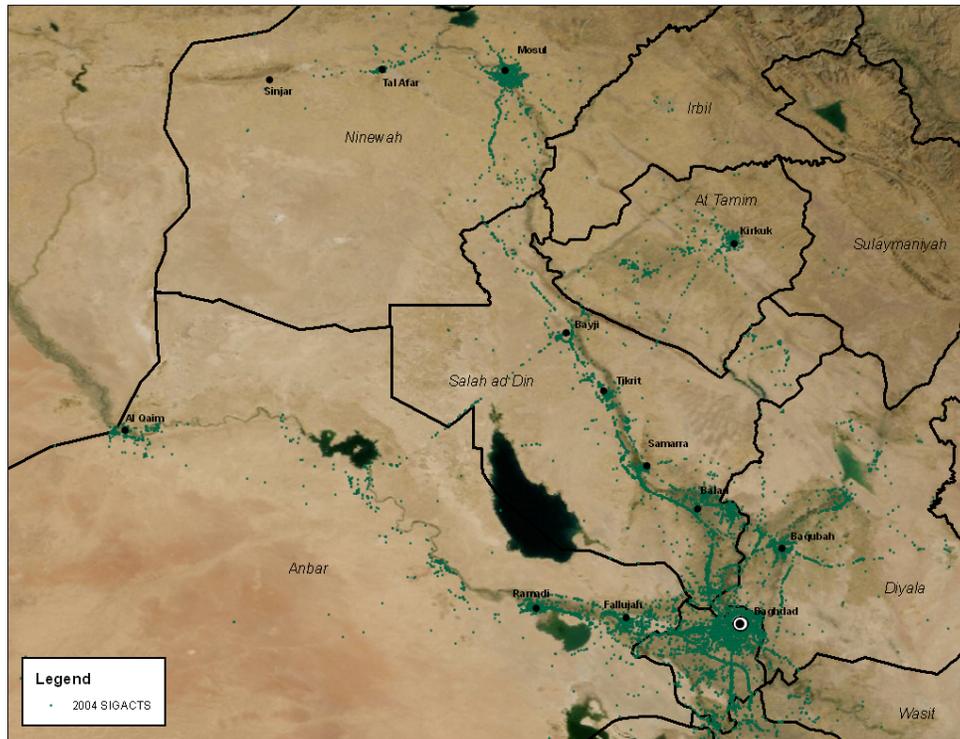


Figure 13. SIGACTS, 2004

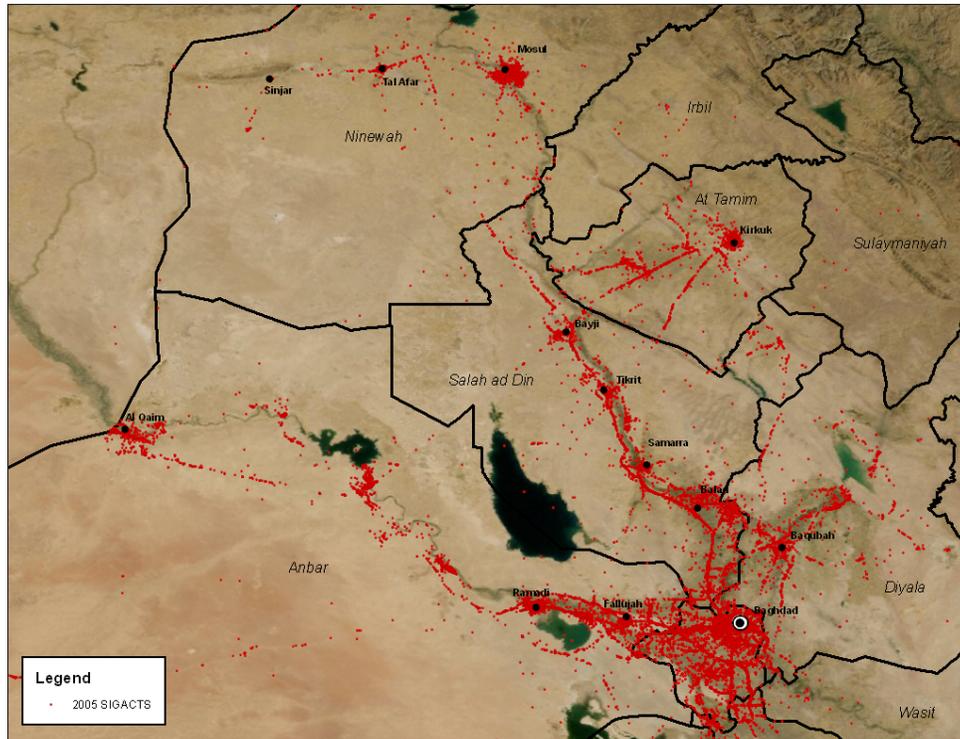


Figure 14. SIGACTS, 2005

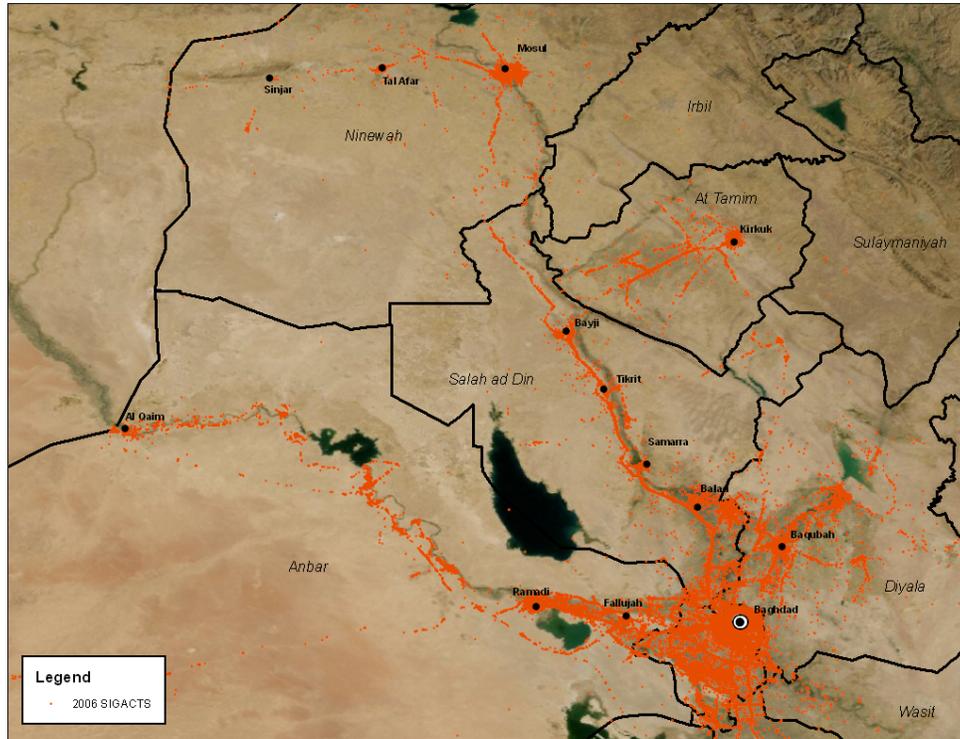


Figure 15. SIGACTS, 2006

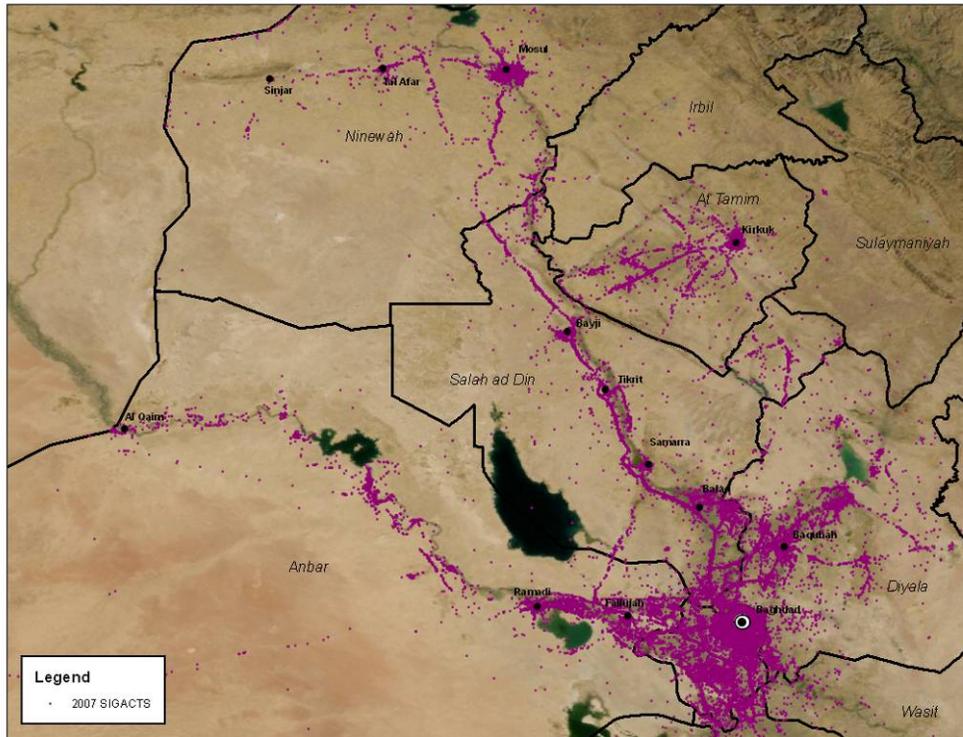


Figure 16. SIGACTS, 2007

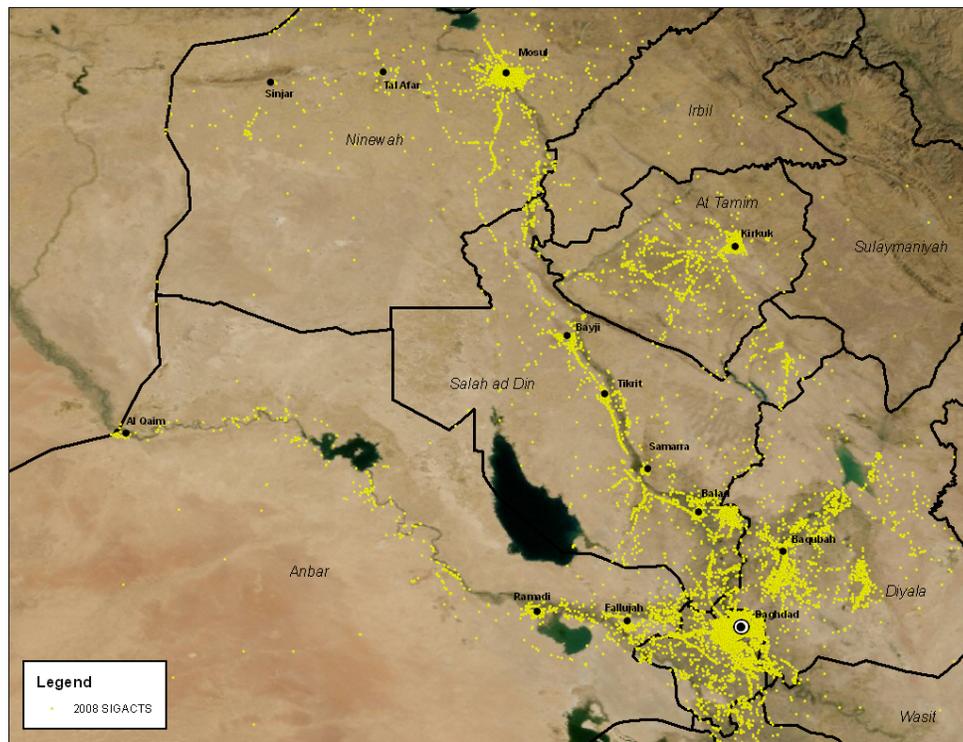


Figure 17. SIGACTS, 2008

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