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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.**

**THE SURGE - - MEASURING ITS EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH OPERATIONAL ART**

by

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

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## **Abstract**

### *The Surge - - Measuring its Effectiveness through Operational Art*

The current situation in Iraq presents an extremely “wicked” problem, and the ongoing multi-dimensional insurgency and profound ethno-sectarian divisions do not allow for a simple solution. The current phase of military operations in Iraq, commonly referred to as the Surge, provides an excellent case study for examining the application of Operational Art in a COIN strategy. This paper will examine the Surge using the Operational Factors of Time, Space, and Force as a framework to evaluate where current operational strategy has worked in achieving operational objectives and where success may remain more illusory in terms of achieving the desired strategic end state as a result of other conditions on the ground.

## INTRODUCTION

Counter-insurgency (COIN) operations present an ongoing challenge to U.S. operational commanders in terms of planning, strategy, and execution. The current phase of military operations in Iraq, commonly referred to as the Surge, provides an excellent case study for examining the application of Operational Art in a COIN strategy. The situation in Iraq, with no single group of insurgents and profound ethno-sectarian divides, is clearly a wicked problem which requires a unique approach. This paper will examine the Surge using the Operational Factors of Time, Space, and Force as a framework to evaluate where current operational strategy has worked in achieving operational objectives and where success may remain more illusory in terms of achieving the desired strategic end state as a result of other conditions on the ground.

General David Petraeus, the architect of the Surge and operational commander in Iraq, was a leading contributor in the joint U.S. Army and Marine Corps effort to develop updated COIN doctrine for use in Iraq, Afghanistan, and future military operations. Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, was published in December 2006 and superseded existing doctrine which was over twenty years old. The doctrine in FM 3-24 is based on recent experiences in Iraq in part, but also historical lessons learned and other previous analysis by experts like the French Army officer David Galula. The strategy of the Surge clearly incorporates the concepts of Operational Art, considerable COIN experience, and thorough understanding of the principles laid out in FM 3-24.

The Surge has been widely lauded as a success, providing increased stability and resulting in lower levels of violence. While there is no debate that Iraq has seen important security gains in the latter part of 2007 and thus far in 2008, the linkage between the

operational success of the Surge and the broader Iraq strategy is not entirely clear. The decline in violence can be also appropriately linked to a series of other factors beyond increased U.S. troop presence or changed strategy to include the rise of the Awakening Councils or Concerned Local Citizens' groups, Muqtada al-Sadr's ceasefire, and Iran's apparent limit to Qods Force operations. It remains unclear whether the current security and stability improvements are sustainable in the long term or will translate into substantial political, economic, and diplomatic gains. To date, the strategic goal of creating a unified, democratic Iraq that can govern, defend, and sustain itself and is an ally in the war on terror remains largely unfulfilled. The Surge is ongoing and ultimately only time will determine its success or failure, so this paper is inherently a starting point in this discussion.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Coalition forces have been in Iraq under a UNSC mandate since 2003, to provide security and to support the freely elected government. Full governmental authority was transferred to an Iraqi Interim Government on 28 June 2004, an Iraqi Transitional Government assumed office in 2005, and national elections were held for a 275-member Council of Representatives on 15 December 2005. By May 2006, the first constitutional government in nearly half a century took office.<sup>1</sup> Yet despite these advances, an insurgency was well underway by the summer of 2003 and the fledgling government remains weak. By 2007, Iraq was ranked number two on the world's list of failed states according to The Fund for Peace and *FOREIGN POLICY* in the third annual Failed States Index. This indicates Iraq

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<sup>1</sup> CIA, *The 2008 World Fact Book*, Iraq Page, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html#Govt>.

is at the top of the charts in terms of vulnerability to violent internal conflict and societal deterioration, according to an analysis of social, economic, political, and military indicators.<sup>2</sup>

Iraq's experience with democracy is limited and it has largely been governed by a series of authoritarian strongmen since its independence. In January 2003, the National Intelligence Council issued a thirty-eight-page classified report entitled, *Principal Challenges in Post-Saddam Iraq*. Unclassified excerpts from that document emphasized this reality.

“The building of an Iraqi democracy would be a long, difficult, and probably turbulent process, with potential for backsliding into Iraq's tradition of authoritarianism. Iraqi political culture does not foster liberalism or democracy. Iraq lacks the experience of a loyal opposition and effective institutions for mass political participation. Saddam's brutal methods have made a generation of Iraqis distrustful of surrendering or sharing power.”<sup>3</sup>

Prior to World War One, Iraq was part of the Ottoman Empire and divided along largely sectarian fault lines into the three provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basrah. It was unified as a single country under British mandate in 1920, and then gained independence in 1932. The British installed a Sunni monarchy which lasted in various forms until 1958. A military coup in 1958 marked the establishment of an Iraqi republic, still under Sunni control. The Sunni-dominated Ba'ath Party came to power under another coup in 1968 and Saddam Hussein ascended to power over the next ten years.<sup>4</sup>

This historical context for Iraqi politics in the twentieth century -- with only nominal popular representation, totalitarianism, and dominance by a Sunni minority -- impacts the current situation and cannot be overlooked. Detailed analysis of the history of a particular

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<sup>2</sup> "The Failed States Index 2007", *Fund for Peace and Foreign Policy magazine*, July/August 2007, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=3865](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3865).

<sup>3</sup> "A Long, Difficult and Probably Turbulent Process", *NY Times*, 20 October 2004, [http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/20/international/20wbar.html?\\_r=1&oref=login&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/20/international/20wbar.html?_r=1&oref=login&oref=slogin).

<sup>4</sup> CountryWatch Website, Iraq Page, [http://www.countrywatch.com/cw\\_topic.aspx?type=text&vcountry=81&topic=POHIS](http://www.countrywatch.com/cw_topic.aspx?type=text&vcountry=81&topic=POHIS).

region must be factored into the planning process for any military operation. In Iraq's case, the lack of effective institutions and democratic experience were extremely significant.

### **WHAT IS THE SURGE?**

The Surge was announced in January 2007 and involved sending roughly an additional 30,000 U.S. troops, five additional Army Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) and two Marine Battalions, to Iraq over the course of several months. The increase in BCTs brought the total from fifteen to twenty by June 2007, and the bulk of those additional troops were sent to the Baghdad area. The two Marine Battalions or approximately 4,000 troops were designated for Anbar Province. There was also a corollary increase in Iraqi Security Forces, with three additional Iraqi Army Brigades deployed to Baghdad to operate with existing army forces and police.<sup>5</sup> But the Surge was not just an increase in troops. It was also a shift in strategy by the General Petraeus, Commander of Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I), who drew from his past experiences in Iraq and experience in counterinsurgency theory and practice. His staff and Multi-National Corps (MNC-I) Commander, Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, designed and implemented a campaign plan which involved establishing joint U.S.-Iraqi security stations in troubled neighborhoods, continuous joint Iraqi and Coalition Force security operations, outreach programs, and reconstruction programs to restore quality of life.<sup>6</sup>

The premise was that securing the Iraqi population was the foundation for all other progress. According to President Bush in his address to the nation on the "Way Forward in Iraq" 13 Sep 2007,

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<sup>5</sup> White House, "Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials", 10 January 2007, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-1.html>.

“As terrorists are defeated, civil society takes root, and the Iraqis assume more control over their own security, our mission in Iraq will evolve. Over time, our troops will shift from leading operations, to partnering with Iraqi forces, and eventually to overwatching those forces. As this transition in our mission takes place, our troops will focus on a more limited set of tasks, including counterterrorism operations and training, equipping, and supporting Iraqi forces.”<sup>7</sup>

This strategy was developed in the wake of increased levels of violence observed in 2006 which intensified sectarian tensions, encouraged extremists, and discredited both the U.S. and Iraqi governments. Little to no progress was made on political reconciliation or economic development during that timeframe, so the basic concept for the Surge is that to overcome sectarian divides and accomplish reconciliation, Iraqis must feel secure in their neighborhoods and confident in their country’s security.

## **OPERATIONAL ART ANALYSIS**

The operational commander in Iraq must take the strategic goal - - creating a unified, democratic Iraq that can govern, defend, and sustain itself and is an ally in the war on terror - - and translate that into a series of operational objectives. As part of the Surge, MNC-I operational objectives included protecting the population, facilitating reconciliation, defeating Al Qaida in Iraq (AQI), developing the Iraqi Security Force (ISF) capability, transferring security responsibility as local security conditions permit, assisting efforts to improve civil and governmental capacity, and protecting the force.<sup>8</sup> Essentially, the operational commander focused on providing stability and security which created an environment in which the Iraqis could make political and economic gains, i.e. progress

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<sup>6</sup> Frederick W. Kagan and Kimberly Kagan, “The Patton of Counterinsurgency”, 10 March 2008, Volume 013, Issue 25. <http://www.understandingwar.org/other-work/patton-counterinsurgency>.

<sup>7</sup> George Bush, “Address by the President to the Nation on the Way Forward in Iraq”, 13 September 2007, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/09/20070913-2.html>.

towards the strategic goal. A key enabler for increased security was increased boots on the ground in key population centers, and an operational strategy focused on the population itself. The population and popular support for the central government were correctly identified as critical centers of gravity. Others include Iraqi leadership, influence of regional states, and popular support in the U.S. and among the Coalition.

To accomplish this list of campaign objectives, the operational commanders in Iraq worked to fully incorporate available military and non-military sources of power. The desired end state for Iraq remained unchanged, but under General Petraeus the operational strategy was shifted to a more traditional counterinsurgency strategy with much greater synchronization of effort across intergovernmental, host nation, and international agencies. To meet the demands of this challenging problem, operational commanders maximized their advantages in terms of Factor Force while recognizing the constraints placed on them by Factors Space and Time. Operational commanders also took full advantage of other conditions on the ground to include the already emerging Awakening Movement in the Sunni areas and then the truce declared by Muqtada al-Sadr.

Evaluation and analysis of Factor Space is critical for Iraq and its multifaceted insurgency. For the Surge, the battlespace is the population of approximately 27.5 million. The strategy correctly identified control over that arena as key to victory. “Whatever else is done, the focus must remain on gaining and maintaining the support of the population. With their support, victory is assured; without it, COIN efforts cannot succeed.”<sup>9</sup> The dynamics of Factor Space are extremely complicated in this case, with ethnic and religious divisions

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<sup>8</sup> Joe Anderson, “Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Chief of Staff 14 December 2006 - 14 February 2008.” Powerpoint, 04 March 2008, Newport, RI: Naval War College.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Army, “Counterinsurgency Field Manual (FM) 3-24” (Washington DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, 15 December 2006), p A-9.

presenting significant challenges for the country. The population is divided among several ethnic groups; Arabs comprise 75%-80%, Kurds 15%-20%, and Turkomans, Assyrians, or others the last 5%. Religious divides are perhaps more important, as the majority of the country is comprised of Shi'a Muslims at approximately 60%-65%, while the remaining population is divided between Sunni Muslims at 32%-37% and Christians or other religions at 3%.<sup>10</sup> Ethno-sectarian divisions are part of the historical social landscape in Iraq, and many ethnic boundaries have been disputed for years. The dominance of the Sunni minority in government throughout the last century, as previously discussed, is particularly significant in the political arena today as Shi'a now demand a redress of political inequities of the past. External influences from six bordering countries (Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Turkey) also play a large role allowing for the flow of money, weapons, and foreign fighters into Iraq.

Recognizing these critical ethnic and religious divisions, the increased numbers of troops in the Surge were allocated to specific areas -- Baghdad and population centers in Anbar Province. It was clear that stabilizing the security situation in Baghdad was vital to building a unified Iraq, for both practical and symbolic reasons. In January 2007, it was estimated that 80% of the sectarian violence in Iraq occurred within a 30-mile radius of Baghdad.<sup>11</sup> In Anbar Province, the problem was very different and sectarian violence was not the primary issue. Anbar was the heart of the AQI insurgency and its principal base of operations, so the other logical focus area. Sustained presence in these areas required increased numbers of troops to maintain. The troops patrol among the population in

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<sup>10</sup> CIA, The 2008 World Fact Book, Iraq Page, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html#Govt>.

<sup>11</sup> White House, "Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials", 10 January 2007, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070110-1.html>.

partnership with Iraqi counterparts to secure the population, drive out insurgents, and build confidence in Iraqi institutions. While an obvious increased risk to force was involved in this strategy, that cost was deemed necessary to achieve operational objectives. Another aspect to this strategy has been to separate Shi'a and Sunni residents of major population centers, to reduce sectarian violence.

Factor Time is also significant for the Surge, largely because operational commanders recognize it is very limited. Time is never on the side of the counterinsurgent and the U.S. public has little patience for a long conflict and is impatient for quick results. On the other hand, the insurgent has time on their side. An insurgency is defined by David Galula as, "a protracted struggle conducted methodically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order."<sup>12</sup> Violent extremists in Iraq recognize this reality, and their strategy is largely based on the concept of breaking the will of the Iraqi people and Coalition forces. By early 2007, limited political and economic gains were threatened by the spiking violence and sectarianism. Time was short and positive results on the ground were required in short order.

It took five months to build up the Surge forces on the ground, from February to June of 2007. General Petraeus and his staff used that time to devise their operational plan, pressure the Iraqi leadership to take action, and coordinate with the U.S. mission in Iraq. In terms of Factor Time, the greatest advantage of the Surge was the ability to conduct military operations in a sustained and large-scale fashion. Three large-scale operations were conducted in 2007, successively. The first was Operation Fardh al-Qanoon or the Baghdad Security Plan, which began in February when the first additional troops arrived in Iraq. The

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<sup>12</sup> David Galula, "Counterinsurgency Warfare Theory and Practice" Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006, p 2.

second was Operation Phantom Thunder, which was conducted from June to July focusing on clearing AQI from its major sanctuaries. The third was Operation Phantom Strike, which began in August, and focused on pursuing AQI operatives fleeing their historic sanctuaries and attempting to regroup following Phantom Thunder.<sup>13</sup>

Factor Force in this strategy was multi-faceted. To meet Surge objectives, the increased troop strength, both U.S. and Iraqi, afforded the operational commander in Iraq with more options and the ability to conduct simultaneous large-scale operations. Elements of the five Surge BCTs were deployed in each of the districts of Baghdad to operate in conjunction with the Iraqi Security Forces, army and police. The Iraqi forces operate in partnership with their U.S. counterparts. The increased numbers of troops do not precisely represent classic COIN doctrine in terms of ratio of counterinsurgent to insurgent, but are a step in that direction. In Anbar Province specifically, operational commanders took advantage of the tribal Awakening Movement which began in 2006 among the Sunni tribes of that area to have locals provide security for their communities. U.S. Marines in Anbar encouraged this movement and worked with traditional tribal leaders or sheiks to organize their opposition to AQI. The Awakening Movement, now called, “Sons of Iraq”, works with Coalition and Iraqi security forces to improve security and protect critical infrastructure in their neighborhoods. As of February 2008, there were an estimated 91,000 Iraqis who belonged to the “Sons of Iraq”<sup>14</sup>

On the other side of the equation, there was no single monolithic insurgency or enemy force. There are several distinct players for the operational commander to address,

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<sup>13</sup> Frederick W. Kagan and Kimberly Kagan, “The Patton of Counterinsurgency”, 10 March 2008, Volume 013, Issue 25. <http://www.understandingwar.org/other-work/patton-counterinsurgency>.

and the same approach will not work for all. According to MNC-I, there are four main threat categories or groups in Iraq which include Sunni extremists largely under the AQI umbrella, Sunni rejectionists, Shi'a extremists, and Shi'a militia or Jaysh al Mahdi (JAM).<sup>15</sup> Among these groups, there are numerous competing motivations for promoting continued violence and instability. The enemy, spread across ethnic and sectarian lines, is essentially in competition for power and resources. The only real commonalities are their opposition to Coalition presence in Iraq and lack of support for the central Iraqi government.

### **HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS?**

Determining the effectiveness of operations involves a mix of both subjective and objective measures. Foremost in nearly all reporting has been the reduction in levels of violence throughout Iraq. Deaths from ethno-sectarian violence are down nearly 90% since June 2007. Total civilian deaths and Coalition deaths have been reduced by over 70% since the start of the Surge. In Anbar Province specifically, security incidents have decreased by almost 90% since January 2007.<sup>16</sup> While these numbers are impressive and indicative of the overall improved security atmosphere, measurements of deaths and/or violent incidents must be considered in context due to the competing dynamics previously discussed. The operational commander was focused on providing stability and security in Iraq in order to create an environment in which the Iraqis could make political and economic gains. So, to measure success of the Surge, it is logical to turn to political and economic measures to evaluate progress.

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<sup>14</sup> "Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq, Report to Congress In accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2008 (Section 9010, Public Law 109-289)", March 2008, [http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq\\_Reports/index.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/home/features/Iraq_Reports/index.html), p 1.

<sup>15</sup> Joe Anderson, "Multi-National Corps-Iraq, Chief of Staff 14 December 2006 - 14 February 2008." Powerpoint, 04 March 2008, Newport, RI: Naval War College.

In terms of political development, there has been some progress. Several key laws have been approved which mark significant progress for the Iraqi central government. This includes a Pensions Amendment which was passed in December 2007, a De-Ba'athification or Accountability and Justice Law which was approved in February 2008, an Amnesty Law which was approved and implemented by March 2008, and a Provincial Powers Law which was also approved in March 2008.<sup>17</sup> The successful process of passing this legislation demonstrates a functioning national government with the ability to compromise and build consensus. Key other legislation remains stalled, to include a law governing provincial elections and a Hydrocarbons Package Law. The Hydrocarbon Package is particularly important, and is designed to establish a legal framework for developing Iraq's resources and sharing the associated revenue.<sup>18</sup>

Iraq's economy is definitely showing signs of progress, and is projected to grow 7% in 2008. Core inflation in 2007 was at 12.28% which is down from 31.92% in 2006. Budget execution improved in 2007, but is still lacking. National and provincial governments doubled the rate at which they executed their capital budgets in 2007 as compared to 2006, but that was only approximately 55% of the 2007 budget by the end of November 2007.<sup>19</sup> To start this year, the Iraqi central government was successful in passing a budget for 2008. The issue of displaced Iraqi citizens remains problematic and indicative of the need for continued progress. According to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) Working Group in March 2008, "It is estimated that over 2.77 million people are currently displaced inside Iraq as of 20 March 2008. Of these, 1.2 million were displaced before 2006 and more than 1.5

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<sup>16</sup> Measuring Stability, March 2008, p iii-iv.

<sup>17</sup> Measuring Stability, March 2008, p 1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p 2-4.

<sup>19</sup> Measuring Stability, March 2008, p 9-10.

million were displaced in 2006 and early 2007.”<sup>20</sup> Despite decreased violence, slowing displacement rates, and limited returns in 2007, IDPs remain a serious and ongoing humanitarian issue in Iraq. Another two million Iraqis are refugees, with the majority living in Jordan and Syria.<sup>21</sup>

Training and effectiveness of Iraq’s own security forces is another measure of progress. Iraqi security forces are gradually assuming security responsibilities for each of the provinces, and their capabilities are improving. As of March 2008, nine of eighteen provinces have transitioned to provincial Iraqi control.<sup>22</sup> Two more, to include the once restive Anbar, are scheduled to transition by the July 2008.<sup>23</sup> Currently, 77% of all formed Iraqi Army units are assessed as being able to plan, execute, and sustain operations with minimal to no assistance from Coalition forces. The National Police is making progress, but is significantly behind the Army with only approximately 25% of its operational battalions assessed as capable of planning, executing, and sustaining operations with Coalition assistance.<sup>24</sup> Without this crucial ingredient, all security gains made by the U.S. and Coalition will fail to have any lasting effect.

A much more subjective measurement of success is evaluating public perception. In January 2008, national polls in Iraq indicated that a majority believe security is better in their neighborhood and that they feel safe in their neighborhood. However, only 26% would describe the country as calm and not violent. This is up from only 8% in September 2007.

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<sup>20</sup> International Displacement Monitoring Center, Iraq Page, [http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/\(httpEnvelopes\)/B6C0B024031DFA0F802570B8005A74D6?OpenDocument](http://www.internal-displacement.org/idmc/website/countries.nsf/(httpEnvelopes)/B6C0B024031DFA0F802570B8005A74D6?OpenDocument).

<sup>21</sup> IDP Working Group, “Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq – Update (24 March 2008)”, [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2008.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/SHIG-7D6DBL-full\\_report.pdf/\\$File/full\\_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2008.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/SHIG-7D6DBL-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Measuring Stability, March 2008, p 29.

<sup>23</sup> David Petraeus, “Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq General David H. Petraeus Commander, Multi-National Force–Iraq 8-9 April 2008” <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/pet040908.pdf>.

In terms of confidence in Iraqi security forces, 77% had confidence in the Iraqi Army which is a 10% increase since September 2007.<sup>25</sup>

### **FURTHER ANALYSIS**

Initial analysis of measures of effectiveness as previously discussed definitely shows progress, but the sustainability of that progress is still to be determined. In order to translate recent security and stability gains into long term political, economic, and diplomatic gains, they must be sustained over the next several years. Measuring in terms of days and months is simply flawed and inadequate.

Complicating this discussion is the existence of other factors which also resulted in a decline in violence in Iraq. The growth of Concerned Local Citizens' groups since 2006 and the ceasefire by Sadr since August 2007 contributed considerably to reduced violence in Iraq. The impact of Sadr's order to his militia, JAM, to suspend all attacks was extremely significant in Baghdad. The majority of JAM elements in Baghdad complied with his order which allowed Coalition and Iraqi forces to focus their efforts on AQI and other Shi'a extremists. The rapid upswing in violence observed in Baghdad following an attempted Iraqi government crackdown in Basrah on 25 March is clear evidence of the threat posed by Sadr's JAM militia, and the fragile nature of the current security gains. Other significant factors relate to transnational issues, to include influence of bordering countries on the situation in Iraq. Iranian President Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader Khamenei pledged in September 2007 to assist Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki in stemming insurgent support across their border, but there is no evidence of a change in policy. Iran's influence in Iraq, particularly the Shi'a dominated south, is an immense wildcard. "Estimates suggest Syria is

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<sup>24</sup> Measuring Stability, March 2008, p. 34.

the entry point for 90% of all foreign terrorists in Iraq.”<sup>26</sup> Each of these countries has the ability to significantly alter conditions on the ground in Iraq in a positive way should they desire.

Additionally, some of the effects of military operations conducted as part of the Surge may have a deleterious effect in the long term. The “Sons of Iraq” have now grown beyond Anbar, and includes 71,500 Sunni and 19,500 Shi’a in several provinces.<sup>27</sup> They have been invaluable in restoring order in Anbar, Baghdad, and other provinces. But this armed militia must be supervised, paid, and then transitioned to the Iraqi security forces or other civil employment. The Shi’a-dominated Iraqi government does not have a comprehensive plan to accomplish this, and is reluctant to absorb the Sons of Iraq wholesale since the majority are Sunni and others are former insurgents. As of February 2008, only 20,000 of the estimated 91,000 Sons of Iraq have been transitioned into Iraqi security forces or civil employment.<sup>28</sup> Building concrete barriers around key infrastructure, public markets, and neighborhoods has also been a feature of military operations in the Surge, in order to control access with manned checkpoints. While this has significantly enhanced security for the population, it has also served to divide districts and neighborhoods separating Sunni and Shi’a. For the short term, this was necessary but it may also serve to reinforce sectarian divides in the long term. While the numbers of IDPs has leveled off considerably since Oct 2007, few IDPs have returned home to date. There has also been a shift in the past two years in terms of displacement with the majority of post-2006 IDPs being displaced from the central provinces of Iraq, with much smaller numbers in the North and South. The central provinces are

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<sup>25</sup> Measuring Stability, March 2008, p 26-27.

<sup>26</sup> Measuring Stability, March 2008, p 6.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p iv

<sup>28</sup> Measuring Stability, March 2008, p iv

generally more ethnically diverse, and initial reports indicate a pattern of artificial migration or increasing ethnic homogenization of areas. Shiite refugees are moving towards majority-Shi'a areas in the South, while Sunnis are moving to Sunni-dominated areas in the west and north.<sup>29</sup>

One means of measuring success has been established by the U.S. Congress in Section 1314 of the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007 (Public Law 110-28) which identifies eighteen benchmarks to measure Iraq's progress on achieving reconciliation within its society, improving security of the Iraqi population, providing essential services to the population, and promoting economic growth (See Appendix A, p 18, for complete list). The benchmarks largely focus on government legislation and so represent only one aspect of the overall picture in terms of progress, but to date success in terms of these benchmarks has been mixed.

## **THE FUTURE**

The desired effect for military operations was to make Iraqis feel secure in their neighborhoods and confident in their country's security in order to overcome sectarian divides and accomplish national reconciliation. There is increased confidence among the Iraqi populace in their country's security and increased stability, but only nascent efforts towards political progress at this point. The success of surge operations on the military side has created an environment for Iraqis to make political compromises and move forward, but it is difficult to influence Iraqis to take advantage of that opportunity. COIN operations and

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<sup>29</sup> IDP Working Group, "Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq – Update (24 March 2008)", <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2008.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/SHIG-7D6DBL->

nation building do not happen overnight, and ultimately more time is required to fully evaluate the success of the Surge.

The linkage between the operational success of the Surge and the broader Iraq strategy will not be direct and much of the next phase is beyond the scope of the operational commander. Compromise in the Iraqi government and reconciliation across ethno-sectarian divides must come from within. The Iraqis must choose the course of national reconciliation or come to consensus on an acceptable plan for semi-autonomous regions. For the operational commander, the focus must be on sustaining and building upon current security gains with increased Iraqi participation to afford that opportunity.

Sustainability is key in our efforts in Iraq. At the end of the Surge, Iraqi forces will have to maintain stability with fewer U.S. forces on the ground. Current efforts to train and grow the Iraqi security forces as a professional and self-sustainable force are pivotal to long term stability. The operational strategy must include continued efforts to bring militia under government control, moving beyond the Sons of Iraq to JAM. This largest Shi'a militia must be brought under government control, disarmed, or defeated militarily. The recent violence in Basrah and Baghdad is indicative of how difficult and lengthy this process could be. Continued efforts in the diplomatic arena with Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran are another crucial element. This is obviously beyond the scope of the operational commander in Iraq, but a necessary step to long-term progress and stability.

Success in Iraq may remain more illusory as a result of conditions on the ground well beyond the control of any operational commander. As already discussed, gaining the support and trust of the Iraqi people will be key to success for the Iraqi government. Measuring and affecting the will of the people is extremely difficult, particularly when the root cause of

violence and insecurity is competition for resources and control among the various religious and ethnic groups.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

The current situation in Iraq presents an extremely “wicked” problem to say the least, and the ongoing multi-dimensional insurgency and profound ethno-sectarian divisions do not allow for a simple solution. As with any COIN operation, Factors Time and Space present significant challenges. The Surge strategy has maximized available advantages in Factor Force to mitigate those challenges. While the security gains in the latter part of 2007 and into 2008 are clear and measurable, the transition from increased security in many areas to achieving real political progress and national reconciliation for Iraq is anything but simple.

## **Appendix A – Complete List of Iraqi Benchmarks**

From: Benchmark Assessment Report, 14 September 2007

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/09/20070914.pdf>

1. Forming a Constitutional Review Committee and then completing the constitutional review.
2. Enacting and implementing legislation on de-Ba'athification reform.
3. Enacting and implementing legislation to ensure the equitable distribution of hydrocarbon resources to the people of Iraq without regard to the sect or ethnicity of recipients, and enacting and implementing legislation to ensure that the energy resources of Iraq benefit Sunni Arabs, Shi'a Arabs, Kurds, and other Iraqi citizens in an equitable manner.
4. Enacting and implementing legislation on procedures to form semi-autonomous regions.
5. Enacting and implementing legislation establishing an Independent High Electoral Commission, provincial elections law, provincial council authorities, and a date for provincial elections.
6. Enacting and implementing legislation addressing amnesty.
7. Enacting and implementing legislation establishing a strong militia disarmament program to ensure that such security forces are accountable only to the central government and loyal to the constitution of Iraq.
8. Establishing supporting political, media, economic, and services committees in support of the Baghdad Security Plan.
9. Providing three trained and ready Iraqi brigades to support Baghdad operations.
10. Providing Iraqi commanders with all authorities to execute this plan and to make tactical and operational decisions in consultation with U.S. Commanders, without political intervention to include the authority to pursue all extremists
11. Ensuring that Iraqi Security Forces are providing even-handed enforcement of the law.
12. Ensuring that, as President Bush quoted Prime Minister Maliki as saying, "the Baghdad Security Plan will not provide a safe haven for any outlaws, regardless of [their] sectarian or political affiliation."
13. Reducing the level of sectarian violence in Iraq and eliminating militia control of local security.
14. Establishing all of the planned joint security stations in neighborhoods across Baghdad.
15. Increasing the number of Iraqi Security Forces units capable of operating independently.
16. Ensuring that the rights of minority political parties in the Iraqi legislature are protected.
17. Allocating and spending \$10 billion in Iraqi revenues for reconstruction projects, including delivery of essential services, on an equitable basis.
18. Ensuring that Iraq's political authorities are not undermining or making false accusations against members of the ISF.

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