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THESIS

**A COUNTRY DIVIDED: THE IMPACTS OF
FRAGMENTED COMMUNITIES ON IRAQ'S
GOVERNMENT**

by

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September 2007

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ON IRAQ'S GOVERNMENT**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to answer the question “What effect do Iraq’s fragmented communities have on the government’s ability to consolidate control in the country?” To answer this question, this thesis examines three underlying factors, essentially on the three levels of analysis (individual, communal, and state): first, why Iraqis are more loyal to their communities than to the central government; second, how the political militias in Iraq affect the security situation in the country (both adversely and positively), and lastly examines how Iraqi politics impacts the government’s ability to consolidate control over the country. Although seemingly obvious, this thesis brings to light the role that militias play in everyday life, how deeply entrenched into Iraqi society they have become, and explains why they cannot be simply wished away, as some U.S. policymakers would like to believe. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the likelihood of U.S. success with the “surge” and what its impact on Iraq’s Sunni and Shi’a militias is, some U.S. policy recommendations, and lastly some thoughts on democratization as a U.S. grand strategy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Governments exist to provide security and other public goods, such as settle disagreements and set public policies, among countless other important tasks. An effective government requires the consent of the people, and must reward that consent with good governance so that the populace comes to respect the authority and abilities of government. This relationship simply does not exist between Iraq's central government and its people. The relationship actually seems to be worse now than ever before.

To understand why the Iraqi government cannot consolidate control over its territory and population, it is necessary to study the factors that confront the central government. A study of these factors provides many insights, but one common theme seems to stand out: communal loyalties. To better understand the Iraqi government's inability to consolidate control, it is necessary to look at the communities that make up Iraq, why they are more loyal to their community than to the government, and how these loyalties play out within the government.

In addition to affecting the Iraqi government's dynamics, community loyalties have resulted in the formation of militias along communal lines; these militias are possibly the most contentious issue facing Iraq today. These three factors: individual loyalty to the community, the militias that formed as a result, and how communal loyalties affect the central government, organized in this study in three different chapters, representing three different levels of analysis, are all interrelated factors affecting the Iraqi government's ability to consolidate control over the country. Without an understanding of Iraq's various communities, their interests and goals, and their interactions, the United States will not be able to understand the difficulties facing Iraq's central government and possible ways to overcome those obstacles, if that is even possible at this late stage.

A. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is generally agreed amongst the world powers that a government must have a monopoly on the use of force within its territory to be truly considered a state. More

recently, authors have begun to study why some states fail to achieve this “monopoly” on the use of force, citing a combination of weak central government and the fragmented communities within the state. Further, some studies conclude that these communities should be given some degree of legitimization by the international community where they control territory. Because Iraq has a democratic form of government, the literature reviewed will include some theories on democratic government.

The theoretical study on the subject of the use of force within a state’s borders naturally begins with Max Weber, who says that:

[A] state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory ... the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the ‘right’ to use violence.¹

Nearly all international relations theories are built on this premise, which is the building block of modern international institutions and organizations. In a democracy, the legitimate use of force is especially limited to the state.

According to Phillippe C. Schmitter, the civilian leadership in a democracy must have firm control over all military forces before a government in transition from authoritarian rule to democracy can be considered mature.² Furthermore, according to Thomas-Durell Young, in a democracy:

[P]rofessional soldiers perform an essential service to the client, which is the state, their ‘management of violence’ can be considered legitimate today only in the context of service to the democratically elected government ... Should an officer employ his or her skill of arms for personal benefit, then that officer is immediately transformed from society’s protector into a criminal threat to social stability.³

¹ H.H Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 8.

² Philippe C. Schmitter, “The Consolidation of Political Democracies: Processes, Rhythms, Sequences, and Types,” in Geoffrey Pridham, ed., *Transitions to Democracy* (Dartmouth: Aldershot, 1995).

³ Thomas-Durell Young, “Military Professionalism in a Democracy,” in Thomas C. Bruneau and Scott D. Tollefson, eds., *Who Guards the Guardians and How* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2006), 21.

Essentially, the authority to use force rests with the state. This is especially true in a democracy because the government that makes the decision to use violence is legitimized by the people. So in theory, the people themselves authorize their elected leaders to use violence. Additionally, the soldiers who execute the use of force are legitimized by the people. Any armed non-state actors in the democracy are therefore challengers to the state's monopoly on the use of coercive force.

So why do some states exist that do not have complete control over the use of violence within their territory? Joel S. Migdal explains that:

There [is] nothing inexorable about the move toward state predominance ... Where an environment of conflict persists, states have been at loggerheads with kinship and ethnic groups and others. Each has struggled to establish the currency of social control in what its leaders consider its domain; each has offered the wherewithal for people's strategies of survival...In many cases, weblike communities have survived with social control dispersed among various social organizations having their own rules rather than centralized in the state or organizations authorized by the state.⁴

Migdal goes on to examine the factors that explain why some states never achieve full control over the communities within their territory, and the implications this can have on the states' policies. Michael E. Brown expounds on this by describing how state weakness can lead to internal conflict, stating that:

When state structures weaken, violent conflict often follows. Power struggles between and among politicians and would-be leaders intensify. Regional leaders become increasingly independent and, should they consolidate control over military assets, become virtual warlords ... individual [ethnic] groups within these states feel compelled to provide for their own defense; they have to worry about incentives for groups to make independent military preparations grow.⁵

⁴ Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), 40.

⁵ Michael E. Brown, "The Causes of Internal Conflict: An Overview," in Daniel J. Kaufman, Jay M. Parker, and Kimberly C. Field, eds., *Understanding International Relations* (USA: McGraw-Hill Companies, 1999), 216.

Both of these authors examine weak states, Migdal by analyzing why weak states exist, and Brown by studying how a weak government contributes to internal conflict and the rise of armed non-state actors. The Geneva Conventions defines armed non-state actors as “groups that have a clear organizational structure and hierarchy (enabling leaders to control their subordinates) and which control sufficient territory to permit them to carry out substantial and concerted military efforts.”⁶ Thus, a state with a weak central government and intense ethnic tension creates the conditions for armed non-state actors.

A recent study on the legality of non-state armed groups under international law concludes that international law actually gives these groups certain rights. The study argues that: 1) “armed groups may assume the role of *de facto* government over territory under their effective control,” 2) “are by definition military entities in conflict with government or other forces and thus under obligations to follow certain international standards of warfare,” and 3) “are political entities with which negotiations over peaceful solutions may need to be conducted and they may also become parties to peace agreements.”⁷ Although many would disagree with these conclusions, they seem logical, but nonetheless give non-state actors some degree of legitimacy on the international stage, which is directly opposed to the state-centric model. According to this conclusion, if a non-state group uses force to gain territory, they then have the right to act as a pseudo-government in the area they control, and be recognized as such by the international community. To a central government trying to consolidate control over its territory, these rights granted to non-state actors can be problematic.

A recent study conducted by Caroline Holmqvist and published by the Geneva Center for Democratic Control of Armed Forces argued that armed non-state actors, although illegitimate by Weberian standards, should be negotiated with and influenced as a step towards democracy consolidation. The study concludes that two concerns stem

⁶ Caroline Holmqvist, “Engaging Non-State Actors In Post Conflict Settings,” A. Bryden and H. Hänggi, eds., *Security Governance and Post-conflict Peacebuilding*, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2005), 50.

⁷ Hannes Berts, “Non-state Armed Groups Under International Law: Some Legal Aspects of Engaging With Non-State Armed Groups,” (Spring 2005), 46-47. This study is Hannes Bert’s thesis; the work won the Swedish Institute for International Law’s award for best international law thesis.

from attempts to “govern” non-state actors. The first is the relationship between the non-state actor and the state; that by discoursing with the armed non-state actors, the international community gives legitimacy to an illegitimate actor. Holmqvist recognizes this dilemma, stating that “[t]he state/non-state relationship is important both on a philosophical and practical level, and underlines the importance of addressing armed non-state actors only as a complement to building up functioning state institutions, including judicial and penal systems.”⁸ The second is from a human security standpoint; Holmqvist recognizes that armed militias provide protection for the constituency that supports them, an important role that government forces are often unable to provide in a post-conflict environment. The dilemma is that these groups pose a threat to peoples outside their constituency, and therefore must be dealt with before “effective reinstatement of a state monopoly on violence can take place.”⁹

In sum, there are two schools of thought on this issue. The first is the Weberian view that only the state has the right to use violence. Some that subscribe to this school of thought oppose even engaging with non-state actors to prevent conferring legitimacy. The weak-state explanation of armed non-state actors essentially says that a consolidated state is a rarity in the world, explains why this is so, and how it leads to armed groups. Lastly, the weak-state school of thought advocates engaging armed non-state actors as a step towards a state’s consolidation.

Iraq clearly does not qualify as a state by Weber’s standards, but rather falls into the weak state category that countries such as Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Sudan belong to. Surprisingly, very little scholarly research based on the theoretical framework just described has been done to examine the relationship between the society and the central government in Iraq despite its prevalence in the national spotlight for the last few years. Countless articles and reports from Iraq cite “sectarian violence,” militias, and many of the underlying causes of Iraq’s difficulties, but do not fully analyze their implications.

⁸ Caroline Holmqvist, “Engaging Non-State Actors In Post Conflict Settings,” A. Bryden and H. Hänggi, eds., *Security Governance and Post-conflict Peacebuilding*, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2005), 61.

⁹ Ibid.

One of the few to analyze Iraq in these terms is Mark LeVine, who builds on Joel Migdal's work, and applies it to Iraq and Palestine. LeVine states that:

Increasing the probability of violence [in Iraq] has been the high level of militarization of Iraqi society, and specifically the development of paramilitary arms by Shi'a movements ... For their part, Sunni religious groups often have close ties with former Ba'thist military leaders and foreign fighters. Together, this dynamic of violence [has] produced a situation which would quite naturally frustrate the solidification of social and political solidarities while enabling religious movements and forces to become the most powerful social forces in the country.¹⁰

Levine goes on to assert that because "chaos is the dominant social and political dynamic," the Iraqi "state" is too weak to enforce its will without the help of the U.S. led coalition.¹¹

Another scholar who saw the problems that militias posed to the Iraqi government is Michael Knights, who in 2004 predicted that "if current trends continue, the future Iraqi central government will not hold a monopoly on the use of force, but will instead be challenged by strong regional militias and a broad base of smaller local militias operating without any government mandate."¹² It is clear that this statement came to fruition, and remains true over two years later.

Anthony Shadid's *Night Draws Near* is perhaps the most comprehensive study of the American led overthrow of Saddam and the cycle of events that resulted, given from the Iraqi perspective. Although he does not explicitly analyze Iraq from the theoretical framework discussed thus far, Shadid sheds light on the various motivations for resistance to coalition presence, which is extraordinarily valuable to understanding the challenges that sectarianism presents for Iraq's new central government. Shadid asks one question that he claims Americans did not understand and Iraqis could not answer: "Who had the right to rule?" Shadid claims that Iraqis could not agree on where the right came

¹⁰ Mark Levine, "Chaos, Globalization, and the Public Sphere: Political Struggle in Iraq and Palestine," *The Middle East Journal* 60, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 480.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Michael Knights, "Militias and the Monopoly of Force in Transitional Iraq," *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 16 March 2004.

from: God, money, tradition, law, or the gun.¹³ In the power vacuum that resulted after Saddam's fall, Shadid reports on the groups often formed along sectarian lines that rose to fill that void, noting that "[t]here was a thuggish quality...that I would see often in Iraq, among the men who emerged to fill the vacuum left by Saddam's demise and the American's inaction."¹⁴ Shadid sums up his observations of post-Saddam Iraq, saying that:

Time and again, though, I was struck by the unintended consequences of Saddam's fall and the country's liberation from his rule. There was the Shiite revival, unexpected in its fervor, empowering men like Muqtada Sadr and Ayatollah Sistani ... Now, in the Sunni hinterland, I was seeing the first signs of a resurgent religion that refused to fall into easy categories, the tentative steps toward a redefinition of the community's identity.¹⁵

Shadid saw in the summer and fall of 2003 the beginnings of the sectarianism that plagues Iraq to this day.

Nir Rosen's *In the Belly of the Green Bird* is a work in the same vein as Shadid's, giving the Iraqi perspective to the U.S. occupation following Saddam's fall, and offering insights to the problems that the Iraqi government faces. Rosen chronicles not only the resistance to the coalition forces, but the beginnings of sectarian strife in 2004. Rosen asserts that:

Though Shia and Sunni leaders professed unity against the Americans and following the attacks in Karbala and Kadimiya, they hated each other. As spring wore on, Sunni and Shia newspapers grew more brazen in their attacks against each other ... The Sunnis were scared, fearing the impending Shia takeover of Iraq if anything resembling a democratic election took place. Shias did not fear the Sunnis; they just disliked them.¹⁶

¹³ Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 187.

¹⁴ Ibid., 190.

¹⁵ Ibid., 276.

¹⁶ Nir Rosen, *In the Belly of the Green Bird* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006), 135.

Rosen also noted the proliferation of private militias during his time in Iraq, noting that “every major Shia leader had one.”¹⁷ His book ends with Iraq heading towards civil war at the end of 2005.

Given this limited body of scholarly research on the topic, this study seeks to expand on the current scholars’ observations, and determine the impact that Iraq’s fragmented communities have on the central government’s ability to consolidate control over the country.

B. HYPOTHESES

As one reads this study, the reader is bound to ponder whether the anarchic conditions that resulted after Saddam Hussein’s fall caused people to revert to their ethnic identity, or if the ethnic conflicts and tensions witnessed today stem from mutual ancient hatred that Saddam Hussein’s regime previously suppressed? In other words, are ethnic identities the independent variable and the anarchic conditions the dependent, or vice versa? In addition to these two hypotheses on ethnic conflict, there is another theory that explains violent action as the result of real or perceived grievances against another group. One scholar to advance this idea is Mohammed Hafez, who argues that “[t]he absence of institutional channels for conflict mediation and political contestation encourages rebellion by delegitimizing the ruling regime and disempowering moderate voices within the movement.”¹⁸ At face value, this may not seem applicable to the current study because Iraq does have a democratic government that has “institutional channels.” However, if the Sunnis see Iraq’s government as a puppet of the United States or the Shi’a majority, and feel that they have no real influence in the new government because they are the distinct minority, Hafez’s argument seems plausible as an explanation for the ethnic violence and the attacks against government forces. In explaining how Iraq’s fragmented communities impact the government’s ability to consolidate control over the country, perhaps one or more of the aforementioned hypotheses will further illuminate the causes of the violence.

¹⁷ Nir Rosen, *In the Belly of the Green Bird* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006), 125.

¹⁸ Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2003), 27.

C. OVERVIEW OF THIS STUDY'S SCOPE

In the power vacuum that resulted after Saddam Hussein's ouster, numerous strong political parties sprang up to provide public goods and services, such as health care and education, but most of all to provide security for their constituents. Three years after the regime change, a newly elected, and U.S. recognized government led by Nuri Kamil al-Maliki became the legal central authority in Iraq. However, this government struggles to consolidate control over much of Iraq, including most of the Anbar province, but most noticeably the capital, Baghdad. Many believe the political militias bear a great deal of blame for the cycle of violence that contributes to the inability of the government to control the country. There is little doubt that there is some truth to these accusations, but a better question would explore whether the militias are the problem or just a symptom of the problem. This study will endeavor to expand on the ideas put forth in the literature review, and answer the question "What effect do Iraq's fragmented communities have on the government's ability to consolidate control in the country?"

This study will first lay some groundwork and background on the communities in Iraq and why citizens are more loyal to their respective communities than the central government, then study how these communal loyalties resulted in the various militias present in Iraq today, and how these militias affect the security situation, and lastly how Iraq's divided communities within the central government affect the government's ability to consolidate control over the country. Community loyalties, militias, and the government's composition are all interrelated factors affecting Iraq's security situation. One can also look at this study as analyzing three different levels of analysis: the individual, community, and state level, representing Chapters II, III, and IV, respectively.

Before the militias can be analyzed, the communities from which they arise must first be briefly introduced. For the purpose of this study, "community" will be defined as a "group of people having ethnic or cultural or religious characteristics in common."¹⁹ Therefore, scholars that analyze ethnic, culture, and religious identities will be used to help illuminate the dynamics at work in Iraq. Iraq is home to three main communities:

¹⁹ Webster's Online Dictionary. <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definition/community> (accessed 24 May 2007).

the Shi`a, the Sunnis, and the Kurds. For the sake of brevity and relevance, the Kurds and their Peshmerga militia will not be included in this study because the Kurdish area of the country is not being contested, and at the present time it does not adversely impact the Iraqi government, although it could at some point in the future. The communities that greatly affect the central government's ability to consolidate control over the country, and which therefore will be discussed in this study, are the Shi`a and the Sunnis.²⁰

²⁰ According to Muslims, Mohammed was the last of God's prophets (who included Abraham and Moses). After Mohammed's death in 632, the Muslim community disputed who should succeed him as the leader. The first successors were Abu Bakr, Omar, Uthman, and lastly Ali. Ali was the cousin of Mohammed, and whom Shi`a thought had the divine right to be the first successor to Mohammed, instead of the first three, who were close associates of Mohammed and whom those who would become Sunnis supported as the new leaders. Ali married Mohammed's daughter Fatima; after Ali's murder the Shi`a believe that Ali's sons, known as imams, had the right to be the religious leaders of Islam. Ali's second son, Hussein, is perhaps the most revered imam because of his heroics on the plains of Karbala in 680 A.D. Unfortunately, the question over who had the right to lead the Muslim community was never resolved, resulting in the split between the Shi`a, who thought Ali and his descendants had the divine right to rule, and the Sunni, who think the leader of Islam is more political, as they believed the first three successors to Mohammed were. This disagreement spawned centuries of fighting and bickering between the two communities that persists to the present day. Cited in Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005, 191.

II. CONFLICTING LOYALTIES

Having defined communities above, it is now necessary to briefly examine why Iraqis are more loyal to their communities than to the central government. On the face of it, most people probably understand why the Sunni population is disenfranchised with the central government, but why is this necessarily the case with the Shi'a as well, despite their dominance in the government? This section will first trace why people in general associate first along societal lines, then explain how communities became the locus of loyalty in Iraq due to the power vacuum after Hussein's fall from power—which will be introduced briefly because it is a common theme throughout this study—and lastly examine the extent of divisiveness amongst Iraq's communities today.

Donald Rothchild notes that people mobilize around their societal identity in order to “compete effectively for state-controlled power, economic resources, positions, contracts, awards, and constitutional protections.”²¹ Besides access to power, people often have a close association with their society because it gives them a sense of unity and identity, particularly in stressful and uncertain circumstances. Michael Armacost, the former president of the Brookings Institution, said that communities can offer “material benefits and [meet] such intangible needs as esteem and a sense of identity and purpose.”²² Samuel Huntington stated that “cultural identification is dramatically increasing in importance compared to other dimensions of identity ... Along any single dimension, identity is usually most meaningful at the immediate face-to-face level.”²³

In Iraq, these assertions certainly played out, as witnessed by the rise to prominence of strong social identities and networks, and the various political parties that sprang up in Iraq along social lines, such as the Sunni party United Concord Front [*Jabhat al-Tawafuq*] and the Shi'a party SIIC (which the Sadr bloc later allied with as

²¹ Donald S. Rothchild, *Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), 4. Rothchild's work is excellent, and holds some lessons that could be applied to Iraq.

²² Ibid., vii.

²³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 128. Regardless of one's thoughts on Huntington's thesis in the rest of the book, or even this statement's applicability to the world at large, it certainly rings true as it applies to Iraq.

part of the larger United Iraqi Alliance (UIA)). Although Iraqis eventually formed the aforementioned political parties, the drift to these societal political parties which currently compete for power in Iraq did not happen overnight, and may not have been inevitable. Though Saddam Hussein certainly favored the Sunnis and suppressed the Kurds and Shi'a to a large degree, strife amongst Iraq's communities was not necessarily the norm prior to Hussein's ouster. For example, intermarriage between Sunni and Shi'a was quite common in previous years—societal differences simply did not cause the level of angst then that they do today. One Sunni resident of Adhamiyah, a Baghdad neighborhood, recently reflected on earlier times, saying that “nobody asked us if we were Shi'ite or Sunni, and we never thought to ask each other. I have friends I didn't know were Shi'ite until quite recently.”²⁴ This statement seems unusual, because if they were truly his friends, he would likely have known their sect. Perhaps he knew of their sect but simply did not care until recently, or they were not really friends, but acquaintances. It is possible that he was not being completely truthful with this statement, or some meaning was lost in the translation to English. It is also quite possible that he was telling the truth. In any event, before the societal political parties began vying for power, the people that formed them became more conscious of their respective identities as Shi'a or Sunni, in large part because communities fill the vacuum left after Saddam Hussein's regime fell.

When Saddam Hussein's regime fell, no government institutions remained that could effectively provide security, water, trash pick-up, electricity, or many of the other myriad of services that many people in the West take for granted. In many cases, religious leaders, particularly Shi'a because they were better organized at first, essentially ran assistance programs out of their mosques, handing out food and other aid, as well as providing the most essential need, security.²⁵ Because the occupying powers failed to provide these things, people became more apt to support their local tribal and religious leaders than the central power in Baghdad; this abrupt up-tick in tribal and religious

²⁴ Bobby Ghosh, “Why They Hate Each Other,” *Time*, 5 March 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1592849,00.html> (accessed 7 August 2007).

²⁵ “Iraq: Can Local Governance Save Central Government,” *International Crisis Group*, 27 October 2004, 14.

loyalties alarmed the CPA, which caused them to delay local elections out of fear that religious and tribal leaders would come to power—the implications of which will be discussed later.²⁶

Unfortunately, this trend continues to the present day in part because the central government is still grossly ineffective at providing essential services to its people. LTC Jeff Peterson, a battalion commander stationed south of Baghdad, reasserted the assessment that societal militias and mosques are still better at fulfilling service needs than the central government, saying that “[t]hey just have to do better than the government. Anything above zero is a better alternative.”²⁷ In Sadr City, the Shi`a are loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr’s organization for much the same reason—it provides services the government does not. One resident stated that the locals in Sadr City “get no help from Maliki. Only Sayyid Moqtada helps us.”²⁸ In addition to giving out food and other necessities to the poor, Sadr’s organization runs Sadr City’s police, hospitals, morgues, trash collection, and even conducts weddings. The Sadr Bureau also provides cooking fuel at a reduced price to the poor—at 4,000 dinars (\$3.15) per canister instead of the market price of 24,000 dinars.²⁹

When I patrolled Sadr City in early 2005, my unit frequented sewage sub-stations (which ran pumps to keep the sewage moving through the sewers towards the treatment plant, so that it would not back up into the street, although it frequently did) to ensure that they were in working order. Conversing with one friendly sewage sub-station operator, I was shocked to learn that each sewage sub-station in Sadr City had its own Sadr Bureau overseer to make sure the pumps stayed in operation—the Sadr Bureau was essentially doing the same thing that we were—trying to prevent sewage from backing up into the street.

²⁶ Iraq: Can Local Governance Save Central Government,” *International Crisis Group*, 27 October 2004, 15.

²⁷ Greg Jaffe, “In Iraq, An Officer’s Answer To Violence: Build A Wall,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 April 2007, 1.

²⁸ Sudarsan Raghavan, “An Enclave Of Normalcy In Fearful Baghdad,” *The Washington Post*, 27 March 2007, 1.

²⁹ Ibid.

The Sadr Bureau is also heavily involved in absorbing Shi'a refugees fleeing from sectarian violence in mixed neighborhoods, providing them with food, shelter, and other needs. A Sadr Bureau official stated that all of the services that they provided to these refugees were "the duty of the government. This is not our duty... Where is the Displacement Ministry? Where is the Human Rights Ministry?"³⁰ Because organizations along societal lines, such as the Sadr bloc, continue to provide essential services better than the central government, Iraqis are more loyal to their communities than ever before.

Unfortunately, the societal violence between the Sunni and Shi'a (the causes of which are discussed later) has exacerbated the situation by further entrenching people's ethnic identities, which makes the Iraqi government's efforts to create a national sense of identity and unity in order to overcome the violence extremely difficult. On 31 August 2005, a stampede ensued amongst Shi'a pilgrims on a bridge over the Tigris River in Baghdad, causing some to jump into the water in an effort to save themselves. Sunnis from neighboring Adhamiya, a Sunni neighborhood on the eastern bank of the river, dove into the water to help the pilgrims—one of them, Othman al-Obeidi, saved six victims before drowning from exhaustion. Although almost 1,000 Shi'a pilgrims died that day, Shi'a leaders applauded the Sunnis' efforts, while Sunni leaders used the event to prove that they held no ill-will towards the Shi'a population.³¹

Nearly two years later, loyalties and attitudes regarding communities have completely changed. One Sunni resident who himself rescued Shi'a from the Tigris River recently stated that al-Obeidi "wasted his life for those animals," further declaring that "[i]f I see a Shi'ite child about to drown in the Tigris now, I will not reach my hand out to save him."³² How has ethnic hatred gone so mainstream in Iraq, and become so pervasive? This is a question not easily answered, but which may become clearer during the course of this study. Individual Iraqis are certainly more loyal to their communities now than prior to Saddam Hussein's departure, which created a government vacuum that

³⁰ Sudarsan Raghavan, "An Enclave Of Normalcy In Fearful Baghdad," *The Washington Post*, 27 March 2007, 1.

³¹ Bobby Ghosh, "Why They Hate Each Other," *Time*, 5 March 2007, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1592849,00.html> (accessed 7 August 2007).

³² Ibid.

communities filled; this engendered Iraqis loyalty to their communities. These communities in turn began to struggle for power in and influence in the new central government, which in part helped birth the societal conflict witnessed today. Donald Rothchild prophetically notes in his ground-breaking work on ethnic conflict in Africa that as:

ethnic leaders pursue their separate interests by “playing the ethnic card” among peoples who are conscious of their ethnic identity, they can entrap their constituents (and themselves) in a deadly encounter from which there may be no escape. Fearful of collective insecurity unless the group hangs together and takes precautionary measures, the ethnic group acts aggressively toward its neighbor. Thus, even though the antagonists and the society at large would benefit from mutual cooperation, the defection of leaders from such action ... can preclude joint problem solving ... In worst-case situations, when leaders and their constituents perceive their political and strategic goals to be incompatible with those of their adversary and they become entrapped in a situation of ungovernability, conflict can escalate to a dangerous level.³³

By far the most important aspect that the communities furnished for their constituents was security, which caused the formation of militias, the implications of which will be discussed in the next chapter.

³³ Donald S. Rothchild, *Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1997), 244.

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III. PLAGUE AND PARADOX: MILITIAS IN IRAQ

The next chapter of this study analyzes the militias currently operating in Iraq and how they affect the central government's ability to consolidate control in the country, focusing on one of the best known and influential, the Mahdi Militia. The militias in Iraq are formed along community lines, and are a direct result of Iraqis having greater loyalty to their community than the state, as discussed in the previous chapter; one can think of this chapter as focusing on the community as a level of analysis, where the previous chapter focused at the individual level. These militias are the subject of much debate in the United States government because they are seen as spoilers in Iraq, and detrimental to the Iraqi government's campaign to consolidate control. This is a valid accusation, and will be discussed here; however, the militias also provide security for their constituents, and therefore are seen by many Iraqis as protectors, and indispensable given the current security environment. This chapter will focus on this Faustian bargain the militias in Iraq offer, which makes the militias in Iraq extraordinarily difficult to get rid of, particularly now that they are so firmly entrenched in some parts of Iraq, both geographically and sociologically.

Often brutalized under Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime, the Shi'a comprise 60% of Iraq's population. There are two major Shi'a militias operating in Iraq. The first is Muqtada Al-Sadr's militia, often referred to as the Mahdi Army, the Mahdi Militia, or Jaysh Al-Mahdi. These names all refer to the same group. Muqtada Al-Sadr is the fourth son of the late Ayatollah Sadiq Al-Sadr, an extremely popular Shi'a leader throughout the 1990s who Saddam Hussein's regime murdered in February 1999 along with his two eldest sons because of the threat they posed.³⁴ Sadiq's popularity was one factor that gave Muqtada the great deal of influence that he did in the power vacuum that developed following the U.S. overthrow of Saddam's regime. The other factor is the disenfranchisement of young, poor, urban Shi'as that saw the new political process as dominated by returning exiles.³⁵

³⁴ "Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabilizer," *International Crisis Group*, 11 July 2006, 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Against this backdrop, Muqtada formed his own pseudo government and army to provide a voice for his constituency. Muqtada expressed hostility to the occupation because he saw it as prolonging “the oppression that had begun with the U.S. backed sanctions which had disproportionately hurt impoverished Shiites.”³⁶ The United States returned the hostility in kind; this, combined with the disastrous, well-documented reconstruction efforts of the CPA, Muqtada’s follower’s disenfranchisement with the political process, and poor economic outlook, set the stage for confrontation.³⁷ The Mahdi Militia led two revolts against the American forces that witnessed intense fighting in Sadr City, Najaf, and Karbala. L. Paul Bremmer’s order to close Muqtada Al-Sadr’s newspaper, *al Hawza*, for its “false articles” that “incited violence” sparked the first revolt in April 2004; this was followed by another revolt in August.³⁸ Despite a truce that ended the fighting, the Mahdi Army remains a potent force, both politically and militarily. Kenneth Pollack noted that:

His militiamen switched from confronting U.S. forces to filling the vacuum in the large swaths of southern Iraq where few (or no) U.S. troops were present. He developed a social-services network that could provide the average Iraqi with the protection, medicine, supplies, assistance and even money and jobs that they so desperately needed.³⁹

As a result of these services, Sadr’s political arm has become increasingly popular, winning 30 of 275 seats in the parliamentary elections held in 2005.⁴⁰

The second major Shi’a militia is the Badr Corps, which is the paramilitary arm of the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC), formerly known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), another popular Shi’a political party in the new

³⁶ “Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabilizer,” *International Crisis Group*, 11 July 2006, 10.

³⁷ There are many recently published books and journal articles about the CPA’s incompetence. The September-October 2006 edition of *Foreign Policy* featured an article entitled “Who Killed Iraq,” by Rajiv Chandrasekaran that briefly summarizes some of the CPA’s dismal failures. Bob Woodward’s *State of Denial* also discusses the CPA’s poor decisions and management of Iraq policy, as do Anthony Shadid’s *Night Draws Near* and Nir Rosen’s *In the Belly of the Green Bird*.

³⁸ Johanna McGeary, “New Thugs on the Block,” *The Economist*, Journal 163, no. 16, (April 2004): 19. <http://libproxy.nps.navy.mil/login?url=http://search.epnet.com/login.asp> (accessed 29 October 2006).

³⁹ Kenneth M. Pollack, “Muqtada Al-Sadr: Iraq’s Shadowy Power Broker,” *Time*, 8 May 2006, <http://www.brookings.edu/printme.wbs?page=pagedefs/2e7ac7d4fe31ff3f8000de340a1415cb.xml> (accessed 11 October 2006).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

government. The SCIRI party has strong ties to Iran, as it was founded there during the Iran-Iraq war.⁴¹ Many Iraqis suspect SCIRI of trying to bring Iraq under Iran's influence; in any event, Badr Corps and SCIRI personnel hurried across the Iraqi border from Iran to begin exerting influence amongst Iraqi Shi'as after Saddam Hussein's government fell. The Badr/SCIRI groups have been very successful in gaining popularity in Iraq due to their high degree of organization and resources, resulting in the SCIRI party gaining enough influence in the January 2005 elections to have a party member, Bayan Jaber Solagh, appointed as the new Minister of Interior.⁴² Under his leadership, Iraqis have widely accused the Ministry of Interior of sectarian violence because they believe that Solagh allowed Badr members to infiltrate the security forces and carry out their agenda.

The Sunnis are not nearly as organized as either the Badr Corps or the Mahdi Militia, but are rather more loosely affiliated insurgents that share some of the same goals. In the August 2006 quarterly report to Congress, the Department of Defense noted that Sunni resistance elements "include Rejectionists—many of whom were members of, or associated with, the former regime—and terrorist groups, including Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Ansar al Sunnah, and other smaller groups."⁴³ Unfortunately, the recent cycle of violence in Iraq has caused some Sunnis to seek out the insurgents for security from the Shi'a militias.

A. THE MILITIA'S DESTABILIZING EFFECTS

Since their appearance in Iraq after the U.S. led coalition toppled Saddam Hussein's oppressive regime, the U.S. and many others have accused the militias as a debilitating factor in the Iraqi government's progress towards consolidated control over the country by causing violence and civil unrest. Militias contribute to the Iraq's violence and civil unrest in three ways: 1) their overt and covert hostility to the coalition

⁴¹ United States Government Accountability Office, "Stabilizing Iraq: An Assessment of the Security Situation," 11 September 2006, 11. SIIC also is the closest US Shi'a ally in Iraq, as they were the only religious group that supported the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

⁴² "The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict," *International Crises Group*, 27 February 2006, http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east_north_africa/iraq_iran_gulf/52_the_next_iraqi_war_sectarianism_and_civil_conflict.pdf (accessed 27 October 2006).

⁴³ Department of Defense, "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," 29 August 2006, 28.

and the central government's goals, 2) their infiltration of the Iraqi Security Forces, and 3) their suspicion of operating "death squads" to carry out sectarian violence.

As alluded to briefly above, Muqtada al-Sadr's militia posed the first major problems for the U.S.-led coalition. He first raised eyebrows in July 2003 when he denounced the Interim Government as "lackeys of the occupation," and then set about establishing his parallel government, complete with its paramilitary wing, *Jaysh Al-Mahdi*, which proceeded to take control of Shi'a dominated territory such as Thawra (also known as Saddam City, which he promptly renamed Sadr City).⁴⁴ The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) understandably saw this as a significant threat and challenge to the legitimacy of both its power and the Interim Government's progress.

Things began to come to a head in March 2004 when Sadr gave a sermon that declared that the September 11th attacks on the United States were "a miracle and a blessing from God."⁴⁵ The situation neared the boiling point when Bremmer ordered a Sadrist newspaper closed on 28 March 2004 after it reprinted the sermon. On 3 April, the coalition arrested one of Muqtada's close advisors, Mustafa al-Yaqubi, for suspected involvement in the murder of Abd al-Majid al-Khoei, a religious leader who worked closely with the U.S. coalition.⁴⁶ When the U.S. issued an arrest warrant for Muqtada himself on 4 April, fighting erupted.

The uprising caught the U.S. forces completely off-guard. Major General Pete Chiarelli, the commander of the newly arrived 1st Cavalry Division, remembers:

At about 1705, 2-5 Cav [2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment], 1st Cavalry Division, was completing its transition with the 2d ACR [2d Armored Cavalry Regiment]. 2-5 Cav was mid-stride in transferring authority when a firefight broke out in Sadr City. Eight Soldiers were killed and 51 were wounded.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ "Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabilizer," *International Crisis Group*, 11 July 2006, 10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Patrecia Slayden Hollis, "The 1st Cav in Baghdad," interview 29 July 2005, in *Field Artillery*, (September-October 2005), http://sill-www.army.mil/famag/2005/SEP_OCT_2005/SEP_OCT_05_Page_3_8.pdf (accessed 25 October 2006).

Fighting also broke out in Karbala, Najaf, and other Shi'a dominated areas, waxing and waning until culminating in the stand-off at the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, to which Ayatollah Sistani negotiated a peaceful solution. Hundreds of Sadr's militiamen died during the year's fighting with coalition forces; but even with a negotiated truce, one U.S. State Department official may have put it best when he said "Maybe they'll leave the mosque, but they won't bend their swords into ploughshares."⁴⁸

Although the Mahdi Militia's uprising in 2004 stemmed from civil unhappiness in some parts of the Shi'a community, it also furthered the civil strife and violence in Iraq that persists to the present day. By uprising against the interim government and the coalition, the Mahdi Militia set an example and created a legacy of violence towards any U.S.-backed central government in Baghdad that still reverberates amongst Shi'a groups. In addition to this, Muqtada al-Sadr's uprising triggered a second-order affect opposed to his interests: it shifted the U.S. military's attention from the Sunni insurgency (in April 2004, Marines began earnest fighting in Fallujah) to the Shi'a militias.

Although the Badr Corps and the Mahdi Militia have many similar, overarching goals, they still compete for political power, as the events in Amarah in October 2006 demonstrate. On 20 October 2006, approximately 800 black-clad Mahdi Militiamen armed with AK-47s and RPGs took control of Amarah, a city of 750,000 situated at the head of the marsh lands, about 30 miles from the Iranian border. The Mahdi Militia's move to take control of the SIIC stronghold city stemmed from the death of Qassim al-Tamim, the provincial head of police intelligence and a leading Badr Corps member. The Badr Corps blamed the Mahdi Militia for the killing, and in retaliation kidnapped the local Mahdi Militia commander's teenage brother, demanding that the Mahdi Militia commander hand over those responsible for Tamim's killing to secure his brother's return. The kidnapping spurred the Mahdi Militia to storm the city, destroying three SIIC-influenced police stations in the process; the Mahdi Militia later withdrew and allowed the Iraqi Army and police forces to reenter the city under a truce brokered by Muqtada al-Sadr.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Bay Fang, "A Grand Ayatollah Pulls Rank," *U.S. News and World Report*, 6 September 2004, 43-44.

⁴⁹ Steven R. Hurst, "Shiite Militia Briefly Seizes Amarah," *The Associated Press*, 20 October 2006.

More recently, the Shi`a militias in Basra have fought to gain political control of that city and possibly of southern Iraq, and the significant spoils that come with it—the Basra region contains approximately two-thirds of the country’s known oil reserves, and its sole reliable conduit to export oil. The gradual British withdrawal from Basra created a vacuum into which the militias, particularly the Mahdi Militia and the Badr Corps, are increasingly inserting themselves.⁵⁰ Although Vice-President Cheney once thought of Basra as a place “where things are going pretty well,”⁵¹ that is far from the case today. The International Crisis Groups recently summed up the situation in Basra:

Basra’s political arena remains in the hands of actors engaged in bloody competition for resources, undermining what is left of governorate institutions and coercively enforcing their rule. The local population has no choice but to seek protection from one of the dominant camps. Periods of stability do not reflect greater governing authority so much as they do a momentary – and fragile – balance of interests or of terror between rival militias.⁵²

The events in Amarah and Basra demonstrate many things: first, that the ISF are not powerful enough in all places to stand up to a concerted militia attack, second, that despite their similar communal backgrounds, the Badr Corps and the Mahdi Militia still struggle for political influence and control, and most importantly, that lawlessness still reigns in Iraq, further delegitimizing the central government and their ability to consolidate control over the country.

B. THE AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS

As described above, the militias in Iraq formed predominantly as a response to the insecurity and government vacuum that resulted from Saddam Hussein’s regime collapse. Although some militias, such as the Badr Corps, appeared to have a pre-planned entrance into Iraq contingent upon Saddam’s demise, most developed from legitimate security and government service concerns. No discussion of the militia’s rise to prominence in Iraq can be complete without an objective analysis of the United States’ “contributions” to the

⁵⁰ Karen DeYoung and Thomas E. Ricks, “As British Leave, Basra Deteriorates,” 7 August 2007, 1.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² “Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons From Basra,” *The International Crisis Group*, 25 June 2007, i.

problems that allowed the militia's popularity to soar. Because respected scholars and authors have covered the U.S.'s initial failures to provide security and fill the government vacuum, this section will be brief. Other than the most obvious action, removing Saddam Hussein and allowing religious leaders to exert their influence over the Iraqi people, the most immediate U.S. actions that set the conditions for the militias' rise are Paul Bremmer and the CPA's unwillingness to listen to the legitimate concerns of the Iraqi people—which made the U.S. further appear as an occupier rather than a liberator—and the overly aggressive U.S. response to the Sadr movement.⁵³ The other inexcusable U.S. failures, such as disbanding the Iraqi Army and de-Baathification, and failing to stop the rampant looting and provide adequate security, doubtlessly spurred the Sunni insurgency and made establishing an Iraqi government more difficult; but were not significant, immediate contributors to militias.

The major U.S. failure with respect to the militia movement was to not recognize the political grievances of the Shi'a population. Anthony Shadid interviewed Muqtada al-Sadr soon after Saddam Hussein's fall, and summarized Sadr's followers' grievances, noting that Sadr and his men did not trust the United States because of their failure to support the 1991 uprisings. More immediate though, Sadr's followers "erupted in anger when the United States made clear in May, after the war, that it would lead an occupation; the Arabic word, *ihtilal*, is shadowed by humiliation, notions of resistance, and still resonant memories of the occupation by the British."⁵⁴ Given the language of Paul Bremmer, the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, it is not surprising that the Iraqi people would have these feelings. On 16 September 2003, Bremmer told a group of new Iraqi Ministers that "Like it or not—and it's not pleasant being occupied, or being the occupier, I might add—the Coalition is still the sovereign power here."⁵⁵

The CPA (and by extension the United States, although after reading *State of Denial*, it is not clear how involved the executive branch of the government was in the

⁵³ Of course, the United States referring to itself as an occupying power in a UN Security Council Resolution did not help U.S. image any, in Iraq and the international community.

⁵⁴ Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 207. Anthony Shadid is an Arab-American of Lebanese descent who speaks fluent Arabic. These abilities allowed him to travel throughout Iraq from 2003-2005, giving a refreshing and much needed Iraqi perspective of the war.

⁵⁵ Cited in Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 249.

CPA's decision making cycle) also caused the Iraqi population, and Sadr's movement in particular, significant concern that "the United States would deprive Sadr and his men of power and handpick a government from the once exiled parties of [Ayad] Allawi...that it had supported."⁵⁶ Muqtada al-Sadr stated that "the U.S. will ignore the opinion of the Iraqi people and it will compose the new government according to its own desires...I don't want the chair of the government because it will be controlled by the U.S., and I don't want to be controlled by the U.S."⁵⁷ This is also a legitimate complaint, as the Iraqi people who suffered under Saddam Hussein had little say in the CPA's decision to impose a governing council, which had a Shi'a majority, but consisted primarily of exiles who had opposed Saddam. Although the Shi'a initially supported the council, as its lack of power became apparent, they increasingly saw it as a U.S. puppet.⁵⁸ Lastly, Shadid claims that "Sadr's lieutenants railed against the importation into Iraq of a corrupt, materialistic culture exemplified...in particular [by] the United States."⁵⁹

Although the last reason was no doubt significant to the religious Shi'a who rejected certain Western values, the first two factors, the imposition of an occupation and the governing council, both stemmed from their main grievance—the lack of representation and a voice in the new Iraq. All of these issues, however, served to mobilize their grassroots movement that eventually formed the Mahdi Militia, arguably the most powerful militia in Iraq today.

The U.S. response to the Sadr movement is the second significant, direct action that greatly contributed to the militia's rise. As already noted above, the CPAs' responses to the Sadr movement—most significantly by closing Sadr's newspaper—directly led to the armed conflict from April-August 2004. Although the Coalition Forces crushed the uprising militarily, Sadr and his militia gained significant political recognition and support by standing up to the U.S. occupation.

⁵⁶ Cited in Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 208.

⁵⁷ Cited in Nir Rosen, *In the Belly of the Green Bird* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 28.

⁵⁸ Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2006), 307.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 208.

The U.S. military's actions also contributed to the Mahdi Militia's popularity rise amongst Iraqis even before Sadr's 2004 uprising. On 13 August 2003, a U.S. helicopter flying over Sadr City removed a black Sadrist flag flying atop a radio tower, infuriating the residents of Sadr City, who compared it to their oppression under Saddam.⁶⁰ A Sadr City sheik proclaimed that "[y]esterday Saddam the infidel attacked our holy sites and the people of this holy city, and now the Americans do the same thing. So what is the difference between Saddam and America?"⁶¹ Whether the U.S. soldiers acted under their commander's guidance or took the initiative to remove the flag on their own is uncertain—but like nearly every other aspect of American involvement in Iraq, the law of unintended consequences took over. This action and similar real and perceived affronts made the Mahdi Militia and the Sadr movement as a whole increasingly popular. The U.S. failure to effectively listen to the Iraqi peoples' desires by giving them real representation in the government and the military's actions towards the Shi'a, intended or not, contributed to the militias' rise to prominence.

C. INFILTRATION

1. The Ministry of Interior

After the overt fighting between coalition forces and the Mahdi Militia ended, both the Mahdi Militia and the Badr Corps recognized that the political process was the best means to accomplish their goals. As noted above, after the January 2005 elections, SCIRI's Bayan Jaber Solagh became the Minister of the Interior, and therefore in charge of Iraq's police forces. Under his leadership, many Iraqis have accused the police forces of being infiltrated by Badr Brigade and Mahdi Militia members, who subsequently assist in sectarian killings. In November 2005, further proof of misconduct on the part of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) came to light when U.S. forces uncovered a covert prison on the Karrada peninsula run by Shi'a police forces which held almost exclusively held tortured Sunni prisoners.⁶² In my experience in Sadr City, nearly every police station

⁶⁰ Nir Rosen, *In the Belly of the Green Bird* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 34.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Jeremy M. Sharp, "Iraq's New Security Forces: The Challenge of Sectarian and Ethnic Influences," Congressional Research Service, 12 January 2006, 5.

exhibited evidence of the Mahdi Militia's presence in the form of violent Sadrist propaganda. My unit frequently caught the local police escorting Mahdi Militia members around the city during curfew hours. Whether they did this out of fear or support for the Mahdi Militia cause was unclear, although a combination of the two was quite likely.

The situation has apparently worsened; the chief of police of western Baghdad, Brig. Gen. Salah al-Ani, recently said that the police are "working for the militias or to put money in their pocket."⁶³ A U.S. military report asserts that a station commander in the al-Amil neighborhood "is afraid to report suspected militia members in his organization due to fear of reprisals."⁶⁴ This report seems to suggest that even if the police are not actively involved in the sectarianism (and the majority may not be), they often feel powerless to stop it. A resident of the Sha'b district in Baghdad recounted a recent incident in which police came upon a group of armed men setting up a mortar. When the men showed their Mahdi Militia identification cards, the police stepped aside and watched the militiamen shoot three mortar rounds at the Abu Hanifa mosque in Adhamiyah, one of the most sacred Sunni shrines in Baghdad.⁶⁵

A U.S. Army MP unit currently tasked with training Sadr City's police forces recently sought to do a joint patrol with the local police, but had to talk the police into doing the patrol with them; the police initially resisted the patrol out of fear of being seen by the Mahdi Militia. This scenario is the same one that my unit experienced in Sadr City in 2005 and the unit before us in 2004; nothing seems to have changed. Staff Sergeant Toby Hansen observed that "eventually, when we leave, they're going to police their own city. They're going to do it their way."⁶⁶ This sentiment is very much in harmony with viewpoint I had after a year in Iraq, that whether U.S. forces left Sadr City

⁶³ Amit R. Paley, "In Baghdad, A Force Under the Militia's Sway," *The Washington Post*, 31 October 2006, 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ashraf al-Khalidi and Victor Tanner, "Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq," The Brookings Institution – University Of Bern Project On Internal Displacement, October 2006, 14.

⁶⁶ Karen Brulliard, "Learning To Live With The Mahdi Army," *The Washington Post*, 10 April 2007, 1.

in two weeks or in two years, the results would be no different. In fact, things have changed since my unit patrolled Sadr City—the Sadr Bureau and the Mahdi Militia have gained more influence and strength.

It is clear from numerous reports such as these that the militias have infiltrated the police forces, they often carry out sectarian or political violence, and lastly that policemen who yearn to do the right thing are too afraid to report corruption. A recent Congressional Research Service report mildly stated that the “blending of Shiite militias with many units under the control of the Iraqi Interior Ministry has caused many Sunni Arabs to distrust Iraq’s police forces.”⁶⁷ In response to U.S. pressure, Prime Minister al-Maliki recently relieved Rasheed Fleyah and Mahdi Sabeh, two senior Ministry of Interior generals in charge of public order and commando brigades who remained from the interim government, under which the polarization of the police forces likely began.⁶⁸ What effect these changes in leadership will bring remains to be seen; given the extent of the police force’s infiltration and the resulting mistrust on the part of the Iraqi people, it is likely that the damage done may take decades to repair. The Iraqi police forces in their current state therefore not only make the government seem more illegitimate, but make the government’s efforts to consolidate control over the country much more difficult.

2. The Ministry of Defense

Although the militia influence is much stronger in the Iraqi police forces, the Iraqi Army is not free from militia influence either. Recent efforts to curb sectarian violence in Baghdad brought societal loyalties within the Iraqi Army to the forefront. Many Iraqi soldiers operating in the capital are Shi’a, recruited from local neighborhoods; this is particularly true in eastern Baghdad, where Sadr City is located. Lieutenant Colonel Greg Watt, a senior U.S. military adviser to one of the two Iraqi Army divisions that operate in Baghdad, noted that “[f]rom my perspective, you can’t make a distinction between Iraq army Shi’ites and the religious militias. You have a lot of soldiers and

⁶⁷ Jeremy M. Sharp, “Iraq’s New Security Forces: The Challenge of Sectarian and Ethnic Influences,” Congressional Research Service, 12 January 2006, 6.

⁶⁸ Sabrina Tavernise, “Iraq Removes Leaders of Special Police,” *New York Times*, 18 October 2006, 1.

family members swayed and persuaded by the religious leadership.”⁶⁹ These assertions played out on the ground, where U.S. advisors repeatedly saw Shi`a Iraqi Army soldiers fail to perform their duties properly in eastern Baghdad. Tasked with operating a checkpoint to prevent the passage of armed militia or other suspicious personnel, U.S. advisors watched as the soldiers allowed many cars and even an ambulance full of armed militiamen pass.⁷⁰

These problems are not particular to Baghdad; Majid Sari, an Iraqi MoD adviser in Basra, laid the issues bare. “Here's the problem...They're taking money from the state, they're taking clothes from the state, they're taking vehicles from the state, but their loyalty is to the parties. Whoever disagrees, the next day you'll find them dead in the street.”⁷¹ Though it is widely accepted that the Iraqi Army is not nearly as infiltrated as the police forces, the influences are still present. My experiences in Sadr City substantiate this; the Iraqi Army battalion we worked with was predominantly locally recruited, yet the soldiers exhibited a much higher degree of loyalty to the government than did the local police, although societal influences were certainly noticeable.

Militia infiltration into both the police forces and the Iraqi Army poses a problem for the central government because these forces are not seen as legitimate, viable forces by all Iraqis due to their questionable loyalties. Until the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) represent the interests of the central government by carrying out their instructions and intents objectively, sectarianism in Iraq will continue, and the central government in its current form will not consolidate control over the country.

D. “DEATH SQUADS”

By far the most significant militia contribution to civil unrest and violence is the much publicized “sectarian violence” carried out by “death squads.” Numerous sources blame some of the sectarian killing on the Ministry of Interior’s police forces, as

⁶⁹ Antonio Castaneda, “U.S. Soldiers See Inept Output By Iraqi Troops,” *The Washington Times*, 25 September 2006, 1.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Steve Fainaru and Anthony Shadid, “Militias Wresting Control Across Iraq’s North and South,” *The Washington Post*, 20 August 2005.

discussed above. However, much of the violence carried out along societal lines is outside the realm of the MOI or the MOD, and is more specific to the militias. Although sectarian killings have been a somewhat regular occurrence since Saddam Hussein's demise, the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra (likely by Sunni terrorists) began a ruthless cycle of violence that continues to this day.⁷² In a August 2006 report, the U.S. Department of Defense succinctly summed up the sectarian violence, stating that:

Sectarian tensions increased over the past quarter, manifested in an increasing number of execution-style killings, kidnappings, and attacks on civilians, and increasing numbers of internally displaced persons. Sunni and Shi'a extremists, particularly al-Qaeda in Iraq and rogue elements of Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM), are increasingly interlocked in retaliatory violence and are contesting control of ethnically mixed areas to expand their existing areas of influence.⁷³

The United Nations (UN) estimated that between January and June 2006, 14,300 Iraqi civilians suffered hostile deaths, most of which stemmed from sectarian violence carried out in the Baghdad area.⁷⁴

The manner in which militias carry out the sectarian violence, and how much control over the violence the militias actually have, is somewhat of a mystery. A senior coalition intelligence analyst in Iraq noted that the Mahdi Militia death squads often receive a target list that gives the soon to be victim's name and address. These groups vary in their composition, but most include special forces, intelligence personnel, and punishment committee members—who often come complete with a cleric that administers sentences.⁷⁵ My unit's experience in Sadr City supports this assertion; our patrols frequently found dead bodies with bound hands and fatal gunshot wounds to the

⁷² United States Government Accountability Office, "Stabilizing Iraq: An Assessment of the Security Situation," 11 September 2006, 2.

⁷³ Department of Defense, "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," 29 August 2006, 3.

⁷⁴ Department of Defense, "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," 29 August 2006, 3.

⁷⁵ Sabrina Tavernise, "Many Iraqis Look to Gunmen as Protectors," *New York Times*, 21 October 2006, 1.

head. The patrols that found the bodies frequently questioned local citizens, who usually cited the “punishment committees” as the guilty party; one patrol even rescued a bound hostage from a car’s trunk.

The violence conducted by the militias is often impersonal; but are more often tit-for-tat reprisals. The *New York Times* reported a story featuring an individual named Ibrahim, whose brother and nephew were murdered by Sunni gunmen in September. At the funeral, Mahdi Militiamen approached Ibrahim and offered to kill Sunnis to avenge the deaths. Ibrahim declined, but said, “If I find who killed my brother, I will tell Mahdi Army to kill him.”⁷⁶ Although Ibrahim declined the Mahdi Militia’s reprisal offer, this mind-set is typical, and causes the indiscriminate sectarian violence currently plaguing Iraq, particularly Baghdad.

Another issue surrounding the various militias’ involvement with the “death squads” is the degree of control the militias have. Although many of these squads claim to operate under the Mahdi Militia banner, they in fact have little allegiance to the organization, and more closely resemble armed gangs; additionally, the Mahdi Militia itself is often divided on numerous issues, although they all give lip service to Muqtada al-Sadr’s leadership. Mahdi Militia commanders claim that they do not need permission to conduct sectarian attacks, saying “We don’t need to ask Muqtada because there is a very clear *fatwa* that authorizes the execution of *nawasib*. All we need to do is read Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr’s chapter on jihad.”⁷⁷ Indeed, in a recent Crisis Group interview, a Mahdi Militia company commander admitted that he had killed over 600 Sunnis, not really delineating between the general population and legitimate targets.⁷⁸ To address this, Muqtada al-Sadr fired 41 Mahdi Militia members linked to “illegal activities;” despite this, sectarian violence continues.⁷⁹ Even though the Mahdi Militia

⁷⁶ Sabrina Tavernise, “Many Iraqis Look to Gunmen as Protectors,” *New York Times*, 21 October 2006, 1.

⁷⁷ Cited in “Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabilizer,” *International Crisis Group*, 11 July 2006, p. 23. Nawasib is thought to mean “those who have set themselves against the prophet’s household.” In contemporary Iraq, Shi’a sometimes use the word to describe Sunnis.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Rick Jervis, “Cleric al-Sadr May Hold Iraq’s Future In His Hands,” *The USA Today*, 13 November 2006, 1.

does not have absolute control over the groups that often carry out sectarian violence under their banner, rightly or wrongly, Iraqis and coalition forces widely blame and associate them with the attacks.

It is clear by Western standards that Iraq's militias make the central government's effort to consolidate control over the country extremely challenging. The militias affect the central government's ability to consolidate control in three important and somewhat related ways. First, the militias' opposition to the coalitions' and central governments' political goals results in their overt and covert violence directed at the Iraqi Security Forces and U.S. forces. This violence not only hampers the coalition's long-term reconstruction efforts, but poses a serious challenge to the objective legitimacy of the Iraqi government because the central government exercises no control over the militias' actions. Second, all Iraqi citizens do not trust the government's security forces because they question the ISF's loyalties due to the political militia's infiltration. Lastly, the militias are widely believed to operate "death squads" that carry out attacks along societal lines, thereby further fragmenting Iraq's communities and making the central government's attempts to gain control and reconcile differences ever more difficult. The Iraqi government's inability to halt any of these militia-sponsored actions makes the central government illegitimate in the Iraqi people's eyes; therefore, the militias are a significant destabilizing force.

E. COUNTERPOINT: SERVE AND PROTECT

Although the militias receive their fair share of criticism from the United States and others, mostly the Sunnis, for creating havoc in Iraq, they also provide a valuable public good for their constituency—security. Like a neighborhood watch, the Mahdi Militia, Badr Corps, and other militias try to protect their own territory against attacks by outsiders; in the case of the Shi'a militias, Sunni suicide bombers. Because they do provide this valuable service that the government can not, many Shi'as argue that the central government cannot disband the militias without first addressing the reason for their existence by eliminating the mostly Sunni threat; the Sunnis counter with basically the same argument about their organized bands of insurgents. Again, the existence of the militias goes back to the power and government services vacuum that resulted after

Saddam's demise. As Qasim Dawood, the former national security minister under interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi stated, the "support of the militias within the Shiite community comes from the failure of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense and the coalition forces to provide security...The creation of these militias comes as a reaction."⁸⁰ Sheikh Fartusi echoed these sentiments in the spring of 2003, stating that after Saddam's fall, "[t]he first thing we did was to reassure people that the area is secure and stable, then restore social services, traffic, power, then restore law and prevent people from looting and stealing. Muqtada was in charge ... [and] gave orders."⁸¹

For example, a senior Iraqi judge in the criminal court system recently stated that "[r]ight now I support the presence of the Mahdi Army ... I know this is unacceptable in law, in politics, in society, but in this unusual time we are living in, this is the reality."⁸² When educated citizens such as this judge carry these sentiments, it is unlikely that the government will be able to disband the militias anytime soon. My unit's experience in Sadr City somewhat reflects these beliefs. Although often at odds, our unit and the Mahdi Militia shared one of the same basic goals: to prevent outside attacks, such as suicide bombs, within Sadr City. We joked on the staff that we should call the Sadr Bureau (Sadr's political office) and coordinate our patrol schedule with the Mahdi Militia to ensure good coverage in the city.

The situation in southern Iraq is not much different; the head of the Badr Corps in Basra, Ghanim Mayahi, said his organization was only providing "support and assistance" to the police through lightly armed militiamen. "There is no law, there is no order, and the police are scared of the tribes. Badr is not afraid, and it can face those threats."⁸³ Because of this security reinforcement, areas where the militias have consolidated control are on the whole much safer than areas still contested by Sunnis and Shi'as. My unit's stay in Sadr City only witnessed one successful suicide bomb attack

⁸⁰ Sabrina Tavernise, "Many Iraqis Look to Gunmen as Protectors," *New York Times*, 21 October 2006, 1.

⁸¹ Cited in Nir Rosen, *In the Belly of the Green Bird* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 31.

⁸² Sabrina Tavernise, "Many Iraqis Look to Gunmen as Protectors," *New York Times*, 21 October 2006, 1.

⁸³ Steve Fainaru and Anthony Shadid, "Militias Wresting Control Across Iraq's North and South," *The Washington Post*, 20 August 2005.

carried out within the city itself, despite their frequent occurrence in other parts of eastern Baghdad. Granted, the intense sectarian violence that has taken place since then has changed the situation, as Sunni groups such as al-Jaysh al-Islami, Jaysh Ansar al-Sunna and Tandhim al-Qaeda consider Sadr City a priority target because of the Mahdi Militia's involvement in the sectarian violence.⁸⁴ This targeting produced an increase in successful suicide bombings within Sadr City's limits, but only strengthens the Mahdi Militia's claims to provide security.

The car bomb attacks on 23 November 2006 in Sadr City, which killed an estimated 200 people, demonstrate this point. After the explosions, militiamen provided disaster relief, directing medical evacuations, crowd control, and even catching other car bombers before they entered the city. Sadr City residents regard the Mahdi Militia as heroes; Shihab Ahmed, a 24 year-old salesmen wounded in the attack, said that "the Mahdi Army are the people who helped us after the explosion...They saved us."⁸⁵ Another resident, Salim Faisal Abid, voiced the opinions of many by expressing his support for the continued presence of the Mahdi Militia by noting that "[i]t has proved there is no need to disarm the Mahdi Army...If they were not there yesterday, it would have been a disaster."⁸⁶ The Mahdi Militia clearly receives their support from the populace they serve; a militia member struck to the heart of the issue after the 23 November bombings when he said that "we [The Mahdi Militia] do even more than what the government should do."⁸⁷ A Sadr City resident later supported this line of thought during the American and Iraqi security operations into the Shi'a enclave, saying that the Mahdi Militia was "treating us very well...What are the Americans doing here?"⁸⁸

As a result of the recent sectarian violence, not only do the Shi'a militias receive more overt support from the population, but citizens are flocking to join their ranks because they support the militia's mission as protectors and providers of humanitarian

⁸⁴ "Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabilizer," *International Crisis Group*, 11 July 2006, 23.

⁸⁵ Sudarsan Raghavan, "A Day When Mahdi Army Showed its Other Side," *The Washington Post*, 27 November 2006, 1.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Sudarsan Raghavan, "U.S., Iraqi Forces Conduct Sweep in Shiite Enclave," *The Washington Post*, 5 March 2007, 11.

aid. Salam Saedi, who normally works at a hotel in downtown Baghdad, signed up for the Mahdi Militia following the 23 November Sadr City bombings, stating that he was neutral to the Mahdi Militia before, “but after the attacks I saw the people who were killed and my feelings changed...So I contacted some friends and I went and I signed up with the Mahdi army. They gave me an AK-47.”⁸⁹ The cycle of violence is only making the militias, particularly the Mahdi Militia, more powerful.

Indeed, during the security crackdown across Baghdad Muqtada al-Sadr instructed his militiamen to lie low, not carry weapons around in their areas, and generally avoid causing trouble or getting caught. Laith Abu Bakr, a Mahdi Militiamen in Sadr City, remarked on the Iraqi Army and American security efforts in Sadr City, saying “[w]e feel upset, but what can we do?...We have orders not to act.”⁹⁰ During the security operation, Sunni extremists conducted numerous bombing attacks on Shi’a markets and Shi’a pilgrims on their way to Karbala, resulting in large numbers of Shi’a casualties. Whether the attacks could have been prevented if the Mahdi Militia had been conducting vigilant security is debatable; one Shi’a in Baghdad summed up the feelings of many, saying “[d]espite the heavy security presence in Baghdad, we are seeing the terror and bombings escalate and more innocents being killed...When the Al Mahdi army was providing protection, there were no violations.”⁹¹

Sunni communities are also organizing forces at the grassroots level to provide protection for their neighborhoods. Although not nearly as organized as the Shi’a militias, and probably with less overarching goals, the Sunnis are rapidly forming neighborhood watch-like organizations. In Dora, a mostly Sunni Baghdad neighborhood, a local named Juburi states that after the February 2006 Samarra bombing, a group of retired Baathist officers formed a group to conduct security patrols in the neighborhood,

⁸⁹ Solomon Moore, “Rising Violence Swells Ranks of Iraq’s Militias,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 28 November 2006, 1.

⁹⁰ Sudarsan Raghavan, “U.S., Iraqi Forces Conduct Sweep in Shiite Enclave,” *The Washington Post*, 5 March 2007, 11.

⁹¹ Alexandra Zavis, “Shiites Want the Help of Sadr’s Militia,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 13 March 2007.

which now consists of a total between 2000 and 2500 men.⁹² Juburi claims that at any given time, “there are anywhere between 400 and 500 organized fighters in my area doing patrols and setting up checkpoints for defensive measures in the event that we are attacked by militias.”⁹³ As Juburi’s comments demonstrate, the Sunni ‘militias’ are currently smaller units organized primarily for neighborhood protection; what other goals they have, if any, are currently unknown.

Essentially, until the government can provide effective security for Shi’a and Sunni communities, the militias will continue to garner a great deal of support from their constituents, making the government’s attempts to disband the militias virtually impossible because they provide the most essential service in Iraq today: security. Because the people look to militias to fill this need instead of the corrupt police forces or the fledgling army, the central government is further delegitimized.

F. CONCLUSION ON MILITIAS

In conclusion, even as militias greatly contribute to the problems that confront the Iraqi government; they are more importantly a symptom of a larger problem. As Vali Nasr concluded:

Just as the Iraqi Shiites’ rise to power has brought hope to Shiites throughout the Middle East, so has it bred anxiety among the region’s Sunnis. De-Baathification, which removed significant obstacles to the Shiites’ assumption of power in Iraq, is maligned as an important cause of the ongoing Sunni insurgency ... Stemming adversarial sectarian politics will require satisfying Shiite demands while placating Sunni anger and alleviating Sunni anxiety, in Iraq and throughout the region.⁹⁴

⁹² Solomon Moore, “Rising Violence Swells Ranks of Iraq’s Militias,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 28 November 2006, 1.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Vali Nasr, “When the Shiites Rise,” *Foreign Affairs Journal* 58, no. 4 (July—August 2006): <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060701faessay85405/vali-nasr/when-the-shiites-rise.html> (accessed 27 August 2007).

There is little doubt that the fall of Saddam Hussein and the events that followed strengthened the Shi'a's power and influence throughout the Middle East. Recent unclassified reports indicate that Iran, which already has a great deal of influence in Iraq through its providing arms and training to the Shi'a militias, is now helping the Mahdi Militia build a relationship with Hezbollah in Lebanon. A senior U.S. intelligence official, who spoke under the condition of anonymity to the *New York Times*, elaborates:

They [Iran] have been a link to Lebanese Hezbollah and have helped facilitate Hezbollah training inside of Iraq, but more importantly Jaish al-Mahdi [Mahdi Militia] members going to Lebanon ... There seems to have been a strategic decision taken sometime over late winter or early spring by Damascus, Tehran, along with their partners in Lebanese Hezbollah, to provide more support to Sadr to increase pressure on the U.S.⁹⁵

What kind of long term threat this increased link between Iran, Hezbollah, and the Mahdi Militia remains to be seen, but it will likely have two major consequences. First, a united central Iraqi government that represents all communities in Iraq will be elusive, as disenfranchised Sunnis will continue to be reluctant to join a Shi'a dominated central government which they perceive as friendly to Iran. Second, the U.S. military position in Iraq, particularly in the Shi'a held populous areas, will become increasingly tenuous should the Mahdi Militia increase its overt attacks on coalition forces, as these attacks will likely increase in lethality due to the influx of technology from Iran. Both of these possible outcomes are obviously detrimental to U.S. interests in the region over the long-term.

At the current time, however, the various militias' overt and covert opposition to the United States and its partners puts the central government in a tedious political position. On one hand, the central government still depends on the United States for political and military support because it lacks the power to confront the militias outright. On the other, the government recognizes that the militias are necessary to provide security for their supporters because neither the U.S. forces nor the ISF can sufficiently provide the security necessary to protect Iraqi citizens from sectarian attacks. Because

⁹⁵ Michael R. Gordon and Dexter Filkins, "Hezbollah Said to Help Shiite Army in Iraq," *New York Times*, 28 November 2006, 1.

militias provide this most basic and crucial good, security, they cannot be simply disbanded or wished away, as some in the U.S. government would like to believe.

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IV. A GOVERNMENT AT LOGGERHEADS: SOCIETAL INFLUENCES WITHIN THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT

In addition to the ways that Iraq's communities directly influence the security situation, societal loyalties within the Iraqi government also contribute to the government's inability to consolidate control over the country. The Iraqi government is set up so that Iraq's different communities have a voice in the government, yet this very structure results in differences of opinion and therefore slow decision-making, the result being an ineffective counter-insurgency campaign. This section of the thesis examines how societal differences within the Iraqi central government affect its ability to consolidate control over the country.

On 15 December 2005, Iraq held an election to select its new permanent government. The election witnessed millions of Iraqis flocking to the polls to vote for their favorite candidates; Iraqis generally voted along sectarian lines, Sunnis voting for Sunni tickets, Shi'a voting for Shi'a, and the Kurds voting for their political parties. The outcome of the election was therefore unsurprising in that the Shi'a won a majority in the new government. However, the Iraqi Constitution states that the parliament must elect a prime minister with a 2/3 majority, which the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) lacked, resulting in the ouster of Interim Prime Minister Jafari and the selection of Nuri al-Maliki, a Shi'a on the UIA ticket.⁹⁶ The UIA is a Shi'a political alliance that shares power between SIIC and the Da'wa Party, along with a few additional, smaller Shi'a political groups.⁹⁷ The parliament selected Talabani to remain as the president, and chose as deputy presidents Adel Abd al-Mahdi, a Shi'a, and Tariq al-Hashimi, a Sunni. Maliki chose as deputy prime ministers one Sunni, Salam al-Zubaie, and one Kurd, Barham Salih. Maliki appointed 37 cabinet ministers, composed of eight Sunnis, seven Kurds, 21 Shi'as, and one Christian, with Gen. Abdul Qadir Mohammad Jasim al-Mifarji, a Sunni, heading the Ministry of Defense, Jawad al-Bulani, a Shi'a, as the Minister of

⁹⁶ Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security," Congressional Research Service, 18 October 2006, 17.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 5.

Interior, and Sherwan al-Waili, a Shi'a, as the Minister of National Security.⁹⁸ With this diverse team of cabinet ministers, particularly the two most important, Defense and Interior, Maliki's central government began their quest to consolidate control over and govern the country.

A. SADR FLEXES HIS POLITICAL MUSCLES

Roughly six months after Iraq formed its new central government, the Department of Defense gave its quarterly report to Congress on progress in Iraq. When discussing political obstacles to progress, the DoD stated:

Personal loyalties to various sub-national groups, such as tribe, sect, or political party, are often stronger than loyalty to Iraq as a nation-state. In addition, Iraq's political parties are often unwilling or unable to resolve conflicts through compromise. Further, some Iraqis have joined the political process but condone or maintain support for violent means as a source of political leverage. This makes effective national reconciliation and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs difficult to design and implement.⁹⁹

Numerous examples support the Department of Defense's report, but perhaps one of the most glaring and standout examples of greater loyalty to a political party than the central government is the boycott of the central government the Sadrists conducted following Prime Minister Maliki's meeting with President Bush in Amman, Jordan on 31 November 2006. Muqtada al-Sadr's official followers in the Iraqi government, consisting of 30 parliament members and 6 cabinet ministers, followed through on their threats to boycott the central government if Maliki met with President Bush to discuss security issues. Upon his return, Maliki asked the Sadrists to return to the government and settle their differences within the political framework, further remarking that he "wish[ed] they would reconsider their decision because it doesn't represent a positive development in our political process."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security," Congressional Research Service, 18 October 2006, 17-18.

⁹⁹ United States Department of Defense, "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq," November 2006, 9.

¹⁰⁰ Kirk Semple, Khalid Hassan, Abdul Razzaq al-Saiedi, "Having Pinned Little Hope on Talks, Many Iraqis Appear to be Beyond Disappointment," *New York Times*, 1 December 2006, A18.

The Sadr bloc said they would return to the government only if President Bush gave more authority to Maliki regarding security decisions, in addition to improving public services.¹⁰¹ A spokesman for the Sadrists, Fallah Hassan Shensel, claimed that the group was reaching out across sectarian lines to mobilize an alliance against the American military presence in Iraq, saying that “it’s a patriotic national group, it’s not sectarian or ethnic...We need to be freed from the occupation.”¹⁰² Although the opposition to the American presence in Iraq is strong amongst both the Shi`as and the Sunnis, and the Sunnis had previously celebrated Sadr’s uprisings against the American forces in 2004, the Sadrists did not receive support for their boycott from the Sunnis. This is no doubt in part due to the sectarian attacks on the Sunnis by the Mahdi Militia’s “death squads,” which removed any semblance of unity between the two groups, despite their sometimes converging agendas.

The Sadr bloc returned to the government on 21 January 2007 in the face of a government security crackdown across Baghdad; an effort that Prime Minister Maliki pledged would target all forces hostile to the government, both Shi`a and Sunni. Prime Minister Maliki had previously protected the Shi`a militias from U.S. military operations, often requiring his approval before any raids or searches. Maliki reversed his position on the Mahdi Militia in light of overwhelming evidence that the group participated in sectarian killings; one Iraqi official speaking on the condition of anonymity remarked that “Al-Maliki realized he couldn't keep defending the Mahdi Army because of the information and evidence that the armed group was taking part in the killings, displacing people and violating the state’s sovereignty.”¹⁰³

The Sadr bloc most likely hastened their return to government in part to try to prevent or mitigate the effects of such a crackdown, rather than a sudden sense of patriotism and national duty. The boycott episode demonstrates where the loyalties of the Sadrists bloc lie—one can easily surmise that the Sadrists actually boycotted because

¹⁰¹ Kirk Semple, Khalid Hassan, Abdul Razzaq al-Saiedi, “Having Pinned Little Hope on Talks, Many Iraqis Appear to be Beyond Disappointment,” *New York Times*, 1 December 2006, A18.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Sinan Salaheddin, “Bombs Kill at Least 100 People in Iraq,” *The Associated Press*, 22 January 2007, http://p143.news.scd.yahoo.com/s/ap/20070122/ap_on_re_mi_ea/iraq. (accessed 23 January 2007).

they knew that President Bush would pressure Prime Minister Maliki to act against the Shi'a militias at their security meeting in Jordan, particularly the Mahdi Militia, and they therefore sought to prevent the meeting from taking place. The Sadr bloc, and by extension the Mahdi Militia, most likely sought to simply maintain their power and influence in Iraq and within the Iraqi government. Such an agenda only weakens the political process and the Iraqi government, as it tries to hold the government's security decisions hostage to their wishes, hindering the government's ability to consolidate control over the country.

Another mark against the Sadr bloc in government is their complete mismanagement of the ministries that they run. This mismanagement only serves to make the government more illegitimate in the eyes of the Iraqi people, making them less likely to support the government on other, more important measures such as security, making the government's efforts to consolidate control over the country more difficult. One of the best examples of the Sadr bloc's incompetence is the Ministry of Health's deterioration since it has been under their management.

Iraq once had one of the better health care systems in the Middle East, but unfortunately the Gulf War and subsequent sanctions damaged the system's efficiency. Unfortunately, things have only gotten worse since the ministry has been under the Sadr bloc's control. A former U.N. official judged Iraq's health care system as "looking more and more like a country in sub-Saharan Africa."¹⁰⁴ A CBS News investigation revealed that Sunni patients were sometimes dragged from their beds and murdered, and ambulances used to transport weapons and hostages of the Sadr bloc's military arm, the Mahdi Militia.¹⁰⁵ Doctors and officials in Baqubah, a Sunni-dominated area north of Baghdad, claim that the Sadr-run ministry discriminates against them by refusing to give them necessary supplies. Tariq Hiali, a health official in Baqubah, said that "[w]e have no medications or blood serum supplies ... The Ministry of Health is not providing us

¹⁰⁴ Louise Roug, "Decrepit Healthcare Adds to Toll in Iraq," *The Los Angeles Times*, 11 November 2006, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-health11nov11,0,5329488,full.story>. (accessed 31 January 2007).

¹⁰⁵ "CBS: Death Squads In Iraqi Hospitals," *CBS News*, 4 October 2006, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/10/04/eveningnews/main2064668.shtml>. (accessed 31 January 2007).

with medications and medical equipment; they consider [us] terrorists.”¹⁰⁶ Another Baqubah official, this one a blood bank employee, said that the “ambulances we send to Baghdad are being intercepted by the Mahdi army,” who in turn sell the bags of blood on the market for up to \$100 a bag.¹⁰⁷ A U.S. Army civil affairs soldier stationed in Tikrit reported that 57 truckloads of medicine disappeared in the last week of October and first week of November 2006.¹⁰⁸

In an apparent recognition of the Health Ministry’s corruption, Iraqi and U.S. forces arrested the Sadr bloc Deputy Health Minister Hakim al-Zamili on 8 February 2007 on charges of filling the Ministry of Health with Mahdi Militiamen, embezzlement, and using “facilities and services for sectarian kidnapping and murder.”¹⁰⁹ Zamili is the first high-level cabinet official arrested for fueling sectarian violence, although Sadr bloc parliament member Bahar al-Araji decried the arrest, saying “[t]his is not an attack on the Sadr organization ... It’s an attack on the Iraqi government.”¹¹⁰ This statement makes clear that some members of the government do not support its efforts to stem the societal strife afflicting the country, despite evidence put forth by the Ministry of Interior and U.S. authorities that implicated Zamili in trafficking arms and militants, in addition to numerous murders.

It is obvious from these reports that the Sadr-led Ministry of Health has poor accountability over its operations and personnel, but more significantly lets its Shi’a societal loyalties prevail over the health needs of the entire country. These actions only deepen Sunni discontent and mistrust of the government, and possibly fuel the Sunni backlash against the government and the dominant Shi’a even more, thereby making a political settlement more difficult. The Sadr bloc’s loyalty to their constituent society rather than the central government, evidenced by their boycott of government and

¹⁰⁶ Louise Roug, “Decrepit Healthcare Adds to Toll in Iraq,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 11 November 2006, <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-health11nov11,0,5329488,full.story> (accessed 31 January 2007).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Damien Cave, “Iraq’s No. 2 Health Official is Held and Accused of Financing Shiite Militants,” *New York Times*, 9 February 2007, 8.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

corruption in the ministries they manage, hinders the government's attempt to consolidate control over the country because it feeds the societal strife tearing apart Iraq.

B. SUNNI DISCONTENT WITH SHI'A LEADERSHIP

There are numerous other examples of divisive currents in Iraq's central government. One of the many policy disagreements along sectarian lines amongst Iraq's "executive branch" of government erupted over the checkpoints the U.S. Army erected around Sadr City after the kidnapping of an American soldier; the U.S. suspects the Mahdi Militia of involvement in the kidnapping. Prime Minister Maliki ordered the checkpoints lifted after weeks of wrangling with the United States government over the issue, and finally got his way at the end of October 2006. Shi'a members of the Iraqi government, such as the deputy speaker of the Parliament Khaled al-Attiya, praised the move, stating that "All the militias will disband at the end of the day but these are not the main enemy of the Iraqi people...The main enemy are the Baathists and Saddamists who want to destroy the political process and the main principles of the constitution."¹¹¹ The Sunni members of the Iraqi government did not all agree with Maliki's decision, including Deputy President Tariq al-Hashimi, who stated that "I'm afraid that by lifting the siege the government sent the wrong message to those who stand behind terrorism in Iraq. It says the iron fist will loosen and they can move freely."¹¹² Hashimi clearly viewed the targets of the siege quite differently than did Attiya, referring to the Mahdi Militia as "those who stand behind terrorism," while Attiya claimed the militias were not the main enemy of Iraq. These differences of opinion on who the true enemies of Iraq are make it difficult for the central government to agree on legitimate targets to pursue in their campaign to stop the violence.

More distrust and divisions within the government boiled to the surface on 25 January 2006 when Prime Minister Maliki briefed the new "surge" security plan for Baghdad to members of Parliament during a nationally broadcast session, promising that

¹¹¹ Mussab Al-Khairalla, "Iraqis Divided Over Checkpoint Order," *Reuters*, 1 November 2006, <http://today.reuters.com/News/CrisesArticle.aspx?storyId=PAR153887> (accessed 16 January 2007).

¹¹² Ibid.

there would be no “safe haven” for militants and insurgents after the crackdown’s implementation, also claiming that the government would immediately “start arresting anybody who took by force the house of a displaced family.”¹¹³ At this, Abdul Nasir al-Janabi, a powerful Sunni leader in the Parliament, asked that the government stop “the firing of officers and civil servants under the pretext of de-Ba'athification ... What kind of national reconciliation are you talking about when you are implementing rules that marginalize [Sunnis] ... Stop sentencing innocent people to death because such sentences are politically motivated.”¹¹⁴ Janabi added that the Parliament should have oversight of the security operation in Baghdad, retorting that “[w]e cannot trust the office of the prime minister.”¹¹⁵ This last remark threw Maliki into a fit of rage, accusing Janabi himself of being a militant, stating that “[t]his brother [Janabi] will trust the Cabinet when I come forward with your file and show that you are responsible. There are 150 people detained in [the] Buhayrat area, and you don't speak about them,”¹¹⁶ implying that the government had evidence of Janabi’s guilt in these kidnappings in the Buhayrat area, where Janabi’s supporters are. These remarks caused Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, the Sunni speaker of the Parliament, to pound his gavel and restore order, stating “[t]hat is unacceptable, Mr. Prime Minister... It is unacceptable, Mr. Prime Minister, to make such accusations against a lawmaker under the dome of Parliament.”¹¹⁷

The bickering continued after the cameras were turned off, with Mr. Mashhadani demanding that Maliki apologize to Janabi for his remarks; members of the UIA (Maliki’s party) responded that it was Janabi who should apologize, not Maliki; Mashhadani then threatened to quit.¹¹⁸ These disagreements unfortunately do not give

¹¹³ Marc Santora, “Iraq Leader And Sunni Officials In Sectarian Clash On Security,” *New York Times*, 26 January 2007, 1. Due to sectarian violence, many families that are the minority in Sunni/Shi’a mixed areas are moving to safer areas of the country, leaving their homes, often complete with furniture. Members of the majority sect moving into the area sometimes move into houses vacated by the minority.

¹¹⁴ Bassem Mroue, “Al-Maliki Promises A Safe Iraq,” *The Washington Times*, 26 January 2007, 1

¹¹⁵ Marc Santora, “Iraq Leader And Sunni Officials In Sectarian Clash On Security,” *New York Times*, 26 January 2007, 1.

¹¹⁶ Bassem Mroue, “Al-Maliki Promises A Safe Iraq,” *The Washington Times*, 26 January 2007, 1

¹¹⁷ Marc Santora, “Iraq Leader And Sunni Officials In Sectarian Clash On Security,” *New York Times*, 26 January 2007, 1.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Iraqi citizens much faith in their government; a Sadr City resident ruefully commented on the state of politics in Iraq, saying that “Sunni and Shiite politicians pretend to work for reconciliation, but they curse each other when the news cameras are gone.”¹¹⁹ Even though the Parliament eventually returned to business and approved the government’s security plan, this episode highlights the mistrust and societal loyalties at work in the central government. There are notable tensions amongst the Parliament and between the Parliament and the Prime Minister along societal lines, making the government’s attempts to consolidate control over the country more difficult than they already are.

Another event that highlighted the sectarian divisions within the Iraqi government and heightened Sunni mistrust of it is the alleged rape of a Sunni woman by Iraqi Police in Baghdad on 19 February 2007. Almost immediately after the woman appeared on Al Jazeera with her account of being kidnapped and sexually assaulted at the hands of three Iraqi National Police, Shi’a politicians dismissed the allegations as propaganda meant to undermine the new security efforts.¹²⁰ Prime Minister Maliki initially promised a full investigation of the incident, but reversed his position hours later, saying that “[i]t has been shown after medical examinations that the woman had not been subjected to any sexual attack whatsoever, and that there are three outstanding arrest warrants against her issued by security agencies.”¹²¹

Sunni politicians supported the woman, and demanded that a thorough investigation be conducted. A spokesman for a Sunni bloc of politicians demanded that the case “should not be dealt with on a sectarian basis,” and then went on to say that if the government did not handle the rape allegations well, it could undermine its authority in security operations.¹²² Other Sunni politicians spoke out much more vehemently, including Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, the Sunni speaker of the Parliament, who said that if

¹¹⁹ Hamza Hendawi, “Security Crackdown Under Way in Baghdad,” *The Associated Press*, 7 February 2007, http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20070208/ap_on_re_mi_ea/iraq (accessed 7 February 2007).

¹²⁰ Marc Santora, “Rape Accusation Reinforces Fears in a Divided Iraq,” *New York Times*, 21 February 2007, 1.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

the government didn't "bring justice to this Muslim Iraqi woman, whom you should view as your sister or daughter ... history will curse us with eternal disgrace."¹²³

Other Sunni leaders also linked the rape allegations and the government's response to the government's efforts to secure Baghdad. Sheik Abdel Nasser Janabi, who belongs to a mostly Sunni bloc in the parliament, claimed that the rape highlighted "the fact that there are dirty hands within the security plan."¹²⁴ Janabi and other Sunni politicians also condemned the Baghdad security plan as a scheme to allow militias to go into hiding while security forces went into Sunni areas, and threatened that Sunni parties might withdraw from the government if their concerns were not addressed.¹²⁵ The head of the Sunni Endowment, Ahmed Abdel Ghafour Samaraie, called for an international investigation to occur because he did not trust the government's ability to handle the situation, and further claimed that the rape incident proved that the government had not yet purged thugs from the Iraqi Security Forces, saying that he thought "the Baghdad security plan in the beginning was good, but the negative aspect is that the militias are penetrating these forces."¹²⁶ Prime Minister Maliki later fired Samaraie from his post, although his legality to do so is unclear. Other Sunnis called for more drastic measures; the Islamic Army in Iraq, a Sunni insurgent group, warned its members to prepare for revenge, declaring that they would "intensify attacks against the Iraqi security forces" to get even.¹²⁷

This unfortunate incident, whether the allegations are true or not, highlights three things. First, that many politicians in Iraq's central government rush to judgment on issues along societal lines without first discerning all of the facts. Second, Sunnis in Iraq associate government responses to incidents against their society to the government's

¹²³ Ernesto Londono, "A Rape Goes Public, Igniting Political Fray," *The Washington Post*, 21 February 2007, 9.

¹²⁴ Christian Berthlesen, "Rape Claim Threatens Iraq Security Plan," *The Los Angeles Times*, 22 February 2007, A1.

¹²⁵ Marc Santora, "Maliki Fires Official for Criticizing Response to Rape Account," *New York Times*, 22 February 2007, A10.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ernesto Londono, "A Rape Goes Public, Igniting Political Fray," *The Washington Post*, 21 February 2007, 9.

legitimacy. If the government does not stand up for or represent the Sunnis well in a particular incident, they see the government as illegitimate and corrupt. Lastly, some Sunnis, such as the Islamic Army in Iraq, view violence as a justifiable recourse against a government they see as corrupt and illegitimate. The Sunni discontent with the Shi`a leadership in the government greatly hinders the government's ability to consolidate control over the country.

C. SADDAM'S EXECUTION

Another indicator of the sectarianism in the Iraqi government is the manner in which the government conducted Saddam Hussein's execution. An Iraqi court rightly convicted him for his murderous response to a Shi`a assassination attempt (by Maliki's Dawa party no less) and gave him the death penalty, but the way the government carried it out on 30 December 2006 only furthered the Sunni view that the central government is dominated by Shi`as bent on revenge, rather than an objective, fair, and representative government that holds the long-term interests of Iraq at stake. The Iraqi government executed Saddam Hussein on what Sunnis celebrate as the first day of the sacred Muslim holiday Eid al-Adha; the Shi`a observe the start of the holiday one day later. Normally, in order for the government to carry out an execution the Iraqi president and two vice-presidents must sign the execution order, an act to prevent executions being conducted along sectarian lines.¹²⁸ However, for crimes against humanity this process is not necessary, and did not occur in Saddam Hussein's case; however, had this process been followed it may have decreased the sectarian outcry that followed the execution. The government could have easily waited to deliver justice until after the holiday was over for all Muslims.

Unfortunately for the Iraqi government, this was not the worst of it. One of the witnesses to the hanging recorded the proceedings on his cell phone, allowing the entire world to see the spectacle. Saddam Hussein presented himself as the most dignified figure in the execution chamber, while some present taunted him with chants of

¹²⁸ Charles Krauthammer, "The Hanging: Beyond Travesty," *The Washington Post*, 5 January 2007, A17.

“Muqtada, Muqtada, Muqtada.”¹²⁹ The *Washington Post* editorial by Charles Krauthammer represented the views of many, saying that the “world saw Hussein falling through the trapdoor, executed not in the name of a new and democratic Iraq but in the name of Muqtada al-Sadr ...”¹³⁰ *The Economist* stated that the hanging “reinforced the Sunni sense of injury at the hands of what many see as a puppet sectarian regime.”¹³¹ President Bush even joined in the execution criticism, stating that the hanging looked like “kind of a revenge killing,” adding that “I was disappointed and felt like they fumbled the — particularly the Saddam Hussein — execution.”¹³² President Bush also acknowledged that the hanging would make it more difficult “to make the case to the American people that this is a government that does want to unify the country.”¹³³ Although Saddam Hussein certainly deserved the punishment he received, the manner in which the Iraqi government carried out the sentence—by rushing the execution so that it fell on the first day of Sunni’s observation of Eid al-Adha, and the antics it allowed in the execution room—only made the execution appear as victor’s justice, rather than justice delivered by a democratic state. The execution exposed the presence of communal influences in the Iraqi government, and this unfortunately pours salt on the country’s wounds, making it even more difficult for the central government to consolidate control over its country.

D. COUNTERPOINT: THE GOVERNMENT IS MAKING INROADS DESPITE DIFFERENCES

Despite the grim picture of the Iraqi government painted thus far, there are some indications of progress with respect to the security situation within the Iraqi government. In particular, there are two fairly significant indicators of the Iraqi government’s willingness to work through its societal differences: first, the Iraqi cabinet approved a draft oil law that equitably distributes oil revenues amongst Iraq’s citizens; second, Prime Minister Maliki acknowledged the societal nature and corruption of some ministries

¹²⁹ Charles Krauthammer, “The Hanging: Beyond Travesty,” *The Washington Post*, 5 January 2007, A17.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ “The Blundering Dictator,” *The Economist*, 6 January 2007, 40.

¹³² Bill Nichols, “Bush: Saddam Hanging Botched,” *USA Today*, 17 January 2007, 1.

¹³³ Ibid.

within his cabinet, including all ministers belonging to the Sadr bloc, and promised to replace them with qualified leaders (which he subsequently did with Muqtada al-Sadr's support).¹³⁴

On 27 February 2007, Iraq's Cabinet finally agreed on a new oil law (which still needs to be approved by the Parliament) that would require the Shi'a and Kurds to share revenues from Iraq's oil exports with the minority Sunnis, whose area of the country contains no proven oil reserves.¹³⁵ The law would distribute oil revenues to all eighteen provinces based on population size and allow regional administrations to negotiate oil contracts with foreign companies (which must then be approved by the central government).¹³⁶ The willingness of the Kurds and the Shi'a to share the potential wealth of oil pumped from their areas of the country with the Sunnis, under whom they were oppressed for many years, is a crucial step that could possibly enfranchise Sunnis and undercut the anti-government currents in the Sunni community, making it easier for the government to consolidate control over the country. Although the draft law is more than two months late, it is a necessary step if Iraq is to remain one country; it is difficult to place blame on the Iraqi government for their delinquency—after all, how many democratic governments produce landmark legislation on time?

The other significant development in Iraq's government that may help it to somewhat overcome its sectarian image is Maliki's recent decision to investigate and if necessary prosecute some of his cabinet ministers whom have proven to be corrupt or downright criminal and also his decision to fire or reassign members of the security forces with militia ties. On 3 March 2007, Maliki announced that he would conduct a formal investigation (similar to a grand jury investigation) of some cabinet members

¹³⁴ Sabah Jerjes, "One Year On, Iraq Government Tries New Tack," *The Associated Press*, http://news.yahoo.com/s/afp/20070524/wl_mideast_afp/iraqpolitics (accessed 22 June 2007).

¹³⁵ Tom Regan, "Iraq Drafts Deal on Oil Riches," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 27 February 2007, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0227/p99s01-duts.html> accessed 7 March 2007. (accessed 15 March 2007). Iraq's proven oil reserves are mostly in southern and northern Iraq, inhabited predominantly by the Shi'a and the Kurds, respectively.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

suspected of corruption or of having ties to extremists, saying that authorities are still determining “who should be arrested and the reasons behind arresting them.”¹³⁷

Another important development is the ongoing purge in the Ministry of Interior of policemen suspected of having ties with militias or suspected of other wrongdoings, such as torture. The ministry’s deputy spokesman, Jassim Hassoon, recently claimed that over 10,000 personnel had been reassigned or fired, further stating that “[m]aybe we aren’t 100% cured, but we’re getting better day by day.”¹³⁸ This is an important process—which needs to continue—that in the long term could help restore some legitimacy to the interior ministry, which is deeply mistrusted by many Sunnis because it is widely regarded as infiltrated by Shi’a militias. A capable and impartial police force is vital in the long run if Iraq is to be a stable country. Both of these steps by Maliki’s government, investigating cabinet members and shaking up the Ministry of Interior, are important strides to make if the government is to become legitimate; even though the Iraqi government should have undertaken them months ago, it is better late than never.

E. CONCLUSIONS ON THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

The CATO institute recently issued a very pessimistic outlook on the odds that the U.S. will be able to recognize its strategic goal of establishing a stable, secure Iraq with a representative government. While analyzing the Iraqi government, the study dismissed the notion that a political reconciliation could occur in Iraq, claiming that:

Calling for a true government of national unity may be noble in principle, but operationally it is an oxymoron. Iraq leaders ... have their own agendas, and creating a united country with an equitable distribution of power ... is not a high priority. The reality is that if Iraqi leaders were both capable of forging such a system and inclined to do so, they would already have taken major steps toward that goal. That they have not done so explains why the ... goal of political reconciliation will not be attained.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Brian Murphy, “Sunnis Slain Over Talks With Shi’ites,” The Associated Press, in *The Washington Times*, 4 March 2007, 1.

¹³⁸ Rick Jervis, “Iraq Ousts 10,000 In Security Ministry,” *USA Today*, 5 March 2007, 1.

¹³⁹ Ted Galen Carpenter, “Escaping the Trap: Why the United States Must Leave Iraq,” *Policy Analysis* 588, Washington, D.C.: The CATO Institute, 14 February 2007, 7.

The former National Security Agency Director, LTG William Odom, backed up this assertion, saying that “no ‘deal’ of any kind can be made among the warring parties in Iraq that will bring stability even temporarily.”¹⁴⁰ General David Petraeus also characterized Iraqi politics in these terms a few months after he began his turnaround efforts there, saying the Iraqi government was “not a government of national unity. Rather, it is one comprised of political leaders from different parties that often default to narrow agendas and a zero-sum approach to legislation.”¹⁴¹

Other senior American commanders have also noted the sectarian and corrupt nature of the Iraqi government. Major General Benjamin Mixon, the senior commander in northern Iraq, said that the government in the Diyala province was “ineffective,” and that all provincial governments in northern Iraq were hampered by poor support from the central government in Baghdad, which was “overburdened by a centralized bureaucratic process...and impacted by corruption and sectarian issues.”¹⁴² Major General Mixon went on to link the government’s ineffectiveness with the security situation, saying that the “most important and difficult task we have is to improve the Iraqi government capacity...That will lead the people to having confidence in their government. The confidence of the people in that government will enhance our security operations and enable us to ultimately defeat this enemy.”¹⁴³

These viewpoints are just a few of the many that believe that the political divisions along societal lines in Iraq are too great to overcome because Iraq’s politicians currently view politics as zero-sum through a religious lens. As long as this is the case, and there is no indication of change anytime in the foreseeable future, the result will be an ineffective, indecisive government that is not seen as legitimate by all of Iraq’s people, which therefore contributes to the cycle of violence gripping Iraq.

¹⁴⁰ William E. Odom, “Six Brutal Truths about Iraq,” Nieman Foundation Commentary, 11 December 2006, in Ted Galen Carpenter, “Escaping the Trap: Why the United States Must Leave Iraq,” *Policy Analysis* 588, Washington, D.C.: The CATO Institute, 14 February 2007, 7.

¹⁴¹ Lolita C. Baldor, “Petraeus Eyes Long Commitment In Iraq,” *The Associated Press*, 26 April 2007.

¹⁴² Major General Benjamin Mixon, “DoD Special Security Operations Briefing with Maj. Gen. Mixon from Iraq,” 11 May 2007, <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3961> (accessed 12 May 2007).

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Prime Minister Maliki himself declared on 26 November 2006 after a few particularly bloody and violent weeks acknowledged that the violence in Iraq was mostly political in nature, and called upon politicians to set aside their differences and begin working together:

These actions are at most the reflection of political backgrounds and wills and sometimes the reflection of dogmatic, perverted backgrounds and wills ... The crisis is political, and the ones who can stop the cycle of aggravation and bloodletting of innocents are the politicians.¹⁴⁴

Whether Prime Minister Maliki himself can rise above sectarian politics and truly lead the government to unity remains to be seen. Although the Iraqi government has shown small signs of progress lately, it has been in place for over a year and has demonstrated a limited willingness to work together to overcome sectarian differences and act decisively to confront the violence, as demonstrated by the Saddam hanging and his handling of the rape allegations, among many other things.

This does not bode well for political reconciliation anytime soon, which will only lead to more communal violence in Iraq because the Sunnis do not see the government as legitimate, and the Shi`a see the Sunni extremists and their more moderate supporters as the main hindrance to achieving stability in Iraq. Indeed, on 30 April 2007 the largest Sunni bloc in Parliament, the Iraqi Consensus Front, threatened to withdraw its ministers from Prime Minister Maliki's cabinet because they had "lost hope in rectifying the situation despite all of its sincere and serious efforts to do so."¹⁴⁵ At this writing, six cabinet ministers from the Sunni political party Iraqi Consensus Front and five ministers from the secular Iraqiya party are boycotting Prime Minister Maliki's cabinet because of

¹⁴⁴ Edward Wong, "Iraqi Premier Blames Politicians for Violence," *New York Times*, 27 November 2006, 10.

¹⁴⁵ Alissa J. Rubin, "Sunni Ministers Threaten To Quit Cabinet In Iraq," *New York Times*, 1 May 2007, 1.

its sectarian nature. The Sadr bloc cabinet members have been absent since April, when they left the government because the Prime Minister refused to set a date for the withdrawal of U.S. troops.¹⁴⁶

Some would argue that the current Iraqi government might never effectively govern Iraq due to the current security and political climate in the country. If this is the case, then perhaps the only government that could consolidate control over most of the country, except perhaps the Anbar Province, is one composed entirely of Shi'a. Although this would be entirely unpalatable to the current United States Administration, probably cause Sunnis who live in mixed neighborhoods to migrate to Sunni areas or to brave a Shi'a government that could possibly carry out extreme repression of the Sunnis, and would most likely result in continued Sunni violence against Shi'a areas and the Shi'a government, a government of this nature could actually be more stable in the long term because it would not be beset with as many conflicts of interests, although its consolidation period in the short term would probably be bloody and painful.

Other political scientists believe that a diverse Iraqi government can consolidate control over the country, but not until the various factions are ready to politically reconcile their differences. James Fearson of Stanford University recently wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that further civil conflict

may be the only way to reach a point where power sharing could become a feasible solution to the problem of governing Iraq. More fighting holds the prospect of clarifying the balance of forces and creating pressures for internal consolidation on one or both sides, thereby providing stronger grounds for either a victory by one side or a stable negotiated settlement.¹⁴⁷

This point of view is quite valid given the divergent viewpoints in Iraq—between and even within the different communities--although further fighting of the sort Fearson speaks of would be devastating for Iraq's citizens, it may be unpreventable at this point.

¹⁴⁶ Stephen Farrell, "5 Ministers Threaten To Leave Iraq's Cabinet," *New York Times*, 7 August 2007, 3. The Iraqiya party members will still run their ministries, but will not take part in any cabinet meetings.

¹⁴⁷ James Fearson, "Iraq's Civil War," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2007, <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20070301faessay86201-p20/james-d-fearon/iraq-s-civil-war.html> (accessed 6 March 2006).

There are various factions within the Shi`a, but even more so amongst the Sunni, some of whom completely reject the current government, and some grudgingly accept it as the best option they have. Further, and perhaps most important for political reconciliation to work, no single Sunni or Shi`a can speak for the entire group, which makes adherence to an agreement nearly impossible.

This violence in Iraq is also nihilistic due to the downward spiral of revenge and tit for tat killings. Bringing a halt to this violence in the short term will not be easy for an Iraqi government crippled with societal loyalties, and in order for the government to be viable and stable in the long term, it must be perceived as legitimate by all Iraqis. This issue is one which causes many Iraqis, mostly Sunni, to carry out violence against the government. Lieutenant Colonel Gian Gentile, who spent a year in the mostly Sunni Amiriyah neighborhood of Baghdad as a U.S. Army battalion commander, recognized that Sunnis had justifiable concerns about the new Shi`a government, stating:

Sunnis killed and continue to kill Shiites and government forces because of sectarian hatred, to retaliate for what they view as unfair acts by the Shiite government and because they fear that any Shiites remaining in their district would provoke more oppressive government actions against them ... When I spoke to shopkeepers, professionals, imams and others in Amiriyah, I was told that the solution to ending the violence—both insurgent attacks and sectarian killings—was an Iraqi government they saw as legitimate.¹⁴⁸

LTC Gentile's experiences reinforce two hypotheses: 1) that people with real grievances against a government they perceive as illegitimate will resort to violence as a means to bring about change, and 2) that during periods of stress and uncertainty people fall back upon and look to their cultural identities for security. Unfortunately, this reversion in Iraq has in part led to the societal violence and governmental disagreements between the Sunni and Shi`a, which hinders the current government's ability to consolidate control over the country.

¹⁴⁸ Gian P. Gentile, "Legitimacy Was Step One," *The Washington Post*, 11 February 2007, B7.

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V. THESIS CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions section of this thesis will necessarily summarize the arguments made in the preceding chapters regarding how the three factors studied here, at three different levels of analysis, individual loyalty to community, the militias that formed as a result of this, and communal loyalties within the central government, all converge to affect the Iraqi government's ability to consolidate control over their territory. Following conclusions on the ideas already put forth in the thesis, this section will examine how these conclusions impact the United States' efforts at reconciliation and stability in Iraq, with some thoughts on the current "surge" strategy and its effects on the militias and Iraqi politics, an alternative strategy the U.S. could pursue, and lastly views on U.S. grand strategy regarding democratization as a means of combating terrorism.

In sum, three main factors all contribute to the Iraqi central government's inability to consolidate control of their territory. First, Iraq's citizens for the time being are much more loyal to their community than to the central government in Baghdad because the communities filled the gap in government services after the coalition toppled Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, and have maintained that loyalty ever since because the government still cannot provide services, while various societal organization, such as the Sadr Bureau, continue to do so. These communal loyalties also contributed to the zero-sum thinking of societal leaders, as Rothchild discusses in his work on ethnic conflict in Africa, which has also come to fruition in Iraq, resulting in the struggle for power and the timeless question: who has the right to rule? Unfortunately, the downward cycle of societal violence that I witnessed in Baghdad in 2005 but spiked to epic proportions after the Golden Mosque bombing in February 2006 hardened people's loyalty to their respective communities because they both further identified with their community and depended on it for protection, which the central government can still not provide. LTC Jeff Peterson, a battalion commander in Baghdad, opined that reconciliation of communal differences in the short term was highly unlikely due to the entrenched beliefs, mistrust,

and hatred, and that overcoming this is probably a “generational undertaking,”¹⁴⁹ a view that U.S. leaders may not find welcome. These communal loyalties underpin the two other factors which contribute to the Iraqi central government’s inability to consolidate control over its country.

The second major factor confronting Iraq’s central government is the numerous militias that initially sprang up to provide security for their societal constituents in the power vacuum after Saddam Hussein’s demise, and which today, by their continued presence and prominence, control large amounts of territory and are the *de facto* power in the regions they inhabit. As discussed above, these militias hinder the central government’s ability to consolidate control because they help propagate the communal violence currently underway by conducting attacks and threatening members of the opposite society. Additionally, Shi’a militias, particularly the Badr Corps and the Mahdi Militia, have infiltrated the police forces, and, to a lesser extent, the national army. This factor is significant because it further disenfranchises the Sunnis, who see these institutions as a tool of the Shi’a militias, which causes Sunnis to not only see the government as illegitimate, but to actively resist the government through the use of violence. However, both Sunni and Shi’a militias continue to enjoy their constituent’s support because of the protection they provide from the sectarian violence; therefore, the notion that the militias can simply be disbanded and sent home is simply absurd unless the Iraqi central government and the coalition can provide effective security for all of Iraq, not just Baghdad, which is not likely to occur for numerous reasons outside the scope of this study.

Lastly, the Iraqi government itself is a stumbling block for its ability to consolidate control over its territory. The Iraqi government’s make-up of Iraq’s various communities, whom often play a zero-sum game for power and influence, has adverse affects on its performance. Specifically, many actions the ruling majority Shi’a take cause the Sunnis to see the government as vengeful, such as the Shi’a governments decision to hang Saddam Hussein on the first day that Sunnis observe the Muslim holiday

¹⁴⁹ Greg Jaffe, “In Iraq, An Officer’s Response To Violence: Build A Wall,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 April 2007, 1.

Eid al-Adha, among others. The government is also slow to make concessions and compromise amongst the communities that make it up. In the face of a complex mix of an insurgency and societal civil war, the government's rampant corruption, indecisive nature due to bickering along societal lines, and the perception many Sunnis have (right or wrong) that the government is a Shi'a instrument to consolidate power all greatly hinder the central government's ability to consolidate control over its territory. At the time of this writing, Prime Minister Maliki's government is extremely weak, and it is possible that it will collapse entirely, perhaps to be replaced with a more effectual leader at its helm.

For all of these reasons, Iraq's central government has thus far been unable to consolidate control over the country; in Weberian terms, the Iraqi government does not have a monopoly of the use of force within its territory. Therefore, Iraq cannot be considered a state strictly using Weber's definition of the term. Iraq rather falls into the category that Joel Migdal and others describe as having weak central governments because the state's territory consists of diverse, strong, and often fragmented communities. If one accepts Hannes Berts' international law conclusions that "armed groups may assume the role of *de facto* government over territory under their effective control," the Iraqi government's problems may be multiplied. Although this has already happened in many areas of Iraq, such as Sadr City, the government maintains its supremacy in part because of the U.S. presence in Iraq.

Should the United States decide to withdraw some or all of its forces, it is likely that Shi'a militias and other armed groups may move into areas that are currently contested and consolidate control over them.¹⁵⁰ If this phenomenon plays out all over Iraq along sectarian lines, the central government may have little choice but to adopt federalism as a means to hold the country together, particularly if Iraq's communities try to gain international support from countries sympathetic to their respective plights. Whatever the future holds for Iraq, the ever-strengthening militias that currently operate within Iraq's territory will undoubtedly play a role.

¹⁵⁰ See Appendix 1 for a depiction of the current sectarian divisions within Baghdad. Based on my experiences in Baghdad, this is fairly accurate.

A. HYPOTHESES CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of this examination of society's impact on the Iraqi government, three hypotheses were presented to keep in mind throughout the study. First, the idea that anarchic conditions resulting after Saddam Hussein's demise caused people to revert to their communal identities for support, comfort, and security. The second hypothesis is essentially the inverse of the first: that the strong community-based identities and mutual hatred witnessed today in Iraq have always existed, but Saddam Hussein kept them repressed by his authoritarian rule, and that when his regime fell, the tensions came to the forefront, causing the anarchic conditions seen currently. The last hypothesis put forth at the beginning of this study is more straightforward—that groups who believe they have legitimate and real grievances against a government they think unwilling or unable to address their issues turn to violence and rebellion against the government and its supporters to achieve redress.

Even after this study, it is still rather difficult to point to any one of these hypotheses as the sole explanation of the current situation in Iraq because elements of all three hypotheses certainly exist in Iraq to varying degrees. However, two of the hypotheses are the most applicable to Iraq: first, the idea that anarchic conditions increase societal loyalties and identity is certainly true in Iraq, and has been a theme touched on throughout this study. Although Saddam Hussein certainly repressed certain ethnic groups, the number of inter-societal marriages, business contacts, and social contacts during Saddam Hussein's regime points to very amicable relations amongst the communities in many parts of the country, and Baghdad in particular. Following Saddam's demise, during the chaos that ensued, people looked to their communities for support because communities were the only ones capable of providing many public goods. Although a small number of people who harbored ancient societal hatreds may have played a part in fomenting the cycle of violence plaguing Iraq today, these ancient societal hatreds did not immediately cause the violence in Iraq.

The other hypothesis that has large explanatory power in this study of Iraq's communities and their impact on government is the last put forth, that groups of people will rebel and foment violence against a government they see as illegitimate because it

will not or is unable to redress their grievances. This hypothesis has also been a somewhat common theme in this study, and it certainly applies to the Sunnis in Iraq, who see themselves as marginalized and largely cut out of power and influence in Iraq's government, and therefore worry about the equitable future distribution of public goods and wealth by the government. Although it would be great to be able to point to one explanation to explain Iraq's problems, as with most things, Iraq's issues are not that simple, and require multiple explanations. The two most prevalent that apply to Iraq today are that communal identities increase greatly in anarchic and uncertain conditions, and that groups with legitimate grievances will rebel against a government that they believe will not give closure to their issues.

B. A SURGE ANALYSIS: EFFECTS OF THE SURGE ON THE MILITIAS, IRAQI POLITICS, AND THE PROSPECTS THAT THE STRATEGY WILL SUCCEED

On 10 January 2007, President Bush announced a new strategy of “surging” U.S. forces into Baghdad to try to reduce the amount of sectarian violence occurring in the capital. In his speech to the nation, President Bush stated that the U.S. would send 20,000 more troops (most of them to Baghdad) to Iraq in order to “help the Iraqis carry out their campaign to put down sectarian violence and bring security to the people of Baghdad.”¹⁵¹ President Bush went on to discuss how the strategy would work and what it's end-state was:

Our troops will have a well-defined mission: to help Iraqis clear and secure neighborhoods, to help them protect the local population, and to help ensure that the Iraqi forces left behind are capable of providing the security that Baghdad needs ... When this happens, daily life will improve, Iraqis will gain confidence in their leaders, and the government will have the breathing space it needs to make progress in other critical areas.¹⁵²

The remainder of this section will discuss the impact the surge has had on the militias in Baghdad and on politics in the capital, and lastly its prospects for success.

¹⁵¹ President George W. Bush, “President's Address to the Nation,” 10 January 2007, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-7.html>. (accessed 13 July 2007).

¹⁵² Ibid.

Following the beginning of the “surge” (this term is somewhat of a misnomer because it took until the middle of June for all of the forces to arrive) in February the militias in Baghdad for the most part reduced their visibility to avoid confrontations with U.S. forces, which resulted in a decrease in sectarian murders. However, just because the militias have temporarily suspended their murdering campaign does not mean that their influence in the areas they control has in any way been diminished. U.S. soldiers that deployed to the Ubaidi neighborhood in Eastern Baghdad to secure residents from the Mahdi Militia admit that they have been unable to meet their goals. The Mahdi Militia threatened to kill the local Iraqi the Americans hired to clean the latrines before he even began work. More significantly, the Mahdi Militia killed two women seen talking with the soldiers, obstructed their economic and infrastructure development efforts, and shut off the water supply.¹⁵³ Even though the surge has forced the militias to significantly reduce their overt operations, it has not reduced their overall influence or changed their long-term goals. One frustrated soldier currently working with the police forces in Sadr City noted that “I see a whole lot of money and a whole lot of American lives on the line...Two weeks after we leave, it's going to go back to the way it was,”¹⁵⁴ which is precisely the same sentiment I felt during my time in Sadr City in 2005.

1. The Sunni Perspective

Another development of note is the increasing Sunni alliance with U.S. forces to combat al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in the Anbar and Diyala Provinces. Although military leaders and the Bush administration tout this development as a great success in their surge strategy, it is in fact more likely an alliance of convenience—the former Sunni insurgents merely see al-Qaeda as the greatest short-term (rather than the U.S. military), which reminds one of the old adage “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.” One former insurgent who turned against AQI explained why he did so, noting that AQI “used

¹⁵³ Julian E. Barnes and Ned Parker, “U.S. Troop Buildup In Iraq Falling Short,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 11 July 2007, 1.

¹⁵⁴ Karin Brulliard, “Learning To Live With The Mahdi Army,” *The Washington Post*, 10 April 2007, 1.

religion as a ploy to get in and exploit people's passions...They started kicking people out of their houses and getting ransom from rich people. They would shoot people in front of their houses to scare the others.”¹⁵⁵

However, just because some Sunni insurgents have recently allied with U.S. forces does not mean that they now support the current Iraqi government, as some in the U.S. administration would like to believe, and point to as a sign of progress in Iraq. One Sunni insurgent leader associated with the Omar Brigades noted in July 2007 that the Shi'a political parties in the government were controlled by Iran, a country he loathed because of its history with Iraq and intolerance of Sunnis. He further noted that the problem with the United States is that it has “a relationship with the slaves: Dawa, Badr Organization, the Mahdi Army are slaves to Iran.”¹⁵⁶ The insurgent leader went on to note that when U.S. forces inevitably left Iraq, “[t]here will be a fierce civil war, a grinding civil war, because Iran will always be there...But the Sunnis are ready for such a day.”¹⁵⁷

One can conclude a few things from these developments: first, that although many Iraqi Sunnis do not support the current government, they are unwilling to standby while AQI continues to indiscriminately kill Iraqis of all communities, including other Sunnis. Second, that just because Sunni insurgents are willing to cooperate with coalition forces in the short-term does not mean they support the larger coalition policies or the Iraqi government. On the contrary, some Sunni insurgent leaders such as the one noted above seem as determined as ever to force a political acquiescence from the ruling Shi'a, even if it takes a civil war. Many Shi'a in the Iraqi government recognize this potential, which explains why they are hesitant to support the coalition forces' efforts to arm the insurgents turned allies—these forces could become militias that confront the government in the future. Sami Askari, an aide to Maliki, declared that by pursuing this strategy, the Americans had “solve[d] one problem by creating another. This is a seed for civil

¹⁵⁵ Michael R. Gordon, “G.I.’s Forge Sunni Tie In Bid To Squeeze Militants,” *The New York Times*, 6 July 2007, 1.

¹⁵⁶ Joshua Partlow, “Sunni Insurgent Leader Paints Iran As ‘Real Enemy,’” *The Washington Post*, 14 July 2007, 13.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

war.”¹⁵⁸ Lastly, it is a possibility that some Sunni groups are only allying with the U.S. because they realize that the United States’ forces will not be in Iraq much longer, and therefore are endeavoring to garner as much military strength as possible for a possible confrontation with the Shi’a, or against rival Sunni tribes. Thus, the fact that the U.S. administration trumpets this development as a huge success in their overall strategy is either short-sighted or dishonest.

The most important overall conclusion that follows from the evidence available is that leaving Iraq precipitously will most likely not allow al-Qaeda to establish a base of operations there (despite the Bush administration’s frequent assertions to the contrary)—most Sunnis in Iraq will likely prevent this from happening; if they don’t, then the Shi’a militias surely will. In any case, an increase in the level of communal violence is sure to occur, likely as a result of the Shi’a militias that have mostly ridden out the “surge” so far and whose strength has not diminished, and the Sunni insurgent groups, some of which are gaining strength through their alliance with the U.S.

2. Probability of Success with the “Surge”

Paul F. Diehl analyzed the use of armed forces in limiting armed conflict (LAC) and bringing about conflict resolution (CR) in *International Peacekeeping*, in which Diehl studies various U.N. peacekeeping missions, and establishes criteria for success in both LAC and CR. Diehl has many criteria he thinks helpful in order to limit armed conflict, but he only deems four as essential: consent of the actors, neutrality, geographic deployment, and interference of third parties. When the Baghdad security plan is analyzed using Diehl’s criteria for the successful limitation of armed conflict, the plan does not have much going for it, although it is undoubtedly better than previous U.S. efforts to squash the violence. First, the coalition forces do not have the consent of all the actors, whom are not necessarily ready to stop fighting.

Second, and more importantly in this situation, the coalition forces are not perceived by all Iraqis as being neutral in the fight. This criterion is not as applicable to U.S. forces, which will not stay in Iraq forever, but it is absolutely essential for the Iraqi

¹⁵⁸ Alexandra Zavis, “U.S.-Tribal Alliances Draw Iraqi Ire,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 29 July 2007.

Forces to be seen as a neutral, legitimate entity of the state. The Iraqi Forces do not meet this requirement because they have been heavily infiltrated by the Shi`a militias—the police more so than the army, but due to this and their societal persuasions all Iraqi citizens, and the Sunnis in particular, do not see the Iraqi Forces as a legitimate, neutral force.

Third, the physical and social geography of Baghdad makes trying to limit armed conflict extremely difficult. Baghdad's urban terrain is not conducive to observing weapons trafficking or insurgent movements because the insurgents blend in with the population and it is nearly impossible to control all vehicular or foot traffic in the city. Additionally, the belligerents in the conflict live close to one another, often even in the same neighborhood. As Diehl rightly points out, it is difficult to position troops between the antagonists in this type of situation. On top of this, the U.S. plan is limited to Baghdad, and involves fewer troops to secure the rest of the country, which has resulted in much of the violence shifting from Baghdad to more outlying areas. The factor that has crippled the U.S. strategy since the invasion in 2003 remains: there are not enough troops in Iraq to secure the entire country.

Fourth, the Baghdad security plan is not occurring in a vacuum—Iraq's neighbor's, particularly Iran and Syria, are pursuing their own strategic aims in the region. Administration officials frequently cite Iran for providing arms, training, and funding to Shi`a militias, such as the Mahdi Militia. Syria is accused of providing or allowing their citizens to provide the same things to Sunni insurgent groups. Saudi Arabia and Egypt also have little incentive to support the Shi`a government in Baghdad, as they see the Iraqi government as an extension of Iranian influence in the region, which they perceive to threaten their national security by upsetting the balance of power in the region, which Saddam Hussein had long stabilized. This interference by Iraq's neighbors in its internal problems not only makes it more difficult for the coalition troops to limit armed conflict in Baghdad, but makes a political solution within the Iraqi government equally thorny.

Despite all of these difficulties and obstacles to success, the new plan to limit armed conflict in Baghdad in order to give the new Iraqi government the political space

to reconcile its differences is not necessarily impossible, although the odds are long at this late stage. Since the coalition formally commenced the security plan on 14 February 2007, as of 26 February Iraqi police have only discovered 164 bodies, versus 390 for the same period in January; Iraqi army Brig. Gen. Qassim Moussawi proclaimed two days into the operation that only 10 bodies were in the Baghdad morgue, down from 40-50 per day before the security plan's implementation.¹⁵⁹ One Sunni resident commented that the "intensive security measures have forced the gunmen to leave Baghdad and quit throwing bodies in the streets."¹⁶⁰ However, LTG Odierno cautioned against sounding too optimistic, saying that he was "not willing to draw any conclusions yet, because it's only [been] three weeks."¹⁶¹ Despite the relative downturn in sectarian executions since the security plan began, the same Sunni resident forebodingly said that "I am afraid that this phenomenon will appear again if the security measures end."¹⁶²

This comment strikes at three very salient subjects: first, political will, for even if the new security plan for Baghdad overcomes the many obstacles in its path and succeeds, the U.S. will significantly draw down its forces in Iraq at some point due to strong domestic political currents in the U.S. The second is more practical in nature: the U.S. Army and Marine Corps are increasingly under strain, and cannot continue the current operational tempo indefinitely. These first two variables to the current Iraq strategy are very significant, and will probably force a U.S. drawdown by the summer of 2008 (at the latest). The last subject this comment hints at is the enemy's will to continue the fighting; most of the belligerents have simply left Baghdad to patiently wait the surge out.

Even if U.S. forces manage to substantially slow down the sectarian violence in the near term, in the long-term such an effort will make little difference because Iraq's politicians, the ones who must bring real stability to the country, see Iraq's politics as zero-sum through a societal lens, which does not bode well for their reconciliation

¹⁵⁹ The Associated Press, "Postsurge Slay Count Way Down," *The New York Post*, 28 February 2007.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid. Indeed, sectarian murders began to climb again in May 2007.

anytime soon. Indeed, the August 2007 National Intelligence Estimate, the first such analysis to assess the “surge,” notes that although:

[t]here have been measurable but uneven improvements in Iraq’s security situation ... the level of overall violence, including attacks on and casualties among civilians, remains high; Iraq’s sectarian groups remain unreconciled; AQI retains the ability to conduct high-profile attacks; and to date, Iraqi political leaders remain unable to govern effectively.¹⁶³

The report goes on to predict that “broadly accepted political compromises required for sustained security, long-term political progress, and economic development are unlikely to emerge unless there is a fundamental shift in the factors driving Iraqi political and security developments.”¹⁶⁴

Even if the U.S. succeeds in further limiting conflict, it is quite likely that fighting will resume once U.S. forces withdraw; whether the U.S. leaves in three weeks or three years, the result will probably be the same. Iraq’s politicians will most likely not negotiate with each other until they have a reason to, which in this case will probably not be until one side or the other has a marked military advantage, and can force a negotiation from a position of power, which will require more fighting by both sides, and unfortunately more suffering by Iraq’s innocent civilians.

C. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? U.S. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

All of these conclusions obviously beg the question of what U.S. policy should be in Iraq given that societal identities and loyalties are stronger than ever, militias along societal lines are gaining increasing strength and influence, and the central government is essentially weak and ineffective, particularly in its capacity to stop the violence raging in Iraq. I for one honestly thought when I arrived in Iraq in February 2005 that I would be out of Baghdad and living in a desert encampment by the end of the year. For whatever reason, U.S. forces remained in Iraq’s major cities after the successful election in December 2005; if one were looking for a quick exit strategy that was likely it.

¹⁶³ National Intelligence Council, “Prospects For Iraq’s Stability: Some Security Progress but Political Reconciliation Elusive,” August 2007, 1.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

Given all of the factors listed above, I believe it is in the United States' best interest to withdraw from Iraq's urban areas to large bases in the desert, isolated from the populace, yet still within striking range to conduct attacks on al-Qaeda targets or other significant threats to U.S. interests. If thought necessary, the U.S. could leave behind black operations forces to collect intelligence on terrorist cells, which are really the only short-term threats to U.S. security in Iraq. Most importantly, U.S. forces would conduct two essential missions from these bases. First, they would *contain* any civil strife resulting from our withdraw to Iraq, and not let it spill over into neighboring countries, which could cause destabilization, as, for example, happened to Rwanda's neighbors after the hostilities in that country. A part of this strategy is that U.S. forces would have to set up refugee camps so that the flow of people fleeing Iraq's violence would not spill over into neighboring countries. Second, U.S. forces would attempt to *isolate* Iraq from the detrimental outside influence of its neighbors, such as Iran, Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia by patrolling Iraq's borders.

This strategy is advantageous for many reasons. First, it allows the United States to continue to have significant presence in Iraq, even though the U.S. will lose most of its oversight on day-to-day security operations within the population centers. Second, this strategy will result in a tremendous decrease in U.S. casualties, which are obviously the main impetus for the United States' domestic erosion of political will to remain in Iraq. Attacks on these bases would be unlikely because they would be positioned far away from the populations, in which the insurgents hide. Additionally, any personnel or vehicles approaching the bases would be easily seen at great distances, making a surprise attack highly unlikely. Because of the remote locations, collateral damage would not be a hindrance for U.S. forces in the event they had to respond to an attack; conducting counter-battery fire if mortared would be possible because the insurgents would have no civilians to hide behind in the open desert. These bases would also have to have their own landing strips so that supplies could be flown in, so that the bases are not dependant on long, unguarded supply routes that originate in Kuwait and are susceptible to attack. Although some casualties would be inevitable because patrols would still be conducted along parts of the border, they would drastically less than the numbers the U.S.

experiences today. In sum, these bases would result in decreased casualties, which results in an increased acceptance at home for continued U.S. presence in Iraq.

Third, U.S. forces could continue to train the Iraqi Security Forces *from these bases* if the United States wishes to do so. This study does not recommend that the U.S. actually embedding advisory forces with Iraqi units, because doing so carries extreme operational risks, as these small forces would be far from any reinforcements. The casualty rate that these soldiers would likely suffer would not ease the American public's distaste for the current conflict, possibly undermining the broader strategy outlined here. Furthermore, as this study discussed, to whom are the Iraqi Army soldiers and policemen really loyal? Although many Iraqi soldiers and policemen are fighting to create a stable Iraq, many more are more loyal to their militia or community, as explained in Chapter III, and giving them further training and more weapons is not necessarily desirable. Additionally, most Iraqi security forces are competent enough at the lower tactical levels,¹⁶⁵ and more tactical level training by U.S. troops will not produce additional results commensurate with the risks involved. In order for the Iraqi Security Forces to become effective, they must decide where their loyalties lie; their effectiveness has little to do with American soldiers acting in an advisory role.

Fourth, by leaving the cities and therefore the Iraqi's everyday lives, a very source of resistance to the Iraqi government and a target of the insurgency, the U.S. military occupation, would be greatly diminished.¹⁶⁶ Fifth, the U.S. Army and Marines could reconstitute their forces at these bases, and husband their resources to act as a bulwark to the greater threat to stability in the region: Iran. A revitalized ground force in Iraq would allow the United States to negotiate with Iran from a position of strength, rather than the weakness which Iran now perceives. It should be noted, however, that the strategy recommended here is not a long-term strategy, but is an interim one. Following whatever happens in Iraq after U.S. forces are withdrawn from the cities, and they have completed

¹⁶⁵ Such as the Iraqi Army soldiers that the author observed.

¹⁶⁶ This tactic would probably work quite well in the short term, for perhaps a number of years, but may not be tenable as a long-term strategy if Iraqis of all communities set aside their differences and demanded the removal of all U.S. forces from the country.

their primary mission of containing the violence to Iraq, U.S. forces should be repositioned outside the country, most likely in Kuwait, where they could still act as a bulwark against Iran.

At the same time, the U.S. must pressure the central Iraqi government to pursue a plan for federalism, because at this point their options are quite limited. The conclusion this study has reached is that a unified, strong central Iraqi government is a pipe-dream at this late stage due to communal differences. Another unpalatable solution is for another strong-man or dictator to take control of Iraq; this person would likely be a Shi'a, the decision would probably result in massive bloodshed, and would be a cruel irony after all of the U.S. efforts in Iraq. Detractors of this option claim that there are too many mixed neighborhoods in Iraq, particularly in Baghdad, for this plan to work. Unfortunately, this becomes less of a constraint every day; the U.N. reported that at the end of 2006, across Iraq 470,094 people had been forcibly displaced since the Samarra bombing in February, 38,766 of them Baghdad residents.¹⁶⁷ These statistics are only the officially known numbers, and additionally only include the forcibly displaced persons, not the people that moved voluntarily due to societal pressures. A decentralized, federal Iraq offers the only real short-term political solution to its problems; in the long-term, after generational healing has occurred, a unified Iraq may be possible again.

Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack recently echoed these sentiments in a comprehensive study they conducted on possible solutions to the Iraq situation. Their underlying assumption is that the current U.S. policy is not working, and that U.S. efforts to forestall a civil war are likely to fail. Byman and Pollack first declared what is obvious to most pragmatists who study the Iraq situation: that the U.S. cannot just

walk away from the chaos. Even setting aside the humanitarian nightmare that will ensue, a full-scale civil war would likely consume more than Iraq; historically, such massive conflicts have often had highly deleterious effects on neighboring countries and other outside states. Spillover from

¹⁶⁷ UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, "Human Rights Report: 1 November—31 December 2006," 3.

an Iraq civil war could be disastrous. America has too many strategic interests at stake in the Middle East to ignore the consequences.¹⁶⁸

Byman and Pollack briefly describe the effects an Iraqi civil war could have on its neighbors, stating that “Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran are all major oil producers experiencing political and economic troubles. Jordan is equally fragile and in a critical location. We [the U.S.] may not like the Syrian regime, but it too is in delicate circumstances and its collapse might not serve our interests either.”¹⁶⁹ Turmoil in Iraq’s neighbors, three of which provide a substantial amount of the world’s oil, would obviously have a significant impact not only on the oil supply, but on the world economy as a result of an oil price shock.

After laying out this conclusion that is clear to most observers, Byman and Pollack then transition to why the U.S. should pursue a policy of containment of an Iraqi civil war, which is similar to the recommendations I laid out above, although less detailed at the operational level.

D. CONCLUSIONS ON DEMOCRATIZATION AS A U.S. GRAND STRATEGY

Regarding the U.S. experiment with exporting democracy, at this point the direct efforts of the most powerful democracy in the world have failed to bring democracy to Iraq. What this means for future U.S. foreign policy decisions regarding democratization is open to debate. One would hope that democratization does not get a bad name from the U.S. experiences in Iraq, but rather that the United States would reevaluate the methods used and the mistakes made before embarking on another such effort. In their reevaluation, U.S. policy makers would do well to carefully heed the advice of Phillippe Schmitter, who observed that:

[d]emocracies generate particularly close linkages between groups in civil society and agencies of the state. However, this threatens the operational autonomy of all public institutions and subverts their putative defence of

¹⁶⁸ Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, “Things Fall Apart: Containing The Spillover From An Iraqi Civil War,” The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, January 2007, XIII.

¹⁶⁹ Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, “Things Fall Apart: Containing The Spillover From An Iraqi Civil War,” The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, January 2007, 3.

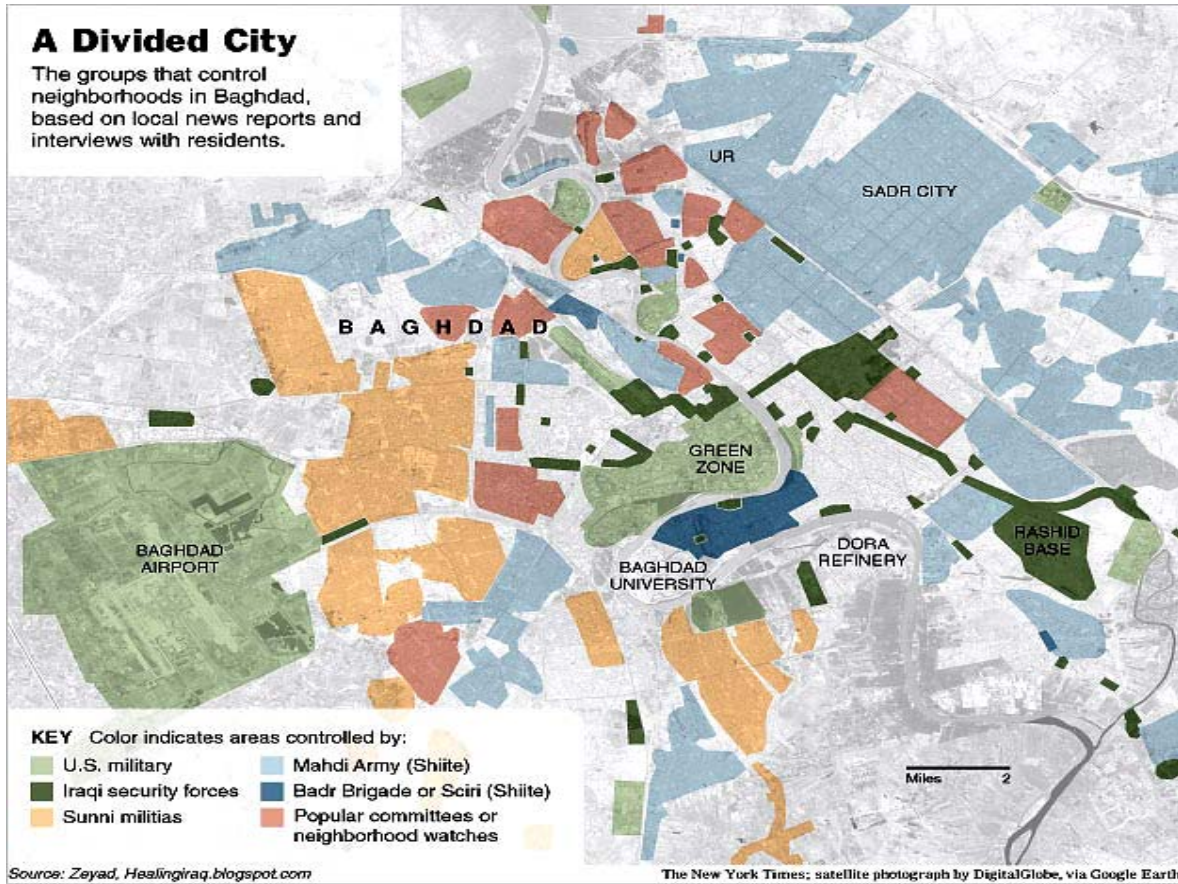
the general or common interest ... Democracies encourage the open expression of conflicts of interest within the ruling group. This destroys members' capacity for unified action and, hence, their action as competent governors.¹⁷⁰

Had U.S. policy makers studied this and truly understood the communal dynamics that make up Iraq, they may have more carefully thought through the methods used to bring democracy to Iraq, if they chose to do so at all. Schmitter additionally states that a government's "legitimation will depend upon perceptions of the effectiveness, efficiency and fairness of political institutions in relation to specific 'authoritative allocations.'"¹⁷¹ At the current time, it is apparent that the link between society and political institutions is quite strong in Iraq, that there are fissures within the ruling Shi'as as well as with the other groups in the Iraqi government, and therefore the current government has difficulty making the decisive decisions necessary to consolidate control over the country. It is also evident that societal interests and militias control many of the Iraqi government's institutions, which the people now perceive as ineffective, unfair, and inefficient, making the government illegitimate. All of these factors lead to an Iraqi government that is ineffective at the current time, with few prospects for improvement.

¹⁷⁰ Philippe C. Schmitter, "The Consolidation of Political Democracies: Processes, Rhythms, Sequences, and Types," in Geoffrey Pridham, ed., *Transitions to Democracy*, (Dartmouth: Aldershot, 1995), 546.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 547.

APPENDIX 1: SECTARIAN MAP OF BAGHDAD



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APPENDIX 2

Table 1. Election Results (January and December)

Slate/Party	Seats (Jan. 05)	Seats (Dec. 05)
UIA (Shiite Islamist); Sadr formally joined list for Dec. vote (SCIRI~30; Da'wa~28; Sadr~30; Fadila (Virtue)~15; others 25)	140	128
Kurdistan Alliance (PUK and KDP)	75	53
Iraqis List (secular, Allawi); added some mostly Sunni parties for Dec. vote	40	25
Iraq Concord Front (Sunni). Main Sunni bloc; not in Jan. vote	—	44
Dialogue National Iraqi Front (Sunni, Saleh al-Mutlak) Not in Jan. vote	—	11
Iraqi National Congress (Chalabi). Was part of UIA list in Jan. 05 vote	—	0
Iraqis Party (Yawar, Sunni); Part of Allawi list in Dec. vote	5	—
Iraqi Turkomen Front (Turkomen, Kirkuk-based, pro-Turkey)	3	1
National Independent and Elites (Jan)/Risalyun (Mission, Dec) pro-Sadr	3	2
People's Union (Communist, non-sectarian); on Allawi list in Dec. vote	2	—
Kurdistan Islamic Group (Islamist Kurd)	2	5
Islamic Action (Shiite Islamist, Karbala)	2	0
National Democratic Alliance (non-sectarian, secular)	1	—
Rafidain National List (Assyrian Christian)	1	1
Liberation and Reconciliation Gathering (Sunni, secular)	1	3
Ummah (Nation) Party. (Secular, Mithal al-Alusi, former INC activist)	0	1
Yazidi list (small Kurdish, heterodox religious minority in northern Iraq)	—	1

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Number of polling places: January: 5,200; December: 6,200.

Eligible voters: 14 million in January election; 15 million in October referendum and December.

Turnout: January: 58% (8.5 million votes)/ October: 66% (10 million)/ December: 75% (12 million).

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