

THE U.S. ARMY CAMPAIGNS IN IRAQ

# THE SURGE

2007–2008





# **THE SURGE**

2007–2008

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# INTRODUCTION

More than ten years have passed since the United States invaded Iraq to depose the regime of Saddam Hussein, but the conflict's origins and consequences remain controversial. The immediate cause of the war emerged in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda, when the Bush administration sought to preempt potential threats to the United States and its allies. Believing that the Iraqi president was building an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction that he might turn over to terrorists, the administration resolved to remove the Ba'athist regime by force. In its place, the United States sought to build a democratic government at peace with its neighbors that would also be an ally in the Global War on Terrorism.

After the United States and its coalition partners toppled Saddam's government in the spring of 2003, deep-seated tensions between Iraq's various sects, tribes, and ethnic groups filled the vacuum left in the wake of the fallen dictatorship. An anti-American insurgency soon expanded into a broad communal struggle for power and influence in the new Iraq. The United States Army, which was trained and equipped primarily for conventional combat, had to reorient itself for unconventional operations in a complex, irregular war.

Initially, U.S. forces and their partners tried to transition responsibility for maintaining safety and public order to the nascent Iraqi government and its developing security elements. However, these forces were quickly overwhelmed by spiraling levels of violence that threatened to tear the country apart. By 2007, the Bush administration concluded that this approach was failing. To turn the tide, it deployed additional U.S. troops to protect the Iraqi population, cut off insurgent forces from their bases of support and supply, and restore stability. During this timeframe, some opposition elements began to see radical jihadists as a greater threat

and began to cooperate with the Iraqi government and U.S. forces. Coupled with the surge, the result was a dramatic reduction in violence. The Obama administration transitioned to Operation NEW DAWN, which emphasized building up indigenous Iraqi forces and the gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces by the end of 2011.

With these commemorative pamphlets, the U.S. Army Center of Military History aims to provide soldiers and civilians with an overview of Operations IRAQI FREEDOM and NEW DAWN. They serve as an account of what the Army did in Iraq and a means of commemorating the hundreds of thousands of servicemen and women who served and the thousands who were killed or wounded in one of the longest conflicts in American history.

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## **THE SURGE, 2007-2008**

As General George W. Casey Jr. surveyed the situation in Iraq at the end of 2006, he came to a sobering conclusion: “We are failing to achieve objectives in the Economic Development, Governance, Communicating, and Security lines of operation within the planned timeframes. It is extremely unlikely that the End State will be achieved by 2009.” The insurgency that had erupted in the wake of the 2003 American invasion continued to thwart U.S. efforts to rebuild Iraq into a self-sufficient, democratic state. Cyclical sectarian violence between Sunni insurgent groups and Shi’ite militias had crippled the country’s capital city of Baghdad. The Iraqi security forces, upon which so much of the U.S. campaign depended, proved unable and often unwilling to stem the sectarian fighting or stanch the ethnic cleansing of the capital city. The new government, elected only the previous year, was fragmented and lacked the ability to effectively assert its authority. By the summer of 2006 nearly 3,000 Iraqis a month were dying from the escalating violence.

In the face of these deteriorating conditions, President George W. Bush concluded that the United States needed to fundamentally alter its strategy. Between 2003 and 2006, the Coalition had focused on quickly standing up Iraqi military forces and transferring the responsibility for maintaining security from U.S. troops to Iraqi troops. Although he agreed conditions were dire, General Casey maintained a firm commitment to this transition approach and opposed increasing the size of the American contingent. The general, along

with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, National Security Council staffers, and members of the U.S. Congress, believed that only Iraqi institutions and security forces could effectively bring an end to the violence. In the face of this opposition, however, President Bush believed that deploying more U.S. forces was the last chance to restore security and to provide the nascent Iraqi government with the breathing space necessary to secure itself. In January 2007, the president ordered the deployment of five Army brigades to reinforce the coalition forces in Iraq and appointed a new commander, U.S. Army General David H. Petraeus, to lead the expanded contingent. The deployment marked the beginning of the Iraqi surge campaign.



Department of Defense

General Petraeus (second from left), commander of Multi-National Force–Iraq, walks through the Al Shurja Market in eastern Baghdad on 11 March 2007, accompanied by an Iraqi division commander, staff, and journalists.



## STRATEGIC SETTING

Although the region it encompasses has been inhabited since the earliest days of human civilization, Iraq itself is a relatively young state. Assembled by the British from three provinces of the recently disintegrated Ottoman Empire in 1920, Iraq is a geographically, religiously, and ethnically diverse country dominated by the Tigris River to the east and the Euphrates River to the west. The two rivers flow southeast from the mountains in southern Turkey and merge about twenty-nine kilometers northwest of the Persian Gulf. Almost all of Iraq's major urban centers can be found on the banks of one of these two rivers. Baghdad, the capital city, sits on the Tigris roughly in the center of the state. Iraq's northeastern regions are mountainous and inhabited mostly by ethnic Kurds. The northwest is a dry alluvial plane. Among its important cities are Mosul and Tall 'Afar. The western part of the country, largely contained within the single province of Al Anbar, is a vast desert. With few exceptions, almost all of the major urban centers in the west, such as Ar Ramadi and Al Fallujah, sit along the Euphrates River. The southern part of Iraq is a fertile river delta marked by rivers, lakes, and marshes. Al Basrah, the region's dominant metropolitan area, is also the country's second largest city and major port (*Map 1*).

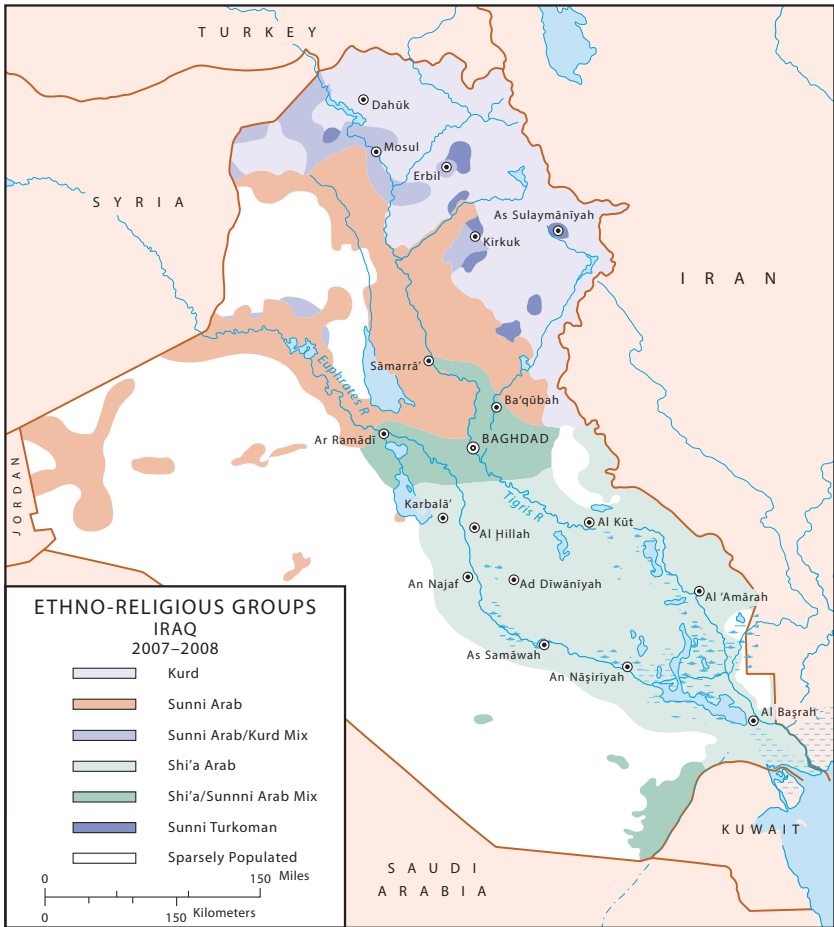
Iraq, whose population in 2007 consisted of about 28 million inhabitants, is a predominantly Arab state with a large community of Kurds living in the northeast. Various other ethnic groups—including Turkomans, Yazidis, and Assyrians, most of which live in the northern part of the country—dot the country's social landscape. Islam is the dominant religion, with 99 percent of the population adhering to one of its major sects; roughly two-thirds identify themselves with Shi'ite Islam, the other third with Sunni Islam. Iraq's Sunni population is divided between Arabs and Kurds. A small segment of the populace, mostly ethnic Assyrians, are Christian. Before the U.S. invasion, Iraq was dominated by Sunni Arabs, a legacy of the country's past as a province of the Otto-



Map 1

man Empire and then, after World War I, as a British Mandate. The United States sought to reverse this system of minority rule, and immediately worked to empower the country's Shi'ite majority following the 2003 invasion. This sudden shift in the distribution of power was a significant factor driving the insurgency that erupted shortly after the collapse of the Ba'ath regime (*Map 2*).

By the time of the Iraq War, the country's population had become increasingly urbanized, with fewer and



Map 2

fewer Iraqis engaged in agriculture. With a population of about 5 million, Baghdad was among the most densely populated cities in the Middle East. Cities were congested and the narrow streets easily channeled vehicular traffic, creating ample targets for improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The relatively low-lying buildings afforded snipers a sufficient range of fire over the major roads, giving unconventional, irregular fighters plenty of opportunities to strike at U.S. and coalition forces.

Almost immediately after the fall of Saddam Hussein in April 2003, the United States and its coalition allies found themselves locked in a struggle with a variety of insurgent forces that sought to end the American occupation and destroy the Iraqi government erected to replace the Ba'ath regime. Although the Bush administration had hoped the occupation would be brief, it quickly became clear that a long, multiyear effort would be required to restore order in the country. By the summer of 2004, the Coalition, led by General Casey, faced a number of complex threats, including Sunni Arab nationalist insurgents, foreign fighters affiliated with fundamentalist groups such as al-Qaeda, and pro-Shi'ite militias, many of which were aligned with Iran. Perhaps the most brutal of these insurgent forces was the movement led by Jordanian-born Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Calling itself al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers, or al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), its ranks included Iraqis as well as fighters from across the globe who had flocked to the Islamist organization's banner to wage jihad against the Americans and their allies. Its primary objective was to spark a civil war between the country's Sunni and Shi'ites, tear down the Iraqi state, and erect a new caliphate to take its place.

Before 2007, the Bush administration's strategy in Iraq focused on helping the Iraqi government provide its own security while working to reduce American involvement. "As the Iraqis stand up, we will stand down" President Bush declared in a 2005 speech. To implement this strategy, Casey focused on expelling radical insurgent forces; bringing about reconciliation between Sunnis, Kurds, and Shi'ites; and making sure Iraqi forces took the lead in providing security to their people. The key component was making sure that a steady state of transition occurred as American forces handed off more and more of the security mission to Iraqi forces. As more Iraqi forces took the lead, more U.S. combat forces could withdraw from the country.

By the beginning of 2006, it seemed as if Casey's transition approach was bearing fruit. "There are clear grounds for optimism," declared a campaign review produced in December 2005. The escalation of violence that

had defined much of 2003 and 2004 seemed to be on an uneven but general decline throughout 2005. Coalition headquarters was making steady progress in its mission to recruit, train, and field Iraqi security forces, and was even predicting that 75 percent of Iraq's brigades and 80 percent of its divisions would be ready to take the lead in the security mission by the end of the year. Especially promising was the participation of large numbers of Sunnis in the December 2005 parliamentary elections, a sign that a government representing all Iraqis could take control of the country.

Yet these upward trends masked internal problems that had plagued Iraq since the invasion. In particular, the deep divisions between the country's Sunnis, Shi'ite, and Kurds hindered the creation of a truly national identity. Sunni participation in the elections did not necessarily demonstrate a commitment to the Iraqi state and the country's Shi'ite leaders were hardly about to surrender their newly won authority to the Sunni minority that had dominated the country from its birth until the fall of Saddam. These underlying tensions, which had flared up into intermittent sectarian violence throughout the U.S. occupation, exploded into veritable civil war following the bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque on 22 February 2006. The mosque, the resting place for the tenth and eleventh Imams, was one of the most revered holy sites for Shi'ite Muslims. Its destruction, likely at the hands of al-Qaeda in Iraq, sparked a protracted and violent period of sectarian strife as Shi'ite militants exacted revenge on Iraqi Sunnis, irrespective of their affiliation with Zarqawi's movement.

Casey's forces were unable to stem Iraq's collapse into civil war. Initially, General Casey hoped that the Iraqi people would rally together against Zarqawi's organization. Following the bombing, Casey informed his commanders that "the resolution of this crisis should advance our campaign objective of keeping Iraq on the path to self-reliance. Treat this as an opportunity to advance the situation." Instead, sectarian strife threatened to tear the country apart. Rather than substantially revise his approach, however, Casey believed that

the answer to this new threat lay in continuing the efforts to transition the security mission from American troops to Iraqi national forces and maintain support for the Iraqi parliamentary system.

However, in many ways these national organizations were at the root of the problem. Dominated by Iraqi Shi'ites, the army and police often targeted Sunni neighborhoods, protected Shi'a militias, and helped to exacerbate sectarian tensions. Sunnis in turn rejected them and looked to radical forces such as AQI for security against Shi'ite militants. Casey's entire strategy was predicated on the assumption that the Iraqi government would be a willing and capable partner in the effort to create a nonsectarian Iraq. Unfortunately, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who only came to power in May 2006, was dedicated to different, potentially incompatible objectives. A former opponent of Saddam's regime and member of the Shi'ite Islamic Dawa Party, Maliki appeared to tacitly condone the ethnic violence as long as it benefited Iraq's Shi'ite community and weakened its Sunnis. As a result, Casey often had to pressure Maliki to take action against the Shi'ite militias.

By the summer, an open battle between Sunni and Shi'ite paramilitary forces for control of Baghdad had begun in earnest. Al-Qaeda in Iraq cells increased their attacks against Shi'ite communities, prompting retaliatory responses from Shi'ite paramilitary forces such as the Jaysh al-Mahdi militia, usually in the form of extrajudicial killings or other forms of assassination. In response, Sunni nationalist insurgent groups such as the 1920 Revolution Brigades would strike at Jaysh al-Mahdi or Iraqi government facilities; the two were one and the same as far as many Sunni militants were concerned. As Lt. Col. Nichoel E. Brooks, an intelligence officer with Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) recalled, "And then it almost became self-sustaining, as all it would take is one [vehicle-borne improvised explosive device] from [Al-Qaeda in Iraq] and [Jaysh al-Mahdi] would just attack."

The coalition command launched a series of joint Iraqi-American operations to quell the violence and secure Baghdad. Designated Operations TOGETHER FOR-

President Bush informs the American people of his decision to send five more brigades to Iraq in a televised speech delivered on 10 January 2007.

WARD I and TOGETHER FORWARD II, the efforts aimed to buttress the authority of the new Iraqi government and serve as a test case for Casey's transition approach. Unfortunately, lack of adequate American forces and weaknesses in the Iraqi Army and police meant that neither operation was able to stem the growing violence.

By the end of 2006, thousands of Iraqis were dying per month as a result of the sectarian fighting. In August, retired Army Vice Chief of Staff, General John M. Keane, began an intensive effort to force a change in approach in Washington, D.C. Working as an unofficial adviser to the Bush administration, Keane contended that the president faced a narrowing window. If he did not act soon to turn things around in Iraq, the American war effort would be lost. Keane proposed that Bush abandon the transition strategy and increase the number of American troops in Iraq. One of the critical problems facing the coalition forces was the lack of manpower needed to hold urban areas once they had cleared them of insurgents. This deficiency allowed insurgents to simply return to their old safe houses once U.S. and Iraqi forces withdrew to attack another enemy position. U.S. personnel disparaged the approach as a "whack-a-mole" strategy.





A surge of troops could potentially allow the Coalition to maintain continuous pressure on the insurgent groups.

The U.S. midterm elections held on 7 November 2006, in which the Republicans lost control of both houses of Congress, only increased the pressure on President Bush to effect some kind of change. The vote was understood by the public, press, and president as a rebuke of his approach to the Iraq War. The day after the election, Bush accepted Donald H. Rumsfeld's resignation as secretary of Defense and subsequently replaced him with Robert M. Gates. The change in leadership was among the first signals that the United States was going to adopt a new course in Iraq.

Largely because of retired General Keane, President Bush began to pay serious attention to a proposal developed by Frederick W. Kagan, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, to increase the U.S. commitment. Kagan's plan called for a surge of seven brigade-sized forces (five Army brigades and two Marine Corps regiments) into Iraq to expand the size of the American expeditionary force already there. According to Kagan, security needed to be the priority, and protecting the population, especially in Baghdad, was a necessary prerequisite for ending the insurgency and sectarian strife. That security needed to come from American troops, as the country would likely collapse before the Coalition could fully train an adequate number of Iraqi soldiers. Kagan cautioned against a quick withdrawal of American forces, stating that such a move would plunge the region into chaos and empower Iran and Syria.

Kagan's plan would differ somewhat from the surge strategy ultimately implemented by Bush later that year. While the proposal called for a surge of seven brigade-sized formations, the United States could ultimately only send five. Kagan's plan also did not take into account the gradual fracturing of the Sunni insurgency that had been taking place in Al Anbar Province since 2005. Nevertheless, the basic thrust of the proposal, namely the need to increase the size of the American combat force in Iraq to strengthen security,



remained the guiding principle behind the new surge strategy. Both Bush's field commander and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were wary. General Casey did not believe a sharp increase in American forces would make a significant difference, and that a surge could potentially aggravate the threat situation even more. For their part, the Joint Chiefs were concerned about the strain that sustaining the lengthy deployments of so many forces was incurring on the Army and Marine Corps. Nevertheless, some of Casey's subordinates pushed for an increase in the U.S. forces. Most notable among them was Multi-National Corps–Iraq Commander Lt. Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, who pressed for a larger contingent of forces to better secure Baghdad and arrest the growing violence there.

The Bush administration concluded that a surge was necessary, and agreed to deploy five more brigades to Iraq: the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division; 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division; 3d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division; 4th Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division, a Stryker unit; and 2d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division. The administration also ordered the deployment of the 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit, a Marine air-ground task force. The president then extended the tours of the majority of the units already in Iraq from twelve months to fifteen months. Finally, President Bush decided to replace General Casey as the commander in Iraq. On Keane's recommendation, he selected the commander of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, then Lt. Gen. David H. Petraeus.

#### COMMAND STRUCTURE AND THE U.S. FORCES IN IRAQ

Responsibility for fighting the Iraq War fell to two headquarters echelons: the Multi-National Force–Iraq (MNF-I) and the Multi-National Corps–Iraq. MNF-I, created in 2004, was responsible for setting strategy and coordinating that strategy with the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, the Iraqi civilian government, and the large inter-



Secretary of Defense Gates conducts a press conference at Camp Fallujah on 19 April 2007. From left: General Petraeus, commander MNF-I; Secretary Gates; Maj. Gen. Walter E. Gaskin, USMC, commander MNF-W; Admiral William J. Fallon, commander CENTCOM; General Odierno, commander MNC-I; General Peter Pace, USMC, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

national coalition that contributed troops to stabilizing Iraq. Although coalition strength had diminished since its peak, it still included forces from the United Kingdom, Poland, Georgia, El Salvador, Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, South Korea, and numerous other states. Responsibility for translating MNF-I's strategic directives into military operations fell to a subordinate headquarters, MNC-I. While MNF-I was an ad hoc headquarters manned by individuals deployed on one-year tours, rotating Army corps headquarters performed duties as MNC-I. At the start of the surge, MNC-I's duties were the responsibility of General Odierno's III Corps.

Although outside the chain of command, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq also served an important function in the war effort, serving, along with the commander

of MNF-I, as the corepresentative of the United States to the Iraqi government. In March 2007, shortly after General Petraeus arrived to take command, Ryan C. Crocker became the new U.S. ambassador to Iraq. A seasoned diplomat who had represented the United States in Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria, and Pakistan before his appointment in Iraq, Crocker had a firm command of Arabic and substantial experience working with Arab and Muslim leaders. He would build an effective and fruitful working relationship with General Petraeus and Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki throughout the surge campaign.

Although General Petraeus reported to United States Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Admiral William J. Fallon, the growing importance of the Iraq War had elevated the influence of the MNF-I headquarters within the chain of command. While Admiral Fallon was the overall theater commander, General Petraeus usually reported directly to President Bush and Secretary Gates, providing each with detailed weekly briefings on the state of the war. This complex command relationship caused some tensions throughout the first year of the surge, as Fallon was often skeptical of Petraeus' approach to the war. However, because of General Petraeus' direct line to the president, the MNF-I commander enjoyed full support from the commander in chief throughout the surge campaign.

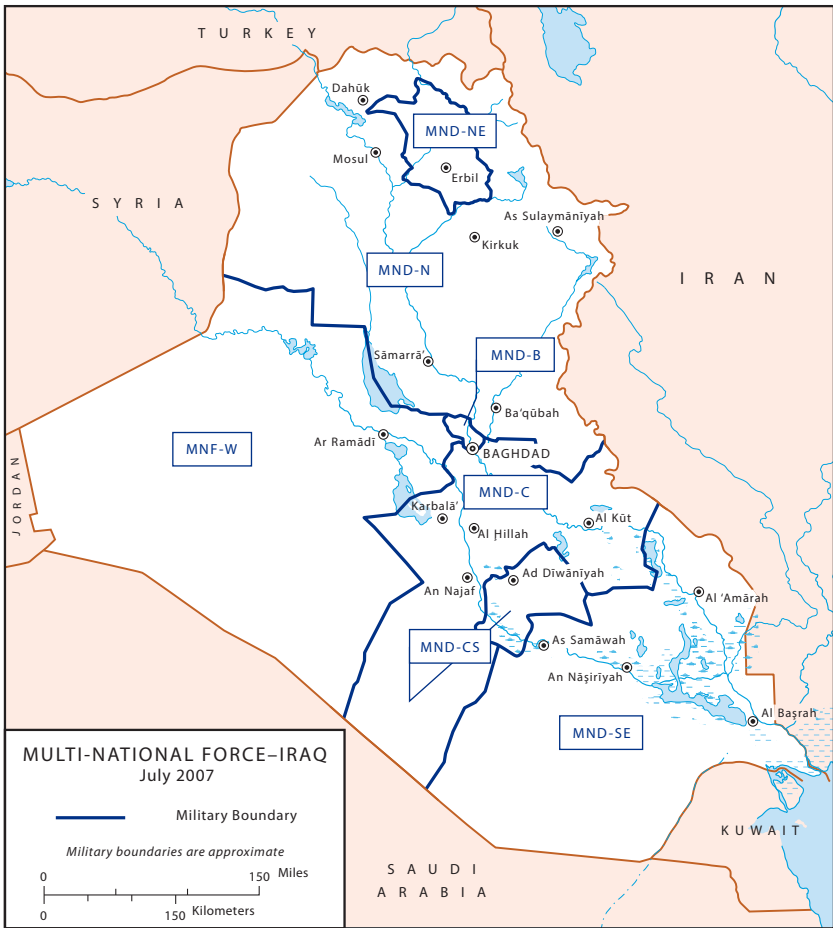
Multi-National Force–Iraq divided the country into different areas of operations, with each area under the responsibility of a division- or brigade-sized headquarters. Operations in Bagdad were commanded by the Multi-National Division–Baghdad (MND-B). At the start of the surge, this was Maj. Gen. Joseph F. Fil Jr.'s 1st Cavalry Division. In terms of geographic size, the city and its surrounding area was the smallest of Iraq's eighteen provinces. However, it accounted for about one-quarter of the country's population. Although most of Bagdad's residents were Shi'ite, the city also included a number of Sunni neighborhoods. Multi-National Division–North (MND-N) was responsible for the dry alluvial plane of northwest Mesopotamia, including

the important cities of Mosul and Tikrit. In early 2007 the headquarters overseeing the area was the 25th Infantry Division commanded by Maj. Gen. Benjamin R. Mixon. Iraq's western Al Anbar Province, the center of the country's Sunni population, was the responsibility of Multi-National Force–West (MNF-W), a U.S. Marine Corps-led contingent. As the surge began, MNF-W was assigned to the II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), a division-sized air-ground task force commanded by Maj. Gen. Walter E. Gaskin. The Marine contingent in Al Anbar was usually reinforced with an Army brigade (*Map 3*).

The U.S. coalition partners' areas of responsibility were in southern Iraq. Multi-National Division–Center South (MND-CS), which occupied the region south of Baghdad, was commanded by Polish Maj. Gen. Pawel Lamla. Lamla's command included troops from Poland, Armenia, Bosnia, Denmark, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Romania, El Salvadore, Slovakia, and the Ukraine. Finally, the Multi-National Division–South East (MND-SE) was a British command, centered near Al Basrah.

The surge was one of the Army's first major campaigns in which its new modular force was put to the test on a large scale. The Army of 2003 largely resembled the late Cold War–era force built to carry out large-scale engagements against the Warsaw Pact. The division had been the main operational element, with most divisions containing three brigades. Those brigades were designed to fight on the line of battle, and although brigades usually fought with attached artillery and combat service support elements, these belonged to the division and were utilized to achieve battlefield objectives set by the division commander.

Following the Cold War, the Army set about restructuring itself to better adapt to a world in which the United States no longer confronted a major superpower but nevertheless still had to contend with multiple contingencies and potential threats across the globe. Along with placing a greater emphasis on computer networks and other technological innovations,



Map 3

the Army also began to restructure its line brigades into autonomous brigade combat teams—modular, combined arms formations of about 3,900 personnel with organic combat support elements. By taking the supporting units previously attached to the corps and divisions and making them a permanent part of a brigade’s organization, the Army created a new formation that was more robust and easier to deploy. It also enhanced the brigade’s ability to function in an irregular warfare

environment, where lower echelon units were required to operate as relatively autonomous formations.

However, the overall goal of transforming forty-eight line brigades into seventy modular brigade combat teams inevitably forced compromises in terms of combat power. Whereas line brigades had been formed around three maneuver battalions, the new modular brigade was built around only two. The 2d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, one of the surge brigades, was typical of this new organization: it consisted of two maneuver battalions (the 1st Battalion, 64th Armored Regiment, and 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment), a reconnaissance squadron (3d Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment), a support battalion (the 26th Support Battalion), an artillery battalion (1st Battalion, 9th Field Artillery Regiment), and a special troops contingent (2d Brigade Special Troops Battalion).

This reorganization dramatically altered the role of the division in combat. Modular brigades were interchangeable, meaning that infantry division headquarters in Iraq could command from three to six light or heavy brigades, many of which would come from other divisions. For example, Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch's 3d Infantry Division, designated Task Force Marne during the surge campaign, commanded the division's 2d and 3d Brigades, as well as the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, and the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division.

With the demarcation between peacetime and wartime now largely fluid due to the persistent threats of international terrorism and the need to maintain expeditionary forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army also transformed how it trained and deployed its units into combat. This new approach, known as the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) process, established a system by which all Army units, including reserves, would be placed into one of three sequential, cyclical readiness pools. Units in the first group, the Reset/Train Force pool, would reconstitute their strength, reequip, and train for future deployments. Once a unit had completed its training, the force entered the Ready Force pool, where it underwent further training for specific missions and possible future missions. The third



group was the Available Force pool—those units available for deployment worldwide. By applying this system to the active component, reserve component, and Army National Guard, the Army was able to ensure that units were either ready to deploy or preparing to deploy. The adoption of ARFORGEN marked another significant break with the Army's Cold War past, as reserve units shifted from serving as a strategic reserve into operational forces capable of carrying out sustained, rotational deployments alongside their active component counterparts.

The two commanders charged with implementing the surge had already acquired considerable experience leading American forces in Iraq. General Odierno had commanded the 4th Infantry Division in 2003 and 2004. Following his deployment to Iraq, Odierno was posted to the Joint Staff. During this period he served as an adviser to Secretary of State Colin L. Powell and his successor, Condoleezza Rice, and accompanied Secretary Rice on trips investigating the situation in Iraq. In the spring of 2006 he took command of the III Corps, which deployed to Iraq in December of that year to assume responsibilities as MNC-I.

General Petraeus also had considerable experience in Iraq. In 2003, he commanded the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), which had been responsible for the occupation of Mosul during the critical months following the fall of Saddam Hussein. His efforts to engage the local population, hold elections, open the university, and work to rebuild a sense of normalcy in the city were widely praised by observers as a potential model for American occupation efforts throughout Iraq. The next year he became the first commander of the Multi-National Security Transition Command–Iraq (MNSTC-I) and worked to build a new Iraqi security force that could replace the army abolished by U.S. authorities in 2003. In 2005 Petraeus returned to the United States to command the Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Ordered by Army Chief of Staff General Peter J. Schoomaker to “[go] out there and shake up the Army,” Petraeus supervised a rigorous effort to update the Army's educational and training programs so that they focused more attention on counterinsur-

gency and other forms of irregular warfare. The various modifications he initiated included transforming the exercises held at the National Training Center to emphasize urban, counterinsurgency operations. He also worked to alter the curricula at the Command and General Staff College to focus more on full-spectrum operations, and he created, updated, or initiated reviews of several doctrinal publications, including the new Field Manual 3–24, *Counterinsurgency*, as well as Field Manual 6–22, *Army Leadership*, and Field Manual 3–0, *Full Spectrum Operations*.

The new counterinsurgency field manual was a controversial document. To create it, General Petraeus went outside the Army and consulted a range of social scientists and military analysts, hosting conferences at Fort Leavenworth to solicit their insight into the topic of irregular warfare. The final product drew considerably from the writings of David Galula, a veteran of France’s war to retain Algeria (1954–1962). Among the principles enshrined in the manual was the concept that counterinsurgents needed to focus on building legitimacy for the host nation government. To do this, they would need to provide security to the populace and to separate them from the insurgents. The manual stipulated, “Political power is the central issue in insurgencies and counterinsurgencies; each side aims to get the people to accept its government or authority as legitimate.” This objective, easy to define but difficult to achieve, guided Petraeus’ and Odierno’s planning efforts throughout the surge campaign.

## ENEMY FORCES

By 2007 what Americans called the “Iraq War” was actually a series of interconnected, overlapping conflicts that included an anticoalition insurgency, a sectarian civil war between Sunnis and Shi’ites, and fighting within the Sunni and Shi’ite communities. The myriad of enemy forces and internal conflicts presented a complex and highly unpredictable environment for the U.S. forces in the country. Untangling the different threats



was a critical first step toward devising a means of bringing security to the country.

Initially dismissed as “pockets of dead-enders” trying to restore the old Ba’ath regime, the anti-American, Sunni-led insurgency was in fact a persistent threat to the future of the new Iraq. As the United States worked to empower the country’s Shi’ite majority, Iraq’s Sunnis feared disenfranchisement and marginalization in the country they had dominated since its creation nearly a century earlier. The dissolution of the army and expulsion of Ba’athists from government positions in May 2003 exacerbated this fear, and many Sunnis had aligned themselves with the germinating anti-American insurgency. At first, the insurgents were largely nationalist organizations such as the General Command of the Armed Forces and Resistance and Liberation in Iraq, and Iraqi Sunni militants such as the Al Anbar Armed Brigades.

Soon, the organizations became more radicalized and fundamentalist in character. They also saw an increase in foreign fighters in their ranks. By 2004 the most charismatic and influential Sunni militant was Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. Zarqawi’s movement proved itself to be a remarkably tenacious enemy, surviving the massive coalition drive to clear Al Fallujah in 2004 as well as a series of American campaigns conducted throughout the western Euphrates Valley in 2005. Even Zarqawi’s death following a Special Forces–directed air strike in June 2006 did not stem AQI’s terrorist operations in Al Anbar Province and Baghdad.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq was hardly the only radical Sunni insurgent group. Organizations such as Jaish al-Ta’ifa al-Mansurah and the 1920 Revolution Brigades also carried out terrorist attacks against coalition forces and Iraqi civilians. By 2006, many of these groups were working to increase coordination and cooperation, and in January 2006 six of them created the Mujahideen Shura Council. In October of that year the umbrella group was rechristened the Islamic State of Iraq. By 2007, the Coalition looked on al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Islamic State as the same force, because AQI was the

best-known member of the organization and ultimately came to dominate it.

Because the insurgency was not a unitary, formally organized movement, it was difficult for the Coalition to determine just how many individuals comprised it. Over the course of the Iraq War, estimates ranged from as few as 3,000 fighters in January 2004 to 70,000 in March 2007. The latter figure was even more remarkable because it was an estimate of just Sunni insurgents. At least 1,000 AQI fighters were thought to be operating across the country. The number of non-Iraqis fighting the Coalition was also in doubt, with assessments ranging from 700 to 2,000 between 2004 and late 2006.

However, the size of the insurgency was less important than its ability to operate unimpeded across Iraq, disrupt daily life, and terrorize its citizens and government in an effort to render the state incapable of carrying out basic functions. Lt. Col. William M. Journey, whose Marine battalion served in Ar Ramadi in the fall of 2006, remarked that: "If I were the bad guy, every other day, if I can go down with only two insurgents, empty a magazine and shoot at the government center, then I get great press out of that. And the press is, 'Al-Anbar Province is defunct, the government center is under siege, there is no progress, there is no stability.' What an economy of force for an insurgency." The insurgent forces in Iraq were capable of achieving major strategic results with limited forces and means. Consequently, coalition commanders had long realized that operations that focused on diminishing the insurgency's manpower, but failed to also disrupt the insurgents' lines of communications and freedom of maneuver, were counterproductive.

As many Iraqi Sunnis took up arms, many Shi'ites also turned to militant activity. Among the most influential Shi'ite militants was the radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr. A member of a prominent Iraqi family, Sadr was a Shi'ite nationalist dedicated to expelling the United States from Iraq. The source of his power was the Jaysh al-Mahdi militia, also called the Mahdi Army, and the organization had fought coalition forces during revolts in An Najaf, Al Kut, and Baghdad. By 2006, the Mahdi Army had largely

consolidated control over Baghdad's Sadr City and its political clout in parliament was substantial enough that Prime Minister Maliki had placed significant restrictions on what kinds of operations the Coalition could carry out in the northeastern district.

Sadr's movement was relatively new, in contrast to the Badr Corps, or Badr Organization. The military arm of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq—also known as the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council beginning in May 2007 and the largest coalition of Shi'ite parties in the country—the Badr Organization had origins dating back to the 1980s and the Shi'ite struggle against Saddam's Ba'ath regime. Whereas Sadr's movement embraced the banner of Iraqi nationalism, the Badr Organization was much more heavily influenced by Iran, a factor that led to tensions between the two organizations. The Qods Force, the international arm of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, took the lead in training, equipping, and advising the Shi'ite militia. Prime Minister Maliki relied on both the Mahdi Army and the Badr Organization for political support, and often the distinction between the militias and official state security organs was blurry at best. For example, the Badr Organization transformed its Wolf Brigade into a formation of the Iraqi National Police in 2005, allowing the brigade to carry out terrorist actions against Iraqi Sunnis with little threat of reprisal from the Iraqi government. It was another example of why many Sunnis were unwilling to embrace the Iraqi security forces and looked to radical organizations such as al-Qaeda in Iraq for protection.

It is important to recognize that the insurgent groups and militias were not as well organized as many of their leaders would have liked to claim. Even as charismatic a leader as Sadr, whose Mahdi Army seemed to be driven by the sheer will of his personality, was unable to control his movement, with splinter factions breaking off to carry out their own campaigns or to abandon the revolutionary fight in favor of criminal activities. As Sadr began to lose his grip on Jaysh al-Mahdi, factions

of the militia known as the Special Groups of the Jaysh al-Mahdi quickly became an arm of the Qods Force. Iranian influence brought with it greater threats to U.S. combat forces, notably lethal munitions such as explosively formed penetrators that could pierce the armor of an Abrams Main Battle Tank.

Iran was not the only Iraqi neighbor playing a role in the insurgency. Elements within the Syrian government were actively involved in training and equipping insurgent groups. Supporters within the Gulf States also provided assistance to organizations such as al-Qaeda in Iraq in the hope of counterbalancing Iranian influence in the country. The presence of militant Kurdish groups in northern Iraq was also a matter of concern for Turkey, meaning that the United States needed to monitor the activities of Iraq's neighbors at the same time it was trying to restore order inside the country.

The insurgents deployed an array of tactics and weapons against the coalition forces. The most common and lethal were IEDs. These rudimentary bombs, equipped with triggers ranging from pressure plates to detonators that could be activated by cellular devices, accounted for well over one-third of all coalition servicemen and women killed in action during the Iraq War. Insurgents and militia forces placed IEDs on roadsides to strike coalition convoys, sometimes using cars rigged with the weapons. Suicide attackers also wore deadly, shrapnel-laden vests or drove cars armed with explosives into coalition positions and civilian targets.

The IED threat was so ubiquitous that coalition forces had begun devoting considerable resources to confronting it in the months leading up to the surge. In the summer of 2006 the Coalition activated Task Force ODIN (Observe, Detect, Identify, and Neutralize), an Army aviation unit that utilized airborne sensors to better locate bomb sites. A variety of airframes carried these sensors, including Apache helicopters, C-12 fixed-winged patrol planes, and unmanned aerial vehicles. Integrating the detection systems with command and control systems, Task Force ODIN afforded field commanders better collection and analysis of data and reduced the time need-



A Baghdad neighborhood in 2005 depicting the terrain and structures typical of the surge campaign's urban battlefields.

ed to respond to potential IED threats. During the surge campaign, MNC-I also created a Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Operation Integration Center (COIC, or Counter-IED Integration Center), commanded by Col. James B. Hickey. Consisting of seventy personnel, the unit was designed to give coalition units better intelligence not only on IED positions, but also on insurgent and militia networks.

While the IED was certainly the best-known and most deadly insurgent weapon, enemy forces also used small arms, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortar rounds to strike coalition units. Whatever the weapon, the insurgents' primary purpose was to inflict as many casualties as possible, both against coalition troops and Iraqi civilians, while avoiding a head-on confrontation with superior coalition forces. Irregular fighters were often able to blend into the populace and monitor coalition patrolling schedules and routes, and they were able to use threat and intimidation to acquire in-

telligence and establish safe houses inside Iraq's major urban areas. They were resourceful and adaptable opponents.

## OPERATIONS

Assessing the situation in early 2007, both Generals Petraeus and Odierno determined that a gulf had emerged between the Iraqi government and the general population. Nonstate actors such as the Shi'ite militias and al-Qaeda in Iraq were rapidly filling this gap. Petraeus and Odierno concluded that they needed to close this power vacuum by reducing violence, controlling the Iraqi population, and bolstering the effectiveness and legitimacy of the Iraqi government. General Odierno's guidance to the III Corps summarized the basic objective as:

MNC-I conducts combat, stability, and support operations in coordination with the Iraqi Security Forces to secure the population, defeat terrorists and irreconcilable extremists, neutralize insurgent and militia groups, and transition responsibilities to the ISF in order to reduce violence, gain the support of the people, stabilize Iraq, and enable [Government of Iraq] security self reliance.

It was a daunting task, requiring close coordination across a variety of lines of operations.

The first and most pressing undertaking was reducing the sectarian violence that had plagued Iraq since the destruction of the Al-Askari Mosque a year earlier. Achieving this goal required a significant revision in the U.S. approach to security. Up to that point U.S. commanders such as General Casey, convinced that the presence of American soldiers in major population centers was sparking insurgent activity, had withdrawn most battalions to forward operating bases outside the major urban areas. U.S. forces continued to provide security, but they did so from positions outside the cities,



usually with mounted patrols, transferring as much local security responsibilities as possible to Iraqi security forces.

General Odierno, who had assumed command of MNC-I in December, had already embarked on a concerted effort to change this approach. Rather than continue the transitioning strategy, MNC-I would intensify its efforts to provide security in Iraq's major population centers, with a focus on Baghdad. The civil strife centered on the capital, where Iraq's Sunnis and Shi'ites intermingled and where sectarian militias carried out campaigns of violence and terror to clear neighborhoods of their religious rivals, a grim reminder of the Iraqi government's ineffectiveness. Thus, by 2007, Baghdad had become the center of gravity in the Iraq War. If the government could not secure its own capital, how could it be expected to effectively govern the rest of the country?

On 2 January 2007, Odierno issued Fragmentary Order 179 to MNC-I's Operations Order 06-03, directing coalition forces to carry out an aggressive effort to "secure the Iraqi people." The plan, which focused American military efforts on Baghdad, called for "24/7 [coalition forces] coverage" to clear municipal areas of insurgents, militia forces, and other extremist groups, in order to maintain security. Supporting operations outside Baghdad would stem the flow of insurgents and supplies across Iraq's borders, interdict and disrupt extremist networks, and continue efforts to strengthen the effectiveness of Iraqi security forces. Rather than journey from forward operating bases and conduct mounted patrols through the city, U.S. forces would actually operate *inside* the city from joint security stations and small combat outposts in the midst of the Iraqi population. Importantly, Odierno's headquarters recognized that threats to security emanated not only from Sunni rejectionists and al-Qaeda in Iraq, but also from the Shi'ite militias, many of which had the backing of the Iraqi government. Petraeus embraced Odierno's Baghdad security plan, and on 14 February, just three days after replacing General Casey, he gave the order to commence Operation FARDH AL-QANOON (roughly translated from Arabic as "Enforcing the Law") in order to pro-



General Fil, commander of MND-B (1st Cavalry Division) (second from right), accompanied by Lt. Col. James W. Phillips (right) commander of the 3d Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, tours the barriers erected throughout the Rusafa District in eastern Baghdad on 19 June.

vide security for Baghdad. The operation was led by the 1st Cavalry Division.

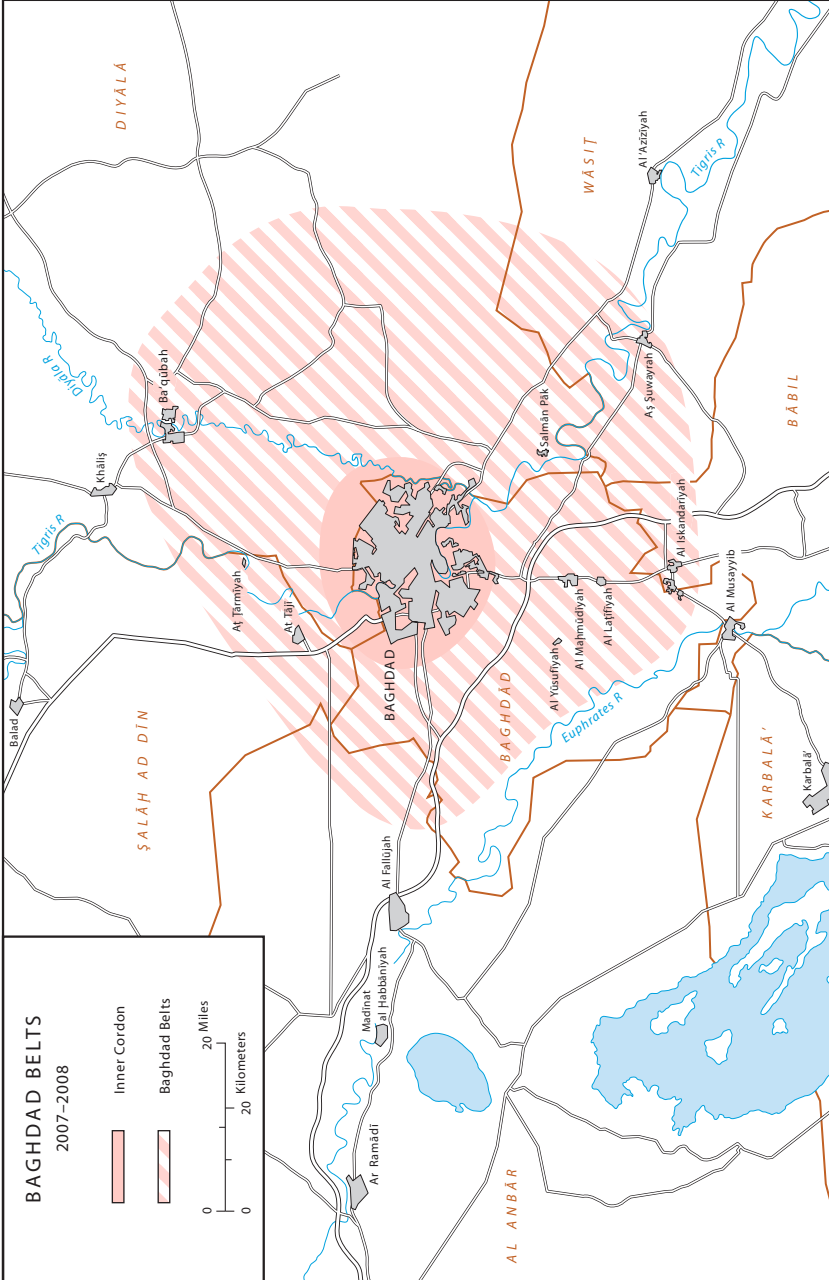
The approach was not new, although the Coalition had never implemented it on such a wide scale. In 2005, Col. Herbert R. McMaster's 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment had cleared and secured the northern city of Tall 'Afar by stationing his soldiers inside the populated areas, allowing his troops to operate among town residents. That same year, in Al Anbar Province, Marine Lt. Col. Julian D. Alford had conducted a similar operation in the border city of Al Qa'im with his 3d Battalion, 6th Marines. Operating in such close proximity to local residents accomplished a number of tasks. Building relations with local Iraqis granted American forces valuable intelligence, allowing them to target insurgents, locate improvised explosives, and uncover safe houses and arms caches. The tactics also isolated insurgents from



locals, disrupting their freedom of maneuver and ability to operate.

Another important operational shift made by General Odierno was to focus as much effort on clearing the so-called Baghdad belts as on securing the capital itself. Extending about forty kilometers outside the capital, the belts were bands of rural, suburban, and light industrial areas that enveloped the city. A number of U.S. and Iraqi intelligence officials had contended that the reason insurgents and militias were able to continue staging attacks in Baghdad despite constant clearing efforts was that the extremist forces, when threatened, simply withdrew to bases outside Baghdad to regroup and rearm. A sketch of Baghdad and its surroundings recovered by U.S. forces in 2006 from an insurgent safe house confirmed this suspicion. Madhi Army forces passed through Husseiniyah on their way to Sadr City, the heavily Shi'ite district in northeastern Baghdad. Al-Qaeda in Iraq fighters approached from the north through towns such as At Taji, At Tarmiyah, and Ba'qubah. Other important positions included Al Yusufiyah and Al Latifiyah in the southwest and Salman Pak to the southeast. Here, insurgents could build improvised explosive devices, rally new recruits, plan future operations, and advance largely uninhibited into Baghdad itself. Thus, Baghdad would always be vulnerable unless the Coalition controlled the major roads and towns inside the belts (*Map 4*).

Consequently, the coalition commanders decided to distribute the incoming surge brigades across the capital and the surrounding area. Two of the surge brigades (2d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, and 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division) were attached to General Fil's 1st Cavalry Division in Baghdad. The remaining three deployed to the belts (the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division, in the north and the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, and 3d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, in the south). To control this expanded force, General Odierno created a new command designated Multi-National Division–Center (MND-C). Occupying territory to the south of Baghdad and initially in the area of responsibility of MND-B, the new MND-C also encompassed



Map 4

territory initially under the supervision of the MND-CS along the Iranian border. The responsibility for this new headquarters fell to the incoming 3d Infantry Division, commanded by General Lynch.

#### PRELUDE IN THE WEST: THE AL ANBAR AWAKENING

A central element of General Petraeus' plans for Iraq was the need to partner and coordinate with Iraqi forces. However, a major question emerging by the end of 2006 was which Iraqi forces? Many Sunnis felt the national security forces, such as the army and police, were illegitimate and pawns of the country's Shi'ite militias. Most were unwilling to cooperate with them and consequently often looked to insurgent organizations for protection.

A possible alternative approach emerged as coalition forces struggled to tame the volatile Al Anbar Province. The vast governorate, encompassing most of western Iraq, was a stronghold for Iraq's Sunnis and a center of the Sunni insurgency. The riverside towns that dotted the Euphrates, such as Hit, Hadithah, Ar Ramadi, and Al Fallujah, served as way stations and strongholds for insurgent fighters moving from Syria to Baghdad. Coalition forces had waged a multiyear campaign to clear the province of insurgent forces, fighting major battles in Al Fallujah in 2004 and Al Qa'im in 2005. However, despite constant security operations, the province appeared to be falling from coalition control. A 2006 intelligence report from MNF-W declared that "nearly all government institutions from the village to provincial level have disintegrated or have been thoroughly corrupted and infiltrated by AQI or criminal/insurgent gangs." That same year, AQI was calling Ar Ramadi, the provincial capital, the new capital of their Salafist caliphate.

However, AQI's aggressive campaign to reorder Al Anbar society alienated many Iraqis living in the region. Since 2005, many tribes in Al Anbar Province had been seeking to forge an alliance with the coalition forces operating in the region to fight al-Qaeda in Iraq. These overtures were often met with suspicion from coalition commanders, as many of the tribes were hostile to the

new Iraqi government and supported the anti-American insurgency. However, as the Sunni insurgency was largely co-opted by radical Islamists such as Zarqawi, the tribes found themselves under siege. Zarqawi's vision of a radical Islamist state had no room for traditional tribal culture. Furthermore, Zarqawi needed money to fuel his operations, and his organization fought the tribes to seize control of Al Anbar's smuggling networks in order to gain access to capital. Sheikhs relying on illegal trafficking to give them the capital needed to provide their tribes with patronage and work saw their power diminish in the face of AQI's aggressive onslaught. The organization also instituted Sharia law in areas under their control, and assassinated prominent sheikhs to intimidate the populace.

Beginning with the Abu Mahal tribe in Al Qa'im, the marines in Al Anbar began to cooperate with tribal groups in the fight against al-Qaeda in Iraq. However, little was done to build on the Abu Mahal alliance, as many commanders remained suspicious of tribal militias that had only recently been participating in the insurgency against the American forces. Meanwhile, the insurgency in Al Anbar continued to fester. Most troubling was the continued insurgent activity in the province's capital, Ar Ramadi, a city of 400,000 residents, which had remained largely outside coalition control since the invasion. Al-Qaeda in Iraq forces enjoyed remarkable freedom of movement throughout the city and the few Iraqi policemen in the city stayed in their stations, too afraid to venture out into the streets. As in Al Qa'im, tribal leaders had attempted to resist al-Qaeda in Iraq only to see their efforts collapse in the face of the organization's assassination campaigns.

By late 2005, many American small-unit commanders began to recognize that ignoring the tribes was counterproductive and potentially fueling the insurgency. The 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, an Army National Guard unit, undertook efforts to cooperate more closely with Ar Ramadi's tribal sheikhs. In need of jobs for the men in their tribes, the sheikhs sponsored police recruiting drives. AQI reprisals against these efforts only pushed the tribes further into the American camp. In May and

June 2006, the 2d Brigade was relieved by the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, commanded by Col. Sean B. MacFarland. General Casey gave MacFarland's brigade a daunting task: "Fix Ramadi but don't do a Fallujah." The Coalition's 2004 effort to clear the insurgent base in Al Fallujah had been a large, division-sized effort lasting several months and costing over 600 coalition casualties. MacFarland had significantly fewer resources and combat power to use for operations in Ar Ramadi. Nevertheless, he decided to immediately go on the offensive, clearing the city's southern area of insurgent forces and then establishing a series of combat outposts to secure his brigade's gains. The posts were jointly manned by U.S. soldiers and Iraqi Army units. However, MacFarland's brigade was too small to hold the entire city and its environs, a problem common to most U.S. combat units operating in Iraq at this time. Consequently, he chose to capitalize on efforts begun in early 2006 by the 2d Brigade, 28th Infantry Division, and continued by his own engagements officer, Capt. Travis Patriquin, to build an alliance with the local tribes in the region, in particular the Albu Risha and Albu Dhiyab. As with many of Al Anbar's tribes, these tribes had been unable to prevent AQI from displacing their economic interests and authority. After many hours of meetings over tea in which the sheikhs frequently seemed to talk about everything but the insurgency, MacFarland and his staff were able to convince the tribal leaders that the Americans intended to stay and were willing and eager to work with them to clear Ar Ramadi of al-Qaeda in Iraq.

By September, the majority of the tribes of Ar Ramadi, under the leadership of Sheikh Abdul Sattar al-Rishawi, proclaimed the Al Anbar Awakening and committed themselves to the struggle to expel al-Qaeda in Iraq from the province. Significantly, Sheikh Sattar was able to convince other tribes and insurgent organizations such as the 1920 Revolution Brigades to join his alliance. With the assistance of the tribes, MacFarland's brigade was able to press the offensive throughout the city, largely securing it by the end of the year. Although insurgents continued to operate in the city, the brigade and their Iraqi police allies achieved

remarkable success. Between the time MacFarland's brigade arrived in Ar Ramadi in July 2006 and January 2007, indirect-fire attacks dropped 67 percent, IED attacks declined 57 percent, and daily attack averages were down 38 percent. Weapons cache finds jumped over 1,000 percent because of the now robust and expanded local police force. Once inside the city, coalition forces undertook humanitarian and civic rebuilding projects.

Nevertheless, the Awakening movement sparked mixed reactions on the part of senior U.S. commanders and Iraqi leaders. Visiting MacFarland's command on 25 September, General Casey stated that the Coalition needed to "figure out if these guys are real or not." Because Sattar and his allies were relatively low-level sheikhs, American commanders had some doubts about what influence they actually held. MNF-W Commander Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Walter E. Gaskin Sr. was skeptical of the Awakening sheikhs, believing that the leaders with real influence were in Jordan. Prime Minister Maliki, perennially concerned about potential Sunni threats to his predominantly Shi'ite government, was also wary of what the Coalition was doing in Al Anbar. Colonel MacFarland expressed frustration with the lack of recognition his brigade's efforts were receiving, telling a marine field historian in 2006 that "it's amazing how little of our story gets out as far as Baghdad."

One leader who did notice MacFarland's efforts was the newly installed commander of MNF-I. Within days of arriving in Iraq in February 2007, General Petraeus took a tour of Colonel MacFarland's area of responsibility, and was impressed with the brigade's results. The 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, had not only devised a new and effective approach for securing Al Anbar, but had also presented a possible means for reducing violence throughout the country. MacFarland's Ar Ramadi campaign brought together many disparate threads: aggressive actions against insurgent fighters, coordination with local Iraqi forces, operations inside major urban areas among the people, and civil affairs activities. However, for all the operation's efficacy, some points of concern remained. The Awakening militias were hardly committed partisans of liberal democracy. "We fought like outlaws,

and that's why we began to beat [the extremists]," recalled Sheikh Hamid al-Hais, a tribal leader from the Ar Ramadi region. "You have to abide by the law if you're an American, even if you're an American in Iraq. We were not bound by any laws in the fight we started with al-Qaeda." Furthermore, although the tribal fighters had enrolled in the Iraqi police forces, many sheikhs still looked at the government in Baghdad with suspicion. Despite these risks, Petraeus saw in Ar Ramadi a blueprint on which the coalition forces could model future counterinsurgency operations.

## THE BATTLE FOR BAGHDAD I: FARDH AL-QANOON

For all the Coalition's achievements in Ar Ramadi, the key to success in the surge campaign remained securing Baghdad. The effort would involve two lines of effort. The first, Operation FARDH AL-QANOON, called for the 1st Cavalry Division to reduce violence in the city itself. The second, code-named PHANTOM THUNDER,<sup>1</sup> would focus on securing the Baghdad belts, with the 3d Infantry Division operating in the south and the 25th Infantry Division working to secure the north. The plan called for a level of coordination that had been missing from earlier coalition campaign plans, which tended to focus on a single, major objective such as Al Fallujah at the expense of other regions, thus allowing insurgent forces to withdraw and regroup.

Baghdad was a massive urban center of about 5 million residents. The multiethnic city, marked by numerous neighborhoods where Sunni Arabs and Shi'ites had lived side by side, had become a center of bloody violence as extremist forces undertook aggressive ethnic-cleansing campaigns to clear neighborhoods of rival sectarian groups. Extrajudicial killings were frequent, as militias carried out reprisal attacks against Iraqis based on religious affiliation, with Sunni

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1. Odierno's headquarters, III Corps, had acquired the nickname "Phantom Corps" during World War II. It had begun the practice of naming major operations beginning with the word "Phantom" in 2004 when it designated the effort to retake Fallujah Operation PHANTOM FURY.





A street following the detonation of a car bomb in Haswa.

rejectionists targeting Shi'ites, Shi'ite militias attacking Sunnis, and AQI fighters staging spectacular terrorist attacks to further stoke sectarian violence. Kidnapping for ransom was another common tactic. Civil order and public works collapsed, and government service workers, fearful for their lives, stopped reporting for work. In some neighborhoods, such as Doura, trash piled up on roadsides and raw sewage flowed down the streets and into homes. Electricity had to be rationed, and was only available for a few hours a day. Baghdad's mixed neighborhoods consequently emerged as the centers of violent activity. In light of this bloodshed, it was not difficult for extremist groups to claim that the Iraqi government had lost complete control over its capital.

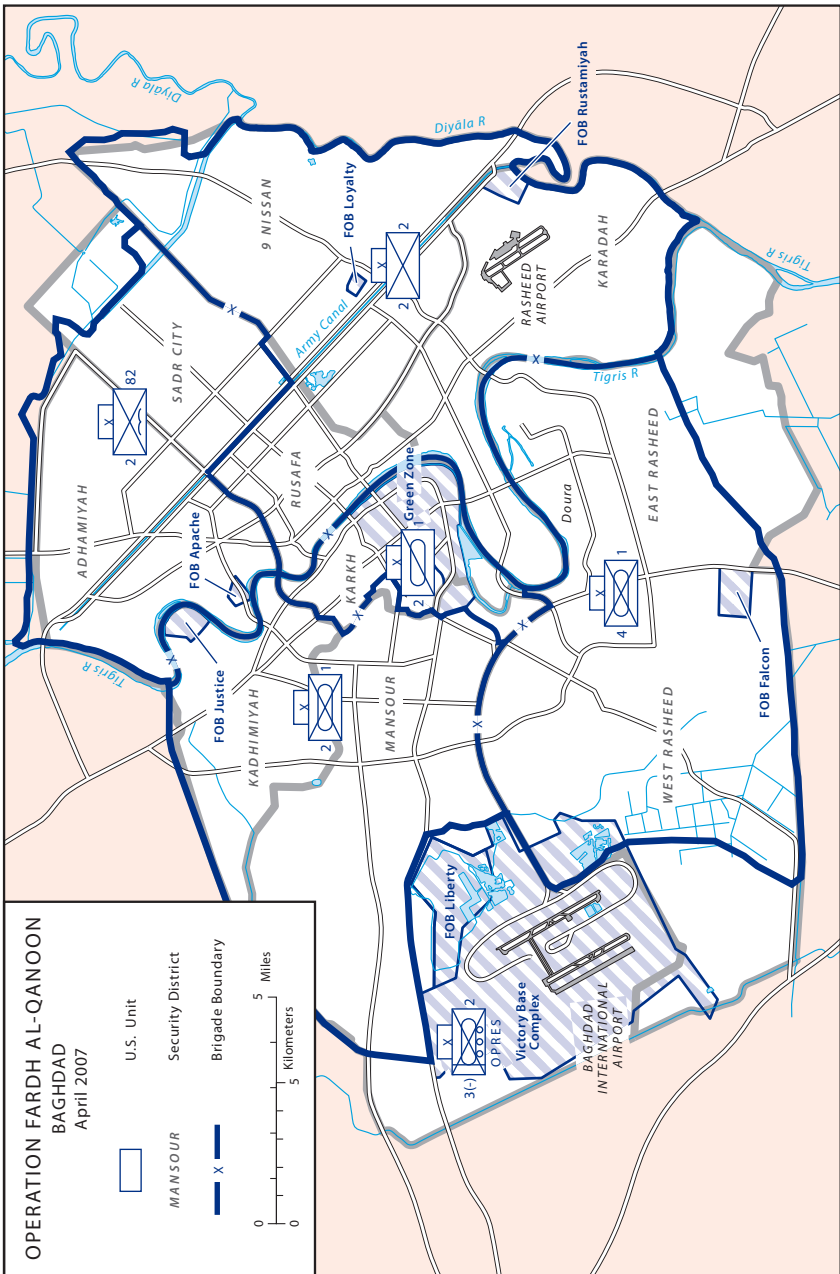
Exacerbating the problem was the sense that the Iraqi government was complicit in ethnic-cleansing operations designed to drive Sunnis out of Baghdad. Col. James B. Burton, whose 2d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, held responsibility for northwest Baghdad, observed that "I truly believe that there was a sectarian-motivated denial of essential services to large portions of the Sunni



population in northwest Baghdad. . . . In the Sunni areas, they're marginally operating to failing because the government had yet to push forward any formal effort that I can see to deliver essential services equitably across northwest Baghdad."

General Fil's 1st Cavalry Division consisted of five brigade combat teams, each of which was assigned a sector of the city to secure and stabilize. Colonel Burton's 2d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, was stationed in the northwestern Mansour and Kadhimiyah districts. The 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, commanded by Col. Ricky D. Gibbs, took up positions to the south of its sister brigade in the Rasheed District. Col. Bryan T. Roberts' 2d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, occupied central Baghdad. Operations in southeast Baghdad were the responsibility of the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division, commanded by Col. Jeffrey L. Bannister. Finally, Col. Billy Don Farris' 2d Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, took over northeast Baghdad, an area that included the volatile militant Shi'ite stronghold district of Sadr City. Col. Stephen J. Townsend's 3d Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division, a Stryker unit, served as both the Multi-National Division–Baghdad quick-reaction strike force and the MNC-I operational reserve (*Map 5*).

The division's mission was broad: reduce sectarian violence, destroy extremist forces, and strengthen the Iraqi armed forces. To carry out these objectives, MND-B based coalition forces inside the major population areas at battalion-sized joint security stations and smaller, company- and platoon-sized combat outposts. These austere positions, consisting of the barest facilities and amenities, were designed to ensure that Iraqis would have daily contact with U.S. troops. They allowed American troops to gain a sense of the local society, acquire valuable intelligence on the communities they were charged with securing, and give them a rapid response capability against extremist attacks. MND-B divided the city into security districts, with each one served by a joint security station or combat outpost. An important operative word in the approach was "joint," as Iraqi and American forces



Map 5

would both occupy the various positions. Each post contained a mix of coalition units, Iraqi military units, and Iraqi police units. This forced them to work together, and proved mutually beneficial. By working with Americans, Iraqi security forces acquired advantageous training and combat experience. In turn, American forces were able to draw on the Iraqi troops' knowledge of the local community and society, and gain valuable intelligence. As the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne, reported after the surge, with "the [brigade combat team's] combat forces located in their area operations, they were able to conduct dismounted patrols from these locations, reacted fast to time sensitive targets, and developed relationships with the neighborhoods they occupied."

The American decision to shift overall missions from transitioning security responsibilities to the Iraqis to taking over the mission of providing security inside the country's major urban centers required units to retrain and reorient their posture in the field. The majority of U.S. forces in Iraq had already been in the country several months before the Bush administration chose to change commanders and strategy. The 25th Infantry Division, for example, had received its orders to deploy in late 2005 and consequently focused its predeployment training on implementing General Casey's transition strategy. However, within months of its arrival the division now had to shift gears in order to surge "combat forces into Iraq in a bid to increase security and head off a possible civil war." First Lt. David Stroud, a platoon leader with Company B, 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry Regiment, from the 3d Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division, bluntly noted that "an overwhelming majority of the platoon said nothing they did back at Fort Lewis remotely compared to the missions and hardships they have endured in Iraq." Even the surge brigades, such as the 2d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, had to quickly adapt to the new mission.

The FARDH AL-QANOON actions were characterized by dismounted patrolling, intelligence gathering, raids against insurgent hideouts, and other combat operations against extremist fighters. Lt. Col. James R. Crid-

er, whose 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, operated in southwest Baghdad under the command of 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, deployed “two platoons on the streets 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.” Crider’s soldiers took photos of every military-aged male they encountered and visited every home in their patrol area, speaking to residents to determine who exactly lived in the neighborhood and who was an outsider. The tactic not only helped the battalion to compose a census of its area of operations, but also created a closer connection between local residents and the Americans. Recognizing that the Americans would be maintaining a constant presence in the area, locals felt more comfortable providing information to soldiers, as many were no longer fearful of reprisal at-



Department of Defense

Soldiers from Battery A, 2d Battalion, 319th Field Artillery Regiment, 2d Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, conduct a joint patrol with Iraqi policemen in Baghdad’s Adhamiyah District on 17 February 2007, during the opening days of Operation FARDH AL-QANOON.

tacks should their assistance be discovered by extremists. Capt. Nicholas Cook, a member of Crider's squadron, recalled, "We sat down with them [Iraqi civilians] in the kitchen and just talked with them. . . . As soon as we did that, we started building trust, and we inundated the community with tip cards." Significantly, the joint stations also stood as symbols to local Iraqis that U.S. forces would not withdraw immediately after they had cleared an area of insurgents. General Odierno recalled that "attitudes changed when the first concrete walls of a coalition patrol base were erected. The protective barriers were an indicator of our intent to stay and conduct sustained operations among the populace."

Despite the increase in U.S. forces, many Iraqis remained wary of being seen out in the open working with the Americans. One resident of the Mansour District recalled that,

I was very scared about the whole thing. The Americans had just established a combat outpost very near my house, and I knew signing up for the Awakening would probably involve coming and going from there. Anyone could see you. Our neighborhood was still mixed, with Sunnis and Shi'ites. Both the Mahdi Army and al-Qaeda operated in the neighborhood. Either one might come to kill you for working with the Americans.

As they acquired more intelligence from Baghdad's residents, Crider and other battalion commanders soon discovered just how much sectarian antipathy was fueling violence and hostility in the city. Distrust fed criminal activity, and in some neighborhoods, such as Doura, Sunni residents bought supplies on the black market rather than risk having to cross police checkpoints. So many Sunnis in Colonel Crider's area viewed the Iraqi police as nothing more than a state-sanctioned, Shi'ite militia that Crider left his partnered Iraqi units at the security posts. Thus, many Sunni Arabs came to trust the Americans more as honest brokers than they did

the Shi'ite-dominated government and security institutions. A platoon leader from Company B, 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry Regiment, 1st Lt. Charlie Parsons, recalled that locals tended to trust the coalition forces more, and recommended leaving "the Iraqi Army out of collecting intel."

Nevertheless, the relationship between U.S. soldiers and Iraqis was not always harmonious. Lieutenant Parsons noted, for example, that his soldiers often had to be wary around local Iraqis: "Watch locals preparing chai (tea) or drinking it with you to be sure it is not drugged." Parson's further recommended:

Be firm but friendly with local nationals. Remember they are not all the enemy. Most are just too scared and do not have the guts to tell you the information they have. Some may share their intel with you after building a relationship, as this worked with us in Shula and Baquoba (*sic*) several times. Some may always be too scared to give you intel, so you will need to cuff them and threat to detain them, for them to give up the intel they do have. Iraqis respect authority. Demonstrate you are in charge, not Al-Qaeda or militia groups.

Parson's fellow platoon leader, Lieutenant Stroud, believed that a delicate balance needed to exist when working with both Iraqi soldiers and interacting with the Iraqi people. "Don't allow heavily Shia units to work alone or unattended in a predominantly Sunni area unless they have established a good reputation with you or someone else." Petty theft was another problem. Stroud bluntly noted, "The Iraqi soldiers are going to steal." He recommended that teams conducting clearing operations always have an equal number of Iraqis and Americans, and cautioned Americans to keep their eyes on their Iraqi partners. Yet, U.S. soldiers also needed to be cautious when dealing with civilians accusing Iraqi soldiers of robbing them. "Sometimes the complaint is legitimate, but sometimes local nationals are trying to extort money from Coalition



Forces.” An American carrying out a clearing operation thus often needed to pay close attention to the Iraqi soldiers he was partnered with and the civilians who he was protecting while also being prepared to fight extremist fighters and being on the lookout for improvised explosive devices. The experience of both lieutenants underscored the myriad of challenges of operating in a densely populated area and relying on locals for support and intelligence.

Ultimately, security had to take precedence over forcing reconciliation. In a controversial move, beginning in the spring of 2007 the Coalition acceded to local Sunni requests to build concrete barriers around their neighborhoods in Iraq. The first effort began in the Al Ghazaliyah neighborhood and was undertaken by Colonel Burton’s 2d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. The construction provoked a public backlash from the Iraqi and international press, as well as from Maliki’s government—although it encouraged the effort in private. The construction of concrete walls seemed to be an admission that the extremist efforts to ethnically cleanse the city had succeeded in destroying the city’s multiethnic, multisectarian character. However, the impact of the barriers was immediate and significantly reduced the levels of violence in the capital. Al Ghazaliyah alone witnessed a 50 percent drop in murders following the construction of the barriers.

By channeling vehicle traffic away from major squares, mosques, and marketplaces, the barricades blunted the effectiveness of car bombs. A good example was a wall erected between the Adhamiya community and the Shi’ite stronghold of Sadr City, in northeastern Baghdad. The 2d Brigade, 82d Airborne, established three entry points, each one manned by Iraqi security forces. They kept Shi’ite militias out and prevented Sunni extremists from leaving the neighborhood. The barriers produced dramatic results; murders in Adhamiya dropped from one hundred in December 2006 to twenty in June 2007, with further decreases throughout the brigade’s deployment. In light of the severe restrictions placed on the Americans regarding



operations in Sadr City, the decision to enclose the Ad-hamiya district was a regrettable but ultimately effective means of curtailing violent activity between the two neighborhoods.

While methodical and persistent patrolling through heavily populated areas was the hallmark of Operation FARDH AL-QANOON, the struggle for Baghdad was nevertheless still marked by intense combat. The increase in American forces in the city provoked a ferocious response from al-Qaeda in Iraq and militia fighters, and the U.S. forces frequently found themselves drawing on their expertise and training in conventional, small-unit combat to defeat the enemy forces. Indeed, many veterans of the surge campaign found that, for all the talk of protecting the people, providing humanitarian aid, and carrying out civil-military projects, the fight for Baghdad was much more about locating and killing enemy fighters. Maj. Jesse Pearson, the operations officer for 1st Battalion, 23d Infantry Regiment recalled:

We were most effective when we focused primarily on finding and killing the enemy. A key effective shaping effort was establishing restrictive population control measures. When we focused our efforts primarily on lethal targeting of enemy militias and insurgent cells, we reduced threats against our forces and gained the most ground with local nationals that we were attempting to influence.

Pearson further noted that by carrying out those types of operations more commonly associated with winning hearts and minds, such as nonlethal targeting, engaging local leaders, and humanitarian aid, that “threats against us and attacks on our units seemed to increase.”

The account of a particularly violent firefight along Baghdad’s Haifa Street by a company commander from the same battalion gives a sense of the intensity of the combat that troops faced. “I had one platoon and my [fire support officer] in an 8 story building and my other platoons screening/isolating to the south. We kept receiving fire from an area and could not neutralize the

threat. I called for fire on the area with our [battalion] Mortars and Fired for Effect after a 1 round adjust.” With the area cleared, the company advanced and immediately came under fire from enemy forces stationed near a mosque, necessitating another call for fire support that neutralized the insurgent threat.

The shift from transitioning to securing the population centers necessitated major logistical shifts. Before the surge, barracks, field feeding, and distribution operations had been largely centralized around the large forward operating bases outside the cities, with logistical assets located at the brigade, division, and corps levels. The perennial dearth of troops also meant that contractors such as Kellogg Brown & Root took on greater responsibility over billeting, fuel, and food as a part of the Army’s Logistics Civil Augmentation Program. As more dining facilities were taken over by contractors, unit food specialists transferred to security and quick-reaction units. The centralization of the Army’s logistical functions on the forward operating bases diminished the ability of brigade support battalions to provide feeding services in the field.

This system was not well-suited to the type of operations General Petraeus wanted to carry out, however. The general’s security-centric approach required smaller units dispersed across a wider geographic area. Unfortunately, as the surge began, units such as the 115th Support Battalion lacked the adequate number of personnel and equipment to carry out many distribution operations. Relying on forward operating bases also meant that units at the outposts and security stations lacked tents and climate-control equipment, necessities when operating in Iraq’s oppressive heat.

Furthermore, troops, companies, and platoons needed to plan far in advance for any supply issues that might emerge down the line. Sometimes such forward planning was not possible, however, and soldiers often had to look to Iraqi contractors to handle immediate logistics problems. The 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, based in the Baghdad suburb of At Taji, came to rely on contractors for electricity and for the equipment and labor

needed to construct the new joint security stations and outposts. Relying on local contractors often had a beneficial effect, however, as the construction projects helped to spur sorely needed economic activity and development.

Transporting supplies to a greater number of locations inside urban areas was another logistical challenge. Roadside bombs were a perennial threat to coalition convoys. Spreading U.S. units across a wider geographic range in order to carry out the new security approach put transports at even greater risk. In the course of its deployment from 2006 to 2007, the 15th Sustainment Brigade carried out over 6,500 patrols and encountered “40 incidents involving detonated and found improvised explosive devices (IEDs), more than 50 attacks by small-arms fire, and 25 direct-fire actions.” The 1st Brigade Combat Team, 34th Infantry Division, an Army National Guard formation responsible for cross-border convoy duty into Iraq, conducted over 10,000 one-way missions covering 3,968,000 kilometers. IED attacks during those missions led to 106 wounded and 10 killed in action. To counter these attacks, support units altered their routes and schedules to avoid setting any kind of predictable patterns. The 1st Cavalry Division’s Combat Aviation Brigade also proved to be a valuable logistics asset, as its helicopters ferried over 13,000 pallets throughout Baghdad. The use of aircraft cut the number of ground convoys by 250.

Operation FARDH AL-QANOON dramatically altered the physical and social landscape of Baghdad. While it further propelled the city’s division into homogenous ethnic and sectarian communities, separating the various groups and asserting control over the population allowed the Coalition to reduce incidences of violent attacks. However, the city remained a volatile place. The number of Iraqis killed in Baghdad had also shown signs of declining in the fall of 2005, only to rapidly rise again following a large-scale terror attack such as the Al-Askari Mosque bombing of February 2006. General Odierno’s headquarters recognized that reducing violence in Baghdad proper would not be enough as long




as so-called accelerants to violence—such as fighters, supplies, and bombs—could continue to enter the city via the Baghdad belts.

## THE BATTLE FOR BAGHDAD II: OPERATION PHANTOM THUNDER

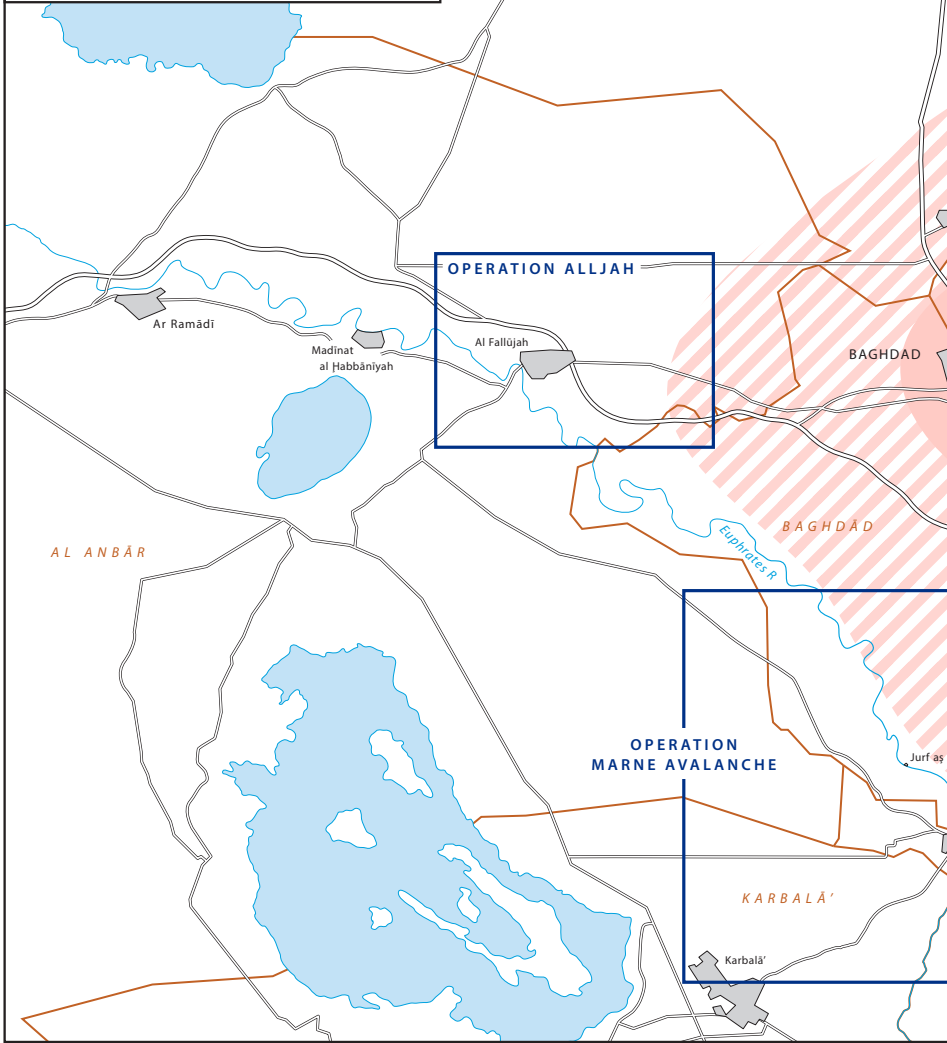
As the final surge force, the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, arrived in Iraq in May 2007, MNC-I launched a major offensive to secure the country's capital. The plan, code-named PHANTOM THUNDER, included three simultaneous efforts to clear the Baghdad belts of insurgent forces. Operation ARROWHEAD RIPPER, carried out by the 25th Infantry Division, would clear Ba'qubah and fortify the Diyala Province, a persistent center of Sunni extremist activity and an al-Qaeda in Iraq base northeast of the capital city. Concurrently, the 3d Infantry Division would carry out Operation MARNE TORCH in the southern belt. The II Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) would also launch Operation ALLJAH to target insurgent forces to Baghdad's west (*Map 6*).

Ba'qubah and Diyala Province had long been a center of insurgent activity. The U.S. forces received a grim reminder of this shortly after the start of the surge campaign when insurgents opened fire on two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters from the 1st Battalion, 131st Aviation Regiment, an Army National Guard unit, on the afternoon of 20 January 2007. The battalion was a part of the 36th Combat Aviation Brigade, which was serving as the MNC-I's primary aviation arm, transporting the III Corps staff throughout Iraq. The insurgent fire struck one of the helicopters, forcing it down. The Black Hawk burst into flames on impact. The second Black Hawk quickly landed and the soldiers aboard engaged the attacking insurgents. With the support of two more Black Hawks, U.S. forces secured the crash site and killed three and captured one enemy fighter. Tragically, the entire complement aboard the downed Black Hawk (four crew and eight passengers) died in the crash. Ten of the twelve lost were from the Army National Guard, making 20 January 2007 one of the deadliest days for the Guard during the Iraq War.

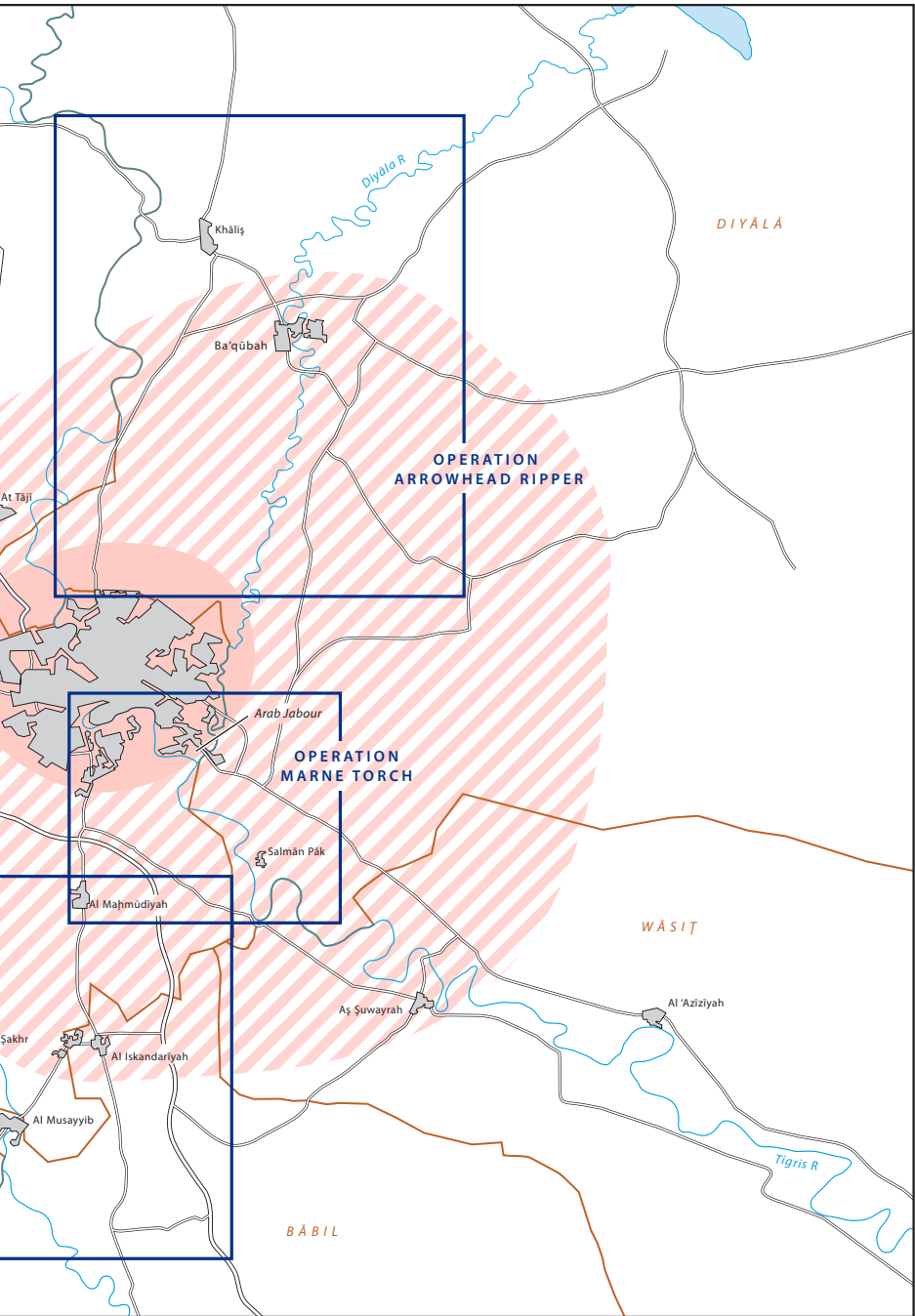
**OPERATION PHANTOM THUNDER**  
16 June–14 August 2007

-  Operational Area
-  Inner Cordon
-  Baghdad Belts

0 20 Miles  
0 20 Kilometers



Map 6



The success of FARDH AL-QANOON and the Al Anbar Awakening only increased the need to secure the river valley. The Coalition's security operations in the capital city made Baghdad into an increasingly inhospitable place for AQI. Squeezed out of the capital, the insurgent cells regrouped around Ba'qubah. An important commercial hub connecting Baghdad with Iran, Ba'qubah was split in two by the Diyala River, a tributary of the Tigris. Like Baghdad, its population was a mix of Sunni Arabs and Shi'ites, making it a particularly volatile place as al-Qaeda in Iraq and other Sunni organizations fought with Shi'ite militias to purge the city of their opposing sect. Criminal gangs, eager to exploit the lack of order, freely roamed the streets. By the spring of 2007 the city had become a veritable ghost town, where few of its nearly 300,000 inhabitants, including the city's police force, dared venture outside, for fear of being killed or kidnapped. Al-Qaeda in Iraq had also taken advantage of the collapse of civil order, using its management of public works and the distribution of food to control the city's inhabitants.

The city and surrounding Diyala Province lay in the area of operations of MND-N (25th Infantry Division). Responsibility for security in the city and province fell to the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. As was so often the case, the brigade lacked the manpower needed to clear the city, hold it, and conduct operations throughout the rest of Diyala. The only unit in the area, stationed about five kilometers outside the city at Forward Operating Base Warhorse, was the brigade's 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. Morris T. Goins. Recognizing the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, needed more forces in the region, General Odierno detached Lt. Col. Bruce P. Antonia's 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment from Colonel Townsend's 3d Brigade, a Stryker unit, and ordered it north to reinforce Goins in March 2007.

However, the expanded task force was still not enough to clear the entire city of AQI fighters. An answer to the U.S. dilemma came from Iraqis living in the area. As the Coalition worked to secure the city, Diyala be-



came one of the first locations outside of Al Anbar to see a concerted effort by Sunni Arabs to turn on al-Qaeda in Iraq and ally themselves with the Americans. Throughout the winter and spring of 2007, U.S. soldiers operating in the region began to observe internecine fighting between insurgent groups. As in Al Anbar, al-Qaeda in Iraq's aggressive tactics and radical social and religious agenda alienated many locals, and many looked to the Americans for support and supplies. Unsure of how much trust to put in these new volunteers, considering that some were members of insurgent groups like the 1920 Revolution Brigades, the Americans nevertheless accepted their aid in searching out IEDs and al-Qaeda in Iraq fighters. Given the name "Kit Carson Scouts,"<sup>2</sup> the Iraqi volunteers provided the Americans in Diyala with benefits similar to the U.S. alliance with the tribal sheikhs in Al Anbar. Thanks to the assistance of these new allies, the two battalions operating in the city were able to clear and secure Ba'qubah's eastern districts over the course of the spring of 2007.

Despite these new allies, American forces in the city still lacked the combat power required to sweep the city's western neighborhoods, a hub of al-Qaeda in Iraq operations. Once again, General Odierno looked to the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division, a Stryker unit, and in May ordered Colonel Townsend to move out with the remainder of his forces from Baghdad to Ba'qubah. The operation to finally clear the city's western districts, to begin in June, was given the code name ARROWHEAD RIPPER.<sup>3</sup>

In selecting the Stryker unit to take the lead, General Odierno had chosen one of the most battle-hardened combat units in Iraq, having already served

2. The term came from a Vietnam War program in which U.S. forces recruited Viet Cong who had defected to the South Vietnamese and American side to serve as intelligence guides. The Marine Corps commander who originated the program chose to name the defectors after the famous U.S. scout Kit Carson.

3. The name was chosen to recognize the different units participating in the operation. The overall division headquarters directing the operation, the 25th Infantry Division, had carried out Operation RIPPER during the Korean War. The 3d Brigade Combat Team, 2d Infantry Division, was nicknamed the "arrowhead" brigade.

in theater for twelve months. The Strykers' networked capabilities and light armored vehicles allowed the Coalition to compensate for the perennial dearth in force numbers, and the units were readily deployed as an operational reserve and quick reaction force for difficult clearing missions. In the twelve months before the battle to clear Ba'qubah, the brigade had served in Al Qayyarah, Mosul, Tall 'Afar, At Taji, Karbala, An Najaf, and Baghdad and had operated in three different division areas of operation. In total, the Stryker brigade had conducted eleven brigade-sized offensive operations, a remarkable testament to its rugged versatility.

Operation ARROWHEAD RIPPER began on 19 June 2007, as the remainder of the 3d Brigade Combat Team advanced north from Baghdad. Meanwhile, blocking units were lifted by helicopter to the city's south and west to cordon off the town and make sure insurgents would be unable to escape. The Stryker brigade then advanced directly into the city. There they encountered whole blocks of houses rigged to explode, and it soon became clear that al-Qaeda in Iraq's strategy was to force U.S. troops to take cover in these houses, which the fighters would then detonate, maximizing the number of American casualties they could inflict. Over the course of a week, Townsend's brigade methodically cleared the city's western half using the full arsenal at its disposal: the firepower from his soldiers and vehicles, drones, guided missiles, and artillery. Enemy casualties included 100 killed and 424 captured, and the Coalition also successfully uncovered about 250 roadside bombs.

By July, Ba'qubah was largely clear of insurgents, although because of its damaged infrastructure important supplies such as wheat needed to be shipped north under escort from Baghdad. To lay the foundations for future reconciliation and security, Colonel Townsend initiated a robust and energetic civil affairs program. As Townsend's deputy, Lt. Col. Frederick L. Johnson noted, "3-2 SBCT had to ensure life was better after the attack than (*sic*) it was when al-Qaeda in Iraq dominated the city. If not, citizens would have no reason to risk the lives of their families to insurgent death squads, whom

the populace believed could infiltrate to exact revenge for supporting the Coalition Forces (CF) and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).”

Operation ARROWHEAD RIPPER demonstrated that the Awakening could expand beyond Al Anbar to other regions of Iraq. Despite anxiety on the part of the Iraqi government, General Petraeus continued to support the efforts of his brigade and battalion commanders to build alliances with Iraq’s tribal militias and former insurgent groups. Al Anbar was far enough from Baghdad that Maliki was willing to sanction those efforts, but Diyala Province—a mixed Shi’ite and Sunni region close to the capital—was a different matter. Nevertheless, Petraeus, Odierno, and their field commanders were not about to pass up the opportunity to forge an anti-al-Qaeda in Iraq alliance, especially if it meant bringing more Iraqis



U.S. Army Spec. William McGrath (left) and Spec. Daniel Brothers launch a grenade against an insurgent position after coming under fire in Bihriz, Iraq, just south of Ba’qubah, in February 2007. The soldiers were part of the 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 3d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division.

to the Coalition's side. To mask the fact that organizations that had once been openly hostile to U.S. forces were now fighting alongside them, MNF-I and MNC-I spelled out a series of specific instructions to govern how the new alliances would work. First, the Coalition deployed a range of euphemisms to avoid the inference that it was empowering nonstate militias. These included Concerned Local Citizens, Sons of Iraq, the aforementioned Kit Carson Scouts, and Ba'qubah Guardians. It also instituted strict rules regarding how such forces should be deployed. For example, while a group of Sons of Iraq could provide coalition forces with actionable intelligence, they would not participate in combat operations. Recognizing the critical importance these new alliances represented, General Petraeus ordered the creation of a Multi-National Force–Iraq Strategic Engagement Cell to better organize and exploit potential reconciliation efforts.

The effects of the Awakening could also be felt in Baghdad itself. The 2d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, responsible for operations in the capital's northeastern districts, confronted a restive Sunni populace frustrated by the increase in Iraqi security force checkpoints around the local hospital. Although the ISF had created the checkpoints to bar insurgent fighters from obtaining medical care, the presence of Shi'ite dominated military forces controlling access to health facilities seemed to only confirm the worst fears of many Sunnis that the Iraqi military was carrying out a sectarian campaign of discrimination. To counteract this perception, the brigade's Task Force 1-26 began training local Sunnis to man the checkpoints in June. The 3d Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment, and 2d Battalion, 319th Field Artillery Regiment, also made concerted efforts to hire locals for security purposes, with each formation hiring 700 and 695 local citizens, respectively. By August, local Sunni forces began undertaking actions against insurgent fighters in the brigade's area of operations.

In the southern belt, the American combat forces that began Operation MARNE TORCH in mid-June also found themselves confronting the question of how to deploy

Iraqi volunteers. The 3d Infantry Division's commander, General Lynch, was wary of enlisting the aid of former insurgents, many of whom had until recently been targeting and killing Americans. Although he established a reconciliation cell within his command, he was firm in his resolve that Sons of Iraq groups would not participate in joint combat operations. "There are two lines we won't cross. We won't arm them or give them ammunition. Also, we won't support them in any fight against al-Qaeda. They can give us the intel and we will fight al-Qaeda." Nevertheless, his subordinate, Col. Michael M. Kershaw, whose 2d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, was conducting operations in the region known as the Triangle of Death, energetically pursued alliances with Sons of Iraq volunteers, relying on them for intelligence on AQI operations.

One issue that Lynch confronted was the need for his division to establish a firm presence in its area of operations before reconciliation efforts could even begin. Consequently, Lynch's operations were much more aggressive and relied on a significant amount of firepower to root out al-Qaeda from the southern belt. The general told his soldiers, "This is all about killing and capturing bad guys. Later we can do area security. So use anything you can to hit him in the nose. Once he is back on his heels, then we can worry about the population."

Operation MARNE TORCH focused on neutralizing the town of Arab Jabour as an al-Qaeda in Iraq hub and staging zone in order to prevent insurgent forces and material from moving into Baghdad. The operation drew on the full combat power of Lynch's division: the 3d Infantry Division's 2d and 3d Brigade Combat Teams; the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division; and, the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division. The 2d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, would focus on clearing Arab Jabour itself, with the main effort falling to the brigade's 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment. The 3d Brigade, operating to the east on the other side of the Tigris, would target insurgent fighters fleeing Arab Jabour across the river in private boats.

The operation commenced on 16 June with an air strike against Arab Jabour conducted by Air Force B-1B bombers. Following the strike, the 1st Battalion, 30th Infantry Regiment, and 1st Squadron, 40th Cavalry Regiment, advanced into and around the town, clearing insurgents and ensuring that they could neither escape nor be reinforced. By 23 June the 2d Brigade had secured a foothold in the town. General Lynch expanded the operation to the west on 20 June, launching a series of assaults against insurgent hide-outs with a combined force consisting of the 2d Brigade, 10th Mountain Division, and the 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division. In turn, the 3d Brigade Combat Team, as it continued to block escape routes across the Tigris to its west, moved forces to the east in a region called Duraiya, south of Salman Pak. There, elements of the brigade encountered Shi'ite fighters from the Mahdi Army, a reminder that Sunni extremists were not the Americans' only enemy.

Operation MARNE TORCH, which ended in mid-July, led to a significant drop in enemy activity in the region as extremist groups fled Arab Jabour. General Lynch then immediately turned his attention to his southwestern flank in the Euphrates valley north of Karbala, around the towns of Jurf as Sakhr and Al Iskandariyah. The area was an important waypoint for fighters and weapons traveling to and from Al Anbar Province, and Lynch consequently ordered Operation MARNE AVALANCHE to clear the region. The unit responsible for carrying out the effort, the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, conducted ten company-sized operations to neutralize the area as an AQI base, leading to a nearly 50 percent drop in insurgent attacks between June and July. In a testament to the importance of advancing against AQI on multiple fronts, a major turning point in the MARNE AVALANCHE effort occurred not in the Euphrates valley, but in southern Baghdad, where the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, captured Abu Bakr, the leader of the insurgent forces in the Jurf as Sakhr area.





Soldiers from 2d Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment, 3d Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, climb a wall during a cordon and search operation in the Rusafa District on 19 June 2007.

As MND-N and MND-C worked to clear the belts, the Coalition also continued to take the fight to extremist groups in the west. Northwest of Baghdad, the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, secured the belt town of At Taji and its environs. In Al Anbar, the Marine Corps' Regimental Combat Team 6 pushed east into the town of Al Karmah while other Marine units secured Lake Tharthar. The 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3d Infantry Division, which had relieved MacFarland's brigade at Ar Ramadi, continued reconciliation efforts and continued to restore order to Al Anbar's capital city.

Fighting coalition forces on multiple fronts, al-Qaeda in Iraq found it more and more difficult to regroup and



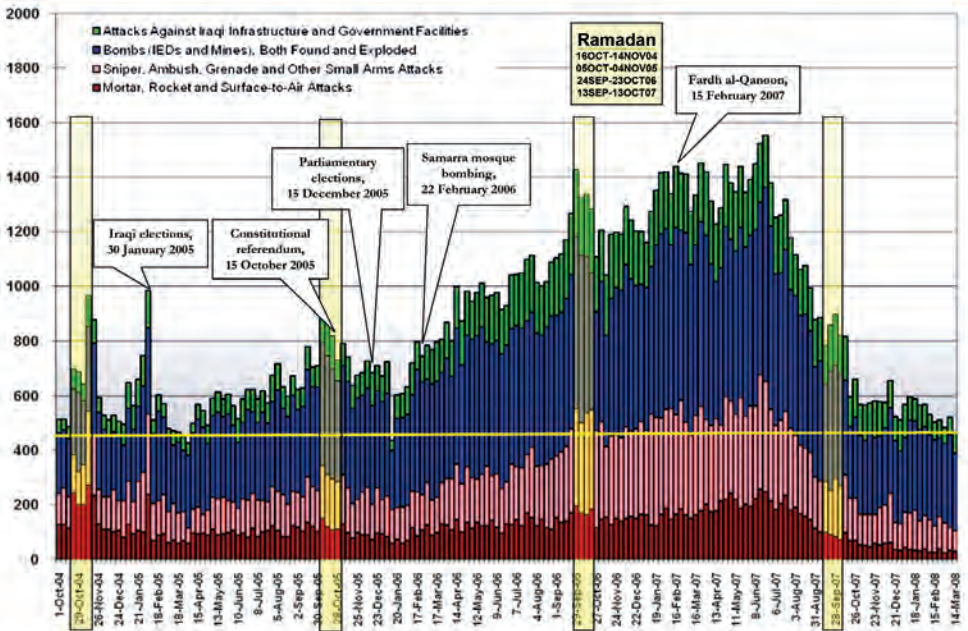
reorganize. Brought into the open, the insurgents became targets for coalition special operators who were able to acquire valuable intelligence through their raids. Before the campaign, the Special Operations Forces in Iraq, consisting of elements from the various service special operations commands, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the British Special Air Service, had often operated independently from the conventional units, sometimes conducting raids in areas without informing the local commanders on the ground. By 2007, Lt. Gen. Stanley J. McChrystal's Joint Special Operations Command Task Force had fine-tuned its operational approach, effectively synchronizing its reconnaissance and analysis efforts to ensure targeted raids took out the most prominent and influential extremist leaders in both al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Shi'ite militias and acquired valuable intelligence in the process. A key weapon of McChrystal's arsenal was the MQ-1 Predator unmanned vehicle, a lethal airframe that afforded the special operators a valuable reconnaissance capability. Their increased effectiveness during the surge demonstrated the need to couple conventional and special operations during a counterinsurgency.

By the summer of 2007, many observers detected a shift in the war in the Coalition's favor. The spring and summer campaigns had nevertheless been costly. The period during which Operations PHANTOM THUNDER and FARDH AL-QANOON took place was among the most volatile of the Iraq War. The British Web site Iraq Body Count, which drew its data from media stories, nongovernment organization analysis, and mortuary reports, recorded that 5,811 violent incidents took place between February and August 2007. Estimates for civilian deaths range between 13,000 and 18,000. In that same time frame, the United States suffered over 5,000 casualties, 650 of whom were killed in action. Army losses were over 3,900 wounded and 548 killed. Such high casualty rates made 2007 the bloodiest year of the war for U.S. forces. Two hundred fifty were killed fighting in Baghdad. Iraqi military losses were even higher, with 1,368 Iraqi security force soldiers killed in the same period. However, a late summer drop in violence seemed

to confirm the wisdom of General Petraeus and General Odierno's strategic and operational designs. Violent civilian deaths throughout Iraq were down 45 percent compared to December 2006, and in Baghdad the number of deaths declined by almost 70 percent (*Chart 1*).

Thanks to the surge of brigades, the Coalition finally had enough forces to simultaneously clear multiple towns and urban areas of insurgent fighters and hold them without the need to redeploy and leave the recently cleared territory open to renewed infiltration. By taking the fight to al-Qaeda in Iraq and Jaysh al-Mahdi in the belts, MNC-I cut the extremist groups' supply lines and diminished the flow of fighters, weapons, bombs, and equipment into Baghdad. At the same time, Odierno made sure that the Coalition continued the FARDH AL-QANON security operations in

## Overall Weekly Iraq Attack Trends (25 September 2004 – 14 March 2008)



Source: SIGACTS (CF reports) as of 15 Mar 08. Chart includes potential attacks (IEDs/mines found and cleared) and executed attacks.

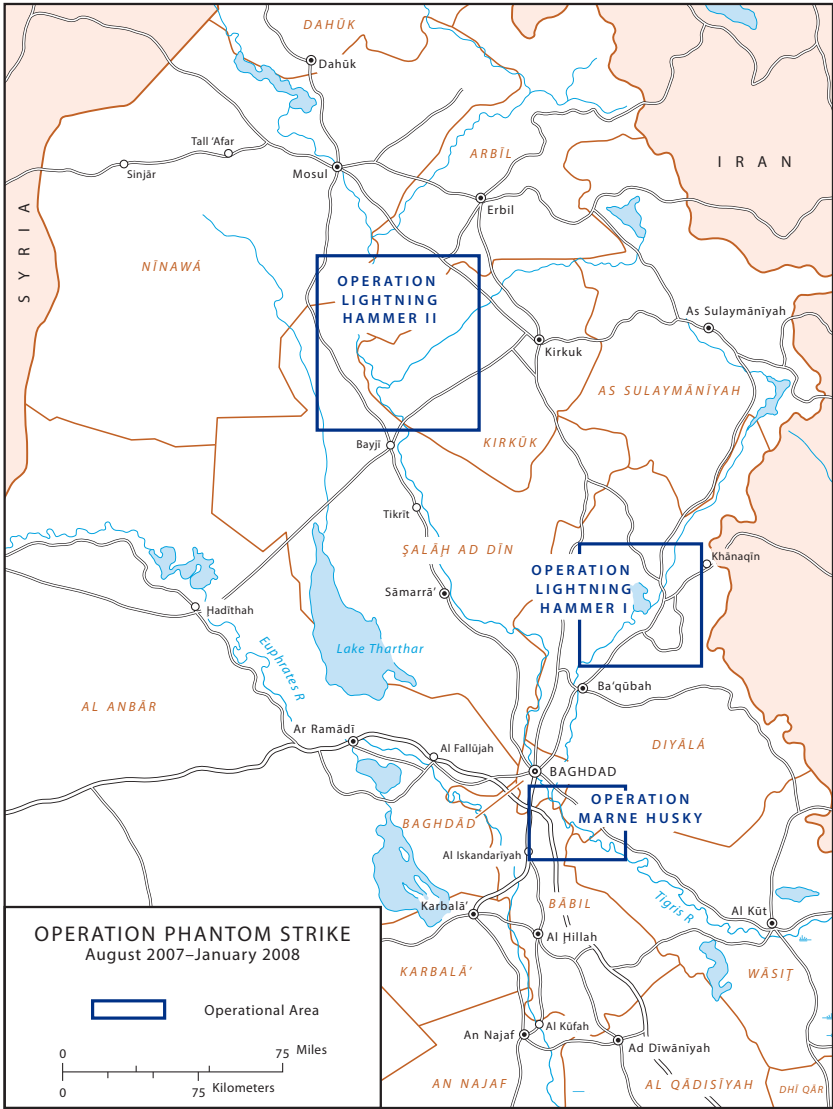
Chart 1

Baghdad. It was a sound display of operational art grounded in basic principles of warfare: synchronizing operations, holding terrain, disrupting the enemy's line of communications, and closing with and defeating the enemy.

#### MAINTAINING THE PRESSURE: OPERATION PHANTOM STRIKE

Both FARDH AL-QANOON and PHANTOM THUNDER demonstrated that, for all their skill and ingenuity, the insurgent forces' effectiveness and freedom of maneuver were severely constrained in the face of unremitting force from well-trained coalition soldiers. With General Petraeus scheduled to brief Congress on the progress of the surge campaign in September, Odierno decided to maintain that pressure through a second major series of offensives, code-named PHANTOM STRIKE. The operation's objective was to exploit the gains achieved in PHANTOM THUNDER. Multi-National Division–North (25th Infantry Division) would continue to advance up the Diyala River Valley from Ba'qubah and also clear al-Qaeda in Iraq hideouts in the Kirkuk Province. Multi-National Division–Center (3d Infantry Division) would maintain its efforts in Baghdad's southern belt. The operation would also focus efforts on a largely ignored region in Iraq, the area between the northern belt town of At Taji and Lake Tharthar (*Map 7*).

The 3d Infantry Division's contribution to the operation was code-named Operation MARNE HUSKY. The main objective was the west bank of the Tigris River, south of Salman Pak. Here, the 3d Infantry Division confronted two major threats. Following Operations MARNE TORCH and MARNE AVALANCHE, AQI fighters were retreating farther south into the Tigris valley, outside the operational reach of the 3d Infantry Division's ground forces. Meanwhile, the same region was a logistics hub for Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias. Trying to devise a means for securing this area, General Lynch confronted the same problem that faced so many of his predecessors who had led divisions in Iraq: even with the surge, he simply did not have the



Map 7

combat power to dominate his entire area of operations all the time.

To compensate, Lynch decided to launch a series of aerial assaults using his division's Combat Aviation



A soldier from 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 3d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, stands guard as Iraqis play an evening soccer match in October 2007.

Brigade, commanded by Col. Daniel L. Ball. With a reinforced infantry company, the aviation brigade would carry out attacks against insurgent positions between Salman Pak and Suwayrah, twenty-five kilometers to the southeast. Between 15 August and 15 September, the aviation brigade launched a series of raids between Salman Pak and Suwayrah using the 4th Brigade (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division's Company B, 3d Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment. As the paratroopers carried out raids, the aviation brigade's aerial assets continued interdiction operations against targets of opportunity throughout the area. In total, Ball's brigade carried out 9 air assaults, 105 air strikes, cleared 836 buildings, uncovered 19 weapons caches, killed 63 insurgents, and captured another 193. Among those captured was Hafiz Khalif Jassim, an al-Qaeda in Iraq commander who had fled south in the wake of Operation PHANTOM THUNDER.

Lynch and his staff were aware that using aerial assault tactics was an imperfect approach and did not

accord with General Petraeus' overall strategy of securing major urban centers and operating among the Iraqi people. While the brigade was able to bring its superior maneuverability and devastating firepower to bear on the enemy forces in the area, the Americans were unable to establish a permanent presence, meaning that AQI fighters and the militias could simply return once the soldiers withdrew. Yet, Lynch calculated that doing nothing left the initiative with the insurgents and would potentially allow the area to become a permanent safe haven for extremist forces.

Meanwhile, to the north the 25th Infantry Division continued to sweep through the Diyala River Valley with Operations LIGHTNING HAMMER I and LIGHTNING HAMMER II. On 19 August, five days after Operation LIGHTNING HAMMER I began, the sheikhs of the river valley swore an oath against al-Qaeda in Iraq. It was a remarkable testament to just how dramatically the course of the war in the region had shifted. Operation LIGHTNING HAMMER II, begun on 5 September, continued the advance northwest, this time targeting the triangle between Al Qayyarah, Hawijah, and Ash Sharqat, the Hamrin Mountains, and Lake Tharthar. The effort resulted in the discovery of 61 weapons caches and 125 IEDs, the capture of 500 enemy prisoners, and 72 enemy killed in action. Seeking to regain the initiative, AQI retaliated with a suicide bombing in Ba'qubah that killed twenty-four and wounded the governor of Diyala. Hoping to intimidate the "concerned local national" groups that had emerged from the tribal alliances against al-Qaeda in Iraq, the attack actually emboldened tribal efforts against the Islamist terrorist group. On 13 September 2007, al-Qaeda in Iraq made another attempt to demoralize the tribal alliance in Al Anbar when they assassinated Sheikh Sattar. The charismatic sheikh, whose efforts with Colonel MacFarland's 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, a year earlier had done so much to change the course of the war in Al Anbar, had become a major symbol of the Awakening and the other tribal alliances which were emerging. However, his death did little to blunt the growing movement against al-Qaeda in Iraq.



General Odierno planned the PHANTOM STRIKE operations to last into January 2008; therefore, actions would overlap with General Petraeus' mandated congressional report on the progress of the war scheduled to begin on 10 September 2007. The testimony was highly anticipated, evidence of the level to which domestic opinion in the United States had come to influence the course of the war in Iraq. President Bush's decision to escalate the U.S. commitment in Iraq had been a gamble and public opposition to the conflict had continued to grow over the course of the surge campaign. Even a number of notable Republicans, such as Senator John W. Warner, had suggested taking steps to limit strictly the United States' involvement in the conflict. Much of the domestic and international press was also critical, with the BBC reporting on 11 September, while Petraeus was delivering his report, that "there is no doubt that there has been a significant turnaround in Al Anbar, because of the tribal rebellion against al-Qa-eda there. It is the one relative success the Americans can point to. But it is far from clear this will help bring wider peace and reconciliation." In a sign of just how politically charged his testimony was likely going to be, on the day he was set to begin testifying, the advocacy group MoveOn.org published a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* accusing General Petraeus of misrepresenting the surge's achievements and "cooking the books" for the Bush administration. The advertisement sparked outrage among both Republicans and Democrats in Congress, with some accusing the organization of slandering the general.

In the end, Petraeus' testimony to both the House and Senate was measured and precise. Avoiding sweeping statements and grand promises, he declared, on behalf of Ambassador Crocker and himself, that "there are no easy answers or quick solutions. And though we both believe this effort will succeed, it will take time." Petraeus patiently parried often critical questions and assertions from congressmen, effectively deflating much of the criticism of his command and the Bush administration. The testimony proved to be a decisive moment in the course of the surge campaign. By presenting a frank assessment that steady progress was being made



by coalition forces, Petraeus placated many congressmen weary of the sometimes sunny prognostications delivered by his predecessors and the Bush administration. In a dramatic turn, many in Congress no longer demanded the immediate withdrawal of American forces from Iraq, but instead began to discuss how long the commitment needed to be.

Success on the surge battlefield nevertheless produced new difficulties for the Coalition. The aggressiveness and scope of operations such as PHANTOM THUNDER and PHANTOM STRIKE led to a dramatic increase in the Iraqi prisoner population. Detainee operations presented a range of challenges. The anger sparked by the 2004 revelations of abuse of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. soldiers in Abu Ghraib had badly damaged America's reputation throughout Iraq during the fraught and often chaotic months following the fall of Saddam's regime. The disclosure of prisoner abuse outraged many Iraqis and turned them against the occupying American forces. Coalition attempts to reform detainee treatment after the scandal were largely inadequate and failed to effectively address the challenges of a growing, often more radicalized, prisoner population. This population mirrored the makeup of the insurgency as a whole: a combination of radical Islamist fighters, nationalists, ex-Ba'athists, and assorted militants who had taken up arms for a variety of reasons. Also present were men suspected of aiding al-Qaeda in Iraq and other insurgent groups but who were not involved in insurgent activity. In a war where euphemisms such as "military aged male" often replaced a solid and detailed understanding of the enemy, many so-called "reconcilable" insurgents were often imprisoned alongside "irreconcilables" who were unwilling to cooperate with the Americans and had every intention of returning to the fight if released.

By failing to differentiate between the various prisoners in its detainee camps, the Coalition had unwittingly built a crucible that helped produce new Islamist fighters sympathetic to movements like al-Qaeda. In a microcosm of the Sunni insurgency, radical prisoners used threats, intimidation, and torture to pressure more moderate detainees to accept their authority. The central detainee facility, Camp Bucca, became a "Jihad

University,” and the longer prisoners were detained, the more likely they would reenter society more radicalized and eager to undertake violent action against fellow Iraqis and the Coalition. As the camp reached capacity, riots erupted, with more than 10,000 acts of violence committed by detainees in May 2007 alone. The largest riot, which broke out on 14 May, proved to be a turning point, with more than 10,000 prisoners nearly bursting the compound’s fortifications.

Releasing fighters loyal to al-Qaeda in Iraq was certainly not an option. However, General Petraeus’ staff recognized that a new approach to detainee operations was clearly needed. In the course of the Awakening and similar movements, the Americans in Iraq gained a better understanding of how the cracks in the Sunni insurgent movement could be exploited to isolate more radical fighters. The unit responsible for detainee operations, Task Force–134, under the command of Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Douglas Stone, recognized these fissures, and began to treat the detention system as yet another front in the counterinsurgency campaign. With 160,000 Iraqis moving through the detention process at one point or another by the end of the surge, and with each detainee estimated to have a network of about one hundred Iraqis, the system had the potential to influence the opinions and attitudes of nearly half the country’s population.

Under General Stone’s direction, the detention facilities at Camp Bucca became another important battlefield of General Petraeus’ campaign. The guards at the camp followed a number of principles in their handling of prisoners. Care and custody was governed by the Geneva Conventions, radical prisoners were segregated from more moderate detainees, and officials tried to replace destructive ideologies through education and rehabilitation. Stone’s command permitted reconcilable prisoners to receive visits from family members and offered them work opportunities in numerous trades. In other words, just as Petraeus and his subordinates worked to determine which insurgents could never be reconciled to the new regime, they also looked to determine which detain-

ees could be convinced by the Coalition to abandon their efforts to wage violence against the Iraqi government, people, and coalition forces. The Coalition established a review board to adjudicate whether detainees had the potential to return to violent activity or whether they would reintegrate into society. The success rate of the board was remarkable, with less than 1 percent of detainees relapsing into criminal activity. However, the decision to separate radical prisoners in the camp also had unintended consequences. Isolated from moderate detainees, the so-called irreconcilable detainees came to adopt even more fundamentalist and radical beliefs, built close social and political connections with each other, and helped lay the groundwork for the future Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). At least nine future leaders of ISIL, including Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, spent time detained in Camp Bucca during the height of the surge campaign.

Operation PHANTOM STRIKE continued into January 2008. The impact of that operation, and those that preceded it, could be readily seen by the end of the surge campaign's first year. In Baghdad alone, attacks had dropped by nearly 80 percent, the number of murders had dropped by 90 percent, and car bomb attacks had declined by nearly 70 percent. The effort was costly, with over 200 Americans killed in action between 15 August 2007 and the termination of the operation in early January 2008. But by the end of the year, it was clear that Operations FARDH AL-QANOON, PHANTOM THUNDER, and PHANTOM STRIKE had dealt a critical blow to al-Qaeda in Iraq. The Shi'ite militias remained active however, and as the new year began, breaking their continued hold on much of northeastern Baghdad and southern Iraq would be the Coalition's primary security objective.

#### POLITICAL EFFORTS, CIVIL AFFAIRS OPERATIONS, AND BUILDING IRAQI SECURITY FORCES

During the surge and afterward, General Petraeus frequently noted that "you can't kill your way out of an

insurgency.” Offensive operations against insurgent forces were fruitless if they were not buttressed by concurrent political progress. The key political effort was reconciliation of the Sunni and Shi’ite communities, as the coalition headquarters and Bush administration both realized that Iraq’s future depended on a government that ruled in the name of all Iraqis, not just one ethnicity or sect. U.S. units in the field were able to make significant inroads in this regard. The Al Anbar Awakening and Sons of Iraq movements helped turn many Sunnis from al-Qaeda and militancy and convert them into supporters, if often lukewarm ones, of the Iraqi state.

Another important effort to help build legitimacy was reconstruction. Iraq’s infrastructure had been in a state of disrepair since the first Gulf War and the international sanctions that followed. American commanders had long recognized the need to rebuild the country’s roads, essential services, and power grid. Some commanders, notably Odierno’s predecessor as the commander of Multi-National Corps–Iraq, Lt. Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli, had made a forceful effort to restore essential services and to create jobs in the belief that doing so would strengthen support for the government and turn Iraqis away from insurgent activity. However, the multiple threats presented by the insurgencies and militias taxed the Coalition’s ability to provide anything more than temporary solutions. Both Generals Petraeus and Odierno certainly saw wisdom in this approach, but recognized that some insurgent fighters would never accept the new Iraqi regime, regardless of how many jobs were available or whether the power worked. It was this realization that led to the large-scale offensives of 2007. However, as these offensives expelled insurgent and militia forces from major urban areas, units undertook numerous construction efforts. A key tool in every unit leader’s satchel was the funds allotted to them by the Commanders’ Emergency Response Program (CERP). In coordination with Provincial Reconstruction Teams from the State Department and members of the United States Agency for International Development, brigade commanders were able to draw on the necessary ex-



First Lt. Giles Wright of 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 2d Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, speaks with an Iraqi policeman in Baghdad's Mashtal District on 6 February 2007.

expertise and funds to effect significant progress in the rebuilding effort. In all, MNC-I spent \$882 million in fiscal year 2007 and \$1.2 billion in fiscal year 2008 on CERP. The Sons of Iraq militia forces were also financed by CERP contracts until the end of 2008, with the highest paid members—those based in Baghdad—typically receiving \$300 a month. By 2008, the reconstruction effort had borne considerable fruit, with the Iraqi gross domestic product growing by 6 percent, electricity production finally matching prewar levels, and oil production improving.

While Iraq was making a slow economic recovery, the Coalition achieved less marked success on the national political stage. As Petraeus and Odierno struggled to destroy al-Qaeda and break the power of Jaysh al-Mahdi, the Iraqi government often proved to be as intransigent and difficult to work with as it had been

during Casey's tenure. Many of these problems could be attributed to Prime Minister Maliki himself. A partisan Shi'ite, Maliki was suspicious of conspiracies against his government and convinced that Iraq's Sunni Arabs were in league with al-Qaeda. Along with frequent boycotts staged by Moqtada al-Sadr and his Shi'ite militia bloc, Maliki's government also faced dissension from the parliament's Sunni parties. On paper, the Iraqi government seemingly balanced the country's diverse groups, with a Shi'ite prime minister (Maliki), a Kurdish president (Jala Talibani), and a Sunni vice president (Tariq al-Hashimi). The Defense Minister, Abdulqder Alobeidi, was also a Sunni. However, Maliki initiated a number of measures that undercut the attempt to distribute power across the different sects and ethnic groups. For example, he created an Office of the Commander in Chief to circumvent the chain of command, allowing him to ignore the Sunni officials in government and issue orders directly to Iraqi military forces, many of which were controlled by Shi'ite militias.

Even though they met with him regularly and did what they could to influence his decision making, Petraeus and Crocker had only limited influence with the Iraqi prime minister. At some moments, Maliki proved to be a decisive leader, such as when al-Qaeda in Iraq forces destroyed the remnants of the Samarra Mosque in June 2007. Following Petraeus' advice, the prime minister personally went to the site to survey the damage and demand answers to how the mosque could have been attacked again. However, the American efforts to encourage Maliki to pass more legislation that would better reflect Iraqi cooperation were less successful. Maliki never overcame his general suspicion of Sunnis and conspiracies against his party and rule. This persistent problem handicapped the surge's ability to achieve a more long-standing strategic success.

Although the surge campaign emphasized U.S. combat operations over transitioning the security mission to Iraqis, MNSTC-I and its military transition teams (MiTTs) continued to train and equip Iraq's security forces throughout the campaign. The task remained



just as daunting as it had been when the transition command had formed three years earlier. U.S. units working alongside Iraqi Army forces found their effectiveness to be mixed. The reports drawn up by various American military transition teams depicted an Iraqi Army plagued by a range of problems. Despite the Coalition Provisional Authority's decision to dissolve the old army in 2003 and then recreate it from the ground up in 2004, the Iraqi security forces nevertheless carried with them many cultural, social, and political legacies from the Ba'ath regime. A highly centralized organization, its officer corps was often more concerned with ensuring that their soldiers were politically and ideologically reliable than with whether or not they were able to carry out basic combat operations. One MiTT attached to the 6th Iraqi Army Division, for example, noted that the division's intelligence branch was an inward looking organization, assessing the loyalty of its soldiers rather than acquiring information on the enemy. A MiTT with another Iraqi unit noted that Iraqi commanders rarely extended their trust beyond a small, reliable circle of officers, which usually consisted of just the commander, his intelligence officers, and his operations officer. General Sunni Arab mistrust of the predominantly Shi'ite force also led many of them to see the Iraqi Army as a sectarian tool of the Maliki regime dominated by the militias. Consequently, many Iraqi units in 2007 focused their efforts more on rooting out internal enemies and sources of dissent than with defeating external threats.

The deficiency most commonly noted in after action reports from this period was the general ineffectiveness of the Iraqi Army's noncommissioned officers. A by-product of the Iraqi military's centralizing tendencies and a reluctance on the part of officers to delegate authority or trust subordinates, the noncommissioned officers had little power or responsibility. The 3226 Military Transition Team (Provisional), supporting 3d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, reported in late 2008 that "the current Iraqi Army does not empower its NCOs or warrant officers with any authority which limits their



ability to be effective leaders, now or in the future.” The same team noted that “officers in the IA unit would rather do the work of the NCOs instead of developing them.”

Nepotism and corruption were also general problems, especially when it came to ensuring that Iraqi soldiers were paid. Officers often enjoyed authority due to the prestige of their rank rather than any inherent ability or proficiency. The weaknesses that plagued the army’s logistical capabilities were also exacerbated by corrupt officers who saw the quantity of supplies and provisions under their control as a sign of authority and prestige. “They find great comfort in knowing that their warehouses are full and would rather store vast amounts of supplies and equipment rather than issue them.”



Department of Defense

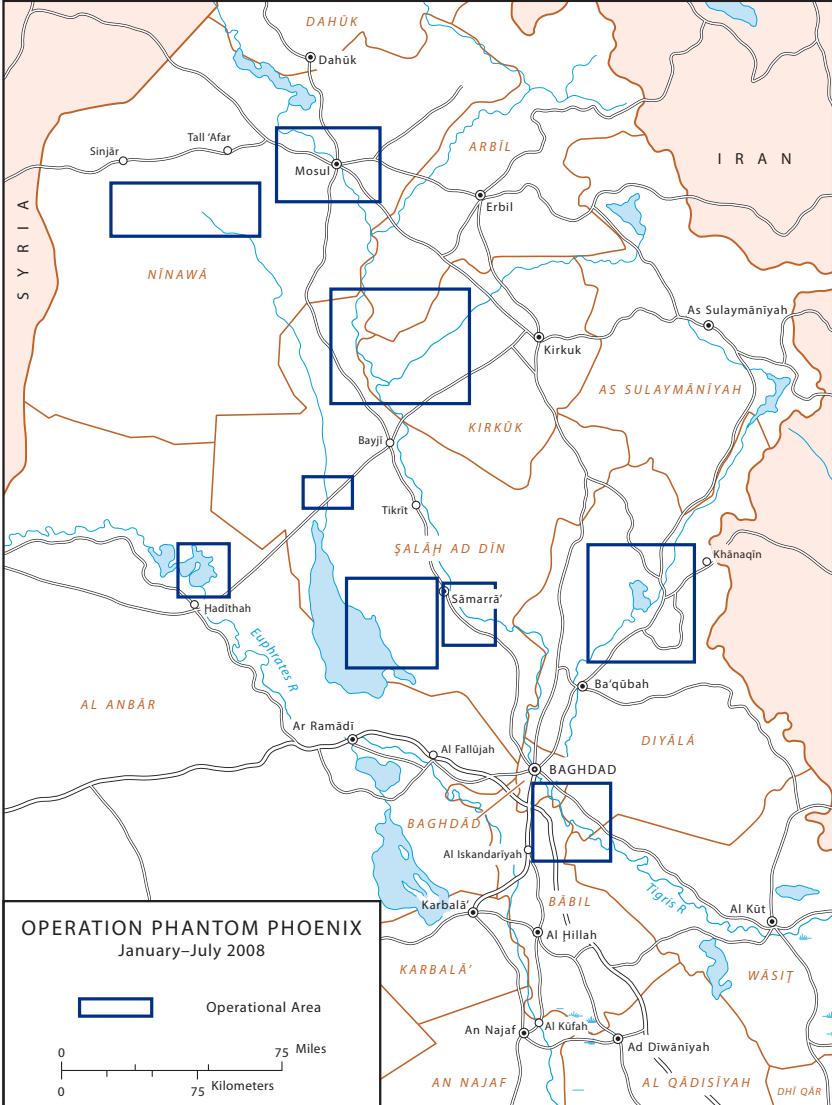
Ambassador Crocker at a press conference held in Baghdad on 16 June 2007. Secretary Gates stands behind him.

U.S. advisers made steady progress as they worked to build up the Iraqi security forces. However, by 2008 the force remained very much a work in progress, as it was largely reliant on the Americans for logistics, air support, and special operations capabilities. Nevertheless, as 2008 began Prime Minister Maliki had gained enough confidence in the combat abilities of the still nascent Iraqi Army and National Police that he began to contemplate using them in a unilateral campaign against the Shi'ite militias in Al Basrah, much to the dismay of his American allies.

#### CONTINUING OPERATIONS AND THE SHOWDOWN WITH JAYSH AL-MAHDI

As 2008 began, General Odierno continued his offensive against al-Qaeda in Iraq, launching Operation PHANTOM PHOENIX. As with the previous year's operations, PHANTOM PHOENIX called for a broad range of actions. Multi-National Division-North, which was now commanded by the 1st Armored Division, continued to push up the Diyala River to secure the towns of Hibbis, Sherween, and Dali Abbas. The division also worked to clear and retain the city of Mosul, the largest metropolitan center in the country's northwest. Meanwhile, Multi-National Division-Center renewed the effort to clear Arab Jabour of AQI forces. The plan also called for the creation of a Combined Interagency Task Force to break AQI's hold on oil smuggling from the Bayji oil refinery in the Salah ad Din Province (*Map 8*).

The order for PHANTOM PHOENIX attested to the fact that al-Qaeda in Iraq's freedom of maneuver had been significantly limited by the previous year's Operations PHANTOM THUNDER and PHANTOM STRIKE. Particularly important was that, beside the need to continue to interdict car bomb networks in the capital, Baghdad was no longer the principal theater for the fight with al-Qaeda in Iraq. Excepting Arab Jabour, AQI had also largely been rooted out from much of the Baghdad belts by coalition forces. With each successive operation Odi-



Map 8

erno had been able to push the radical Sunni organization away from central Iraq and its major population centers. The successful implementation of Operation PHANTOM PHOENIX would maintain this effort. The operation was also the last major one executed by General Odierno's III Corps during its tour as the MNC-I. In February 2008, Odierno's III Corps was relieved by the XVIII Airborne Corps, commanded by Lt. Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq may have been receding as the principal danger to the Coalition by the beginning of 2008, but MNF-I could not truly restore order in Iraq unless it also neutralized Jaysh al-Mahdi as a threat to the Iraqi government and coalition forces. Beginning in the summer of 2007, the Jaysh al-Madhi militia had begun to supplant al-Qaeda in Iraq as the Coalition's primary adversary. The militia had long been a thorn in the American's side, dating back to 2004 when Moqtada al-Sadr had led revolts against the occupation forces in An Najaf and other Shi'ite-dominated regions. By 2007 Sadr's political movement was a key component of Maliki's government, although open fighting between Sadr's militia and the Badr Organization had become a common feature of the sectarian fighting waging throughout much of the country. Sadr was also rapidly losing control of his own organization. By choosing to enter the government, the mercurial Shi'ite nationalist had been forced to moderate some of the more extreme objectives of his organization in order to forge compromises with the Maliki ministry. In response, many of the more radical elements within the militia began to turn their backs on Sadr's leadership. The financial and logistical demands of running the militia had also undermined Sadr's authority, as splinter groups broke away to raise their own funds through organized crime and by extorting Baghdad's citizens.

Sadr's unpredictability also played a hand in diminishing his authority. His organization staged a number of boycotts of the Iraqi government. The first was in protest of Maliki's decision to meet with President Bush in Amman, Jordan, in November 2006. The second came

in June 2007, following the destruction of the minarets of the Al-Askari Mosque. Each boycott increased distance between Sadr and Maliki, reducing Sadr's role as a kingmaker in Iraqi politics and increasing the prime minister's ability to isolate and neutralize the Sadrist movement. To ease tensions between his Mahdi forces and the Badr Organization and avoid any more destructive confrontations with coalition forces, Sadr declared a six-month cease-fire in August 2007. The decision would reduce Sadr's authority even further.

Sadr's decision to stand down his forces had major repercussions during the surge campaign. Many observers, both during the surge and since, have credited Sadr's cease-fires as the principal reason incidences of violence dropped during the summer of 2007. Sadr's order to stand down certainly played a role, as it allowed Odierno to focus his offensive operations against al-Qaeda in Iraq without also having to worry as much about the Shi'ite militias. However, it is important to note that Sadr's control of the militia forces had declined noticeably by the middle of 2007. In his place, Jaysh al-Mahdi's Iranian backers gained considerably greater influence and authority. Iran continuously lurked in the shadows throughout the surge. A weak, dependable, and solidly Shi'ite Iraqi state was in the Islamic Republic's interests, as it would increase Iranian influence in the region and offset its Sunni rivals, led by Saudi Arabia. The chief power behind the Shi'ite militias was the enigmatic Iranian Qassem Suleimani, the head of the Revolutionary Guard's Qods Force, an organization described by one journalist as "the sharp instrument of Iranian foreign policy, roughly analogous to a combined C.I.A. and Special Forces." The organization sought to expand Iranian influence throughout the Middle East using proxy forces, such as the terrorist organization Hezbollah, which had successfully gained political power in Lebanon and was Iran's primary means of attacking Israel. It was clear to the Bush administration and Iraqi government that the Qods Force aimed to achieve similar goals in Iraq through Jaysh al-Mahdi. Iranian support ensured that the Mahdi

Army was well-trained, well-armed, and had a strong base of political support.

The Qods Force also carried out well-planned and coordinated attacks in its own right. Among the most notable was a 20 January 2007 raid into Karbala Province in which operatives dressed in U.S. Army-style uniforms entered a provincial joint coordination center and attacked the U.S. forces there, killing one, wounding three others, and kidnapping four more from the 2d Battalion, 377th Field Artillery Regiment. When U.S. forces found the soldiers forty-three kilometers away in Babil Province, three were dead, and the fourth died en route to the hospital. The level of sophistication and preparation needed to carry out the kidnapping convinced coalition headquarters that it was neither the work of al-Qaeda in Iraq or a Shi'ite militia; one source noted "the Karbala Government Center raid the other day was a little too professional for JAM [Jaysh al-Mahdi]." Further evidence backing this theory that the Qods Force was responsible was the recent capture by U.S. forces of seven Qods Force members operating in Iraq, along with ample documentation detailing the organization's operations in the country. The ultimately aborted kidnapping effort was thus likely a retaliatory effort and ill-fated attempt by the Iranians to gain bargaining chips to obtain the release of their captured operatives. Instead, the Bush administration responded by authorizing U.S. forces to "kill or capture Iranian operatives inside Iraq."

As lethal and effective as these Qods Force operations were, the Iranians nevertheless used the Mahdi Army as their primary weapon in Iraq. The Mahdi Army operated throughout the country's Shi'ite heartland, but two strongholds in particular remained important bases of support: the city of Al Basrah and the Baghdad District of Sadr City. Al Basrah had been an ulcer in Iraq's southeast corner since 2005. Initially, many analysts believe it would be a relatively quiet spot. Dominated by Shi'ites, the city's population had much to gain from the collapse of Saddam's regime. Many analysts bought into the notion that the Brit-



ish were somehow more adept and skilled at counter-insurgency than Americans, due in large part to the United Kingdom's long counterinsurgency campaigns in Northern Ireland, Malaya, and in other countries that had once constituted the British Empire. British domestic opposition to the Iraq War and the increase in requirements from Afghanistan had led to a significant reduction of the United Kingdom's contribution to the MND-SE. As a result, over the course of 2007 the British force largely withdrew from the city and established itself in Al Basrah's nearby airport, effectively ceding the city, and its lucrative commercial interests, to Jaysh al-Mahdi. The militia continued to harass the British force even after the withdrawal, besieging it with constant rocket attacks.

Without any major coalition force to patrol the city's streets, Jaysh al-Mahdi was able to establish a firm grip over Al Basrah. Instituting an Islamist regime and running a lucrative criminal empire, the Shi'ite militia turned the city into a militant stronghold. The British forces continually underestimated the severity of the threat, and it was not until well into the surge that American commanders began to recognize that a major effort would be needed to recapture the city. When they could do so was another matter. With the surge brigades making preparations for their return to the United States later that year, Petraeus had fewer forces with which to work than he did in 2007. He certainly planned to address the Al Basrah problem, but determined that continuing the efforts to secure Mosul from al-Qaeda in Iraq was a more pressing matter.

However, Prime Minister Maliki did not agree. The Iraqi leader had gradually grown into his position over the course of the surge campaign. Initially a political unknown, Maliki had managed to survive parliamentary efforts to replace him, helped the Iraqi government overcome frequent deadlock, and worked to diffuse Shi'ite-on-Shi'ite violence in the city of Karbala in August 2007. With Baghdad becoming more secure and incidences of violence dropping, the prime minister had become more confident in both his governing abilities and in the capa-





Soldiers from the 3d Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, patrol Siniyah, Iraq, on 21 September 2007 during the surge campaign.

bilities of the Iraqi security forces. He thus ordered his commanders to draw up a plan to attack Al Basrah and destroy the Jaysh al-Mahdi presence there.

Petraeus was wary of the plan, and tried to discourage the prime minister from implementing it too hastily. Maliki had presented the coalition commander with something of a conundrum. Coalition leaders strongly believed that the only way they could effectively defeat Jaysh al-Mahdi and other Shi'ite extremists was for the Iraqi government to take the lead against them. "We will never solve this problem ourselves," General Odierno observed in September 2007, "Only Iraqis can solve this problem." That the Shi'ite leader had made the decision to take the fight to the most powerful Shi'ite militia demonstrated how far the Iraqi leader was now able to act without the sanction of Sadr's

political movement. But launching an offensive against a well-entrenched insurgent stronghold without the requisite logistical support or Special Forces assets, could potentially lead to a major setback for the coalition effort. A failed offensive would shake the often unsteady legitimacy of the Maliki administration and potentially set back the gains achieved during the previous years' offensives. It would also force Petraeus to change priorities in the middle of the Coalition's efforts against al-Qaeda in Iraq in Mosul, as he would likely need to re-deploy resources to assist Maliki in Al Basrah and deal with any retaliatory actions launched against the U.S. forces in Baghdad from Jaysh al-Mahdi's stronghold in Sadr City.

Despite Petraeus' concerns, Maliki informed the coalition commanders on 21 March 2008, that he intended to go through with his campaign against Jaysh al-Mahdi. Four days later, the Iraqis launched Operation SAWLAT AL-FURSAN, or "Charge of the Knights." Under Maliki's personal command, the Iraqis moved to seal off the northern approaches to Al Basrah and then clear it of militia forces from the south. However, as Petraeus feared, Maliki had underestimated the level of opposition he would face upon striking Al Basrah. Jaysh al-Mahdi proved to be skilled fighters and the Iraqi Army, whose performance was always uneven at best, became locked in a stalemate. In the face of the fighting, one brigade of the 14th Iraqi Army Division simply collapsed as an effective combat unit, its remnants fleeing for safety in the face of the onslaught of militia fighters.

General Petraeus found Maliki's optimistic outlook for the Al Basrah effort dubious. Petraeus nevertheless recognized that the Coalition needed to respond quickly to help the prime minister. Failure in Al Basrah would likely lead to the collapse of the Maliki government. Jaysh al-Mahdi had also increased the pressure on Maliki by launching retaliatory uprisings in Al Kut, Al Hillah, and Baghdad. To help the Iraqi prime minister, the coalition commander subsequently sent a robust contingent of Special Operations Forces to Al Basrah and supported them with AC-130 gun-



Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki

ships, Predator drones, Army helicopter gunships, and Air Force fighter jets. Maliki also rushed in reinforcements, including the seasoned 1st Iraqi Army Division, from Al Anbar Province, to strengthen his Iraqi contingent. With more American assets moving south, Jaysh al-Mahdi's leadership began to sense that the tide was turning against them in Al Basrah. Furthermore, Su-leimani, the shadowy Qods Force commander behind Jaysh al-Mahdi's activities, had come to the conclusion that Iranian interests would be better served if Maliki remained in power. With his sanction, Sadr negotiated another cease-fire, allowing Iraqi forces to enter the city and occupy the nearby port of Umm Qasr.

The cease-fire did not bring an end to fighting in Baghdad however, as on 23 March Jaysh al-Mahdi began to fire 107-mm. rockets into the Iraqi government complex in the International Green Zone, which was lo-

cated about six kilometers southwest of the Mahdi base in Sadr City. Meanwhile, Madhi Army fighters began to overrun Iraqi security force checkpoints throughout the district and along its borders. Like Al Basrah, Sadr City remained a festering ulcer of extremist activity despite the successful inroads achieved by the surge offensives of the previous fifteen months. Thus, while FARDH AL-QANOON had secured most of the capital city and ended much of the sectarian violence that had nearly torn it apart, Sadr City, thanks in no small part to Maliki's prohibition of coalition activity there, remained a Jaysh al-Mahdi stronghold. By 2008 however, the Sadrists no longer held the political sway over the Maliki government that they had just a year earlier, giving the prime minister greater freedom of maneuver against Sadr City. Consequently, by the spring of 2008, Maj. Gen. Jeffrey W. Hammond's 4th Infantry Division, which had replaced Fil's 1st Cavalry Division as the coalition headquarters in Baghdad, began to make preparations for a final showdown with the Shi'ite militia forces.

General Hammond ordered Col. John Hort's 3d Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, to seize the rocket launch sites in the district's southern areas and then advance into the neighborhood to clear Jaysh al-Mahdi fighters and neutralize the area as a site for launching further attacks throughout the Iraqi capital. Clearing Sadr City, a district encompassing over twenty-one square kilometers and with a population of 2.4 million inhabitants, was a significant challenge for a single brigade. However, the battle demonstrated the potent combat power contained within the new modular brigade command team. Hort's force included a combined arms battalion, the 1st Battalion, 68th Armored Regiment; an infantry battalion, the 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment; a Stryker cavalry unit, the 1st Squadron, 2d Cavalry Regiment; and support forces from a brigade support battalion and special troops battalion, as well as a company each of engineers, explosive ordnance disposal personnel, and civil affairs teams. The brigade was also able to draw on ample unmanned aerial vehicles for

close air support, including two MQ-1 Predator drones armed with Hellfire missiles, RQ-7B Shadow drones, six AH-64 Apaches, and Air Force fighter jets.

On 26 March 2008, Hort's forces began the offensive to clear Sadr City. Striking from the northwestern and southern approaches to the district, the 3d Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, encountered unexpectedly heavy resistance in its initial effort to seize the neighborhood's southern communities of Ishbilyah (also called Jamila) and Habbibiya. Using M1 tanks and M2 Bradley fighting vehicles, the brigade cut southeast across Sadr City, along a series of roads code-named Route Gold. To prevent additional infiltration south, brigade engineers constructed a wall along a section of the route designated Phase Line Gold, thus robbing Jaysh al-Mahdi of the forward positions from which they had conducted rocket attacks against the Green Zone. In total, the effort to seize the southern neighborhoods and build the wall took about six weeks. By the time the twelve-foot tall barrier was finished, Jaysh al-Mahdi fighters had exhausted themselves trying to prevent the wall's construction in a battle of attrition. To finish off the militia, the 4th Infantry Division launched an elaborate aerial operation combining drones, attack helicopters, and fixed-wing aircraft in order to conduct continuous surveillance and maintain unceasing pressure on enemy forces. (*See Map 9.*)

Unable to keep the Coalition out of Sadr City, Moqtada al-Sadr once again declared a cease-fire on 12 May and ordered Jaysh al-Mahdi to stand down. The Coalition, with Iraq forces in the lead, had been conducting a range of civil affairs and reconstruction efforts in the areas south of Phase Line Gold. Robbed of popular support and exhausted by the constant fighting, Jaysh al-Mahdi's hold on the rest of the district began to collapse, with many of the militia's leaders fleeing the city. Eight days later Iraqi troops occupied the remainder of the former militia stronghold.

The spring offensives against Jaysh al-Mahdi were a significant turning point of the surge campaign. Both campaigns demonstrated that much work remained with regards to the Iraqi Army; in both Al Basrah and



Sadr City, regular army units often broke formation and ran in the face of persistent militia resistance. The Iraqis were heavily reliant on American aerial and logistical support as well. Nevertheless, the fact that Prime Minister Maliki, a committed Shi'ite politician, took the fight to the most powerful Shi'ite militia in Iraq was a promising turn of events. General Petraeus and his predecessor, General Casey, both recognized that success in Iraq would only come when Iraqi leaders undertook initiatives in the name of national, rather than sectarian, interests. Certainly, the spring offensives had as much to do with Maliki's concerns about losing power as they did with strengthening the Iraqi state. But the two were not necessarily exclusive, especially in the unstable months of early 2008. Had Maliki failed, his government would likely have fallen. A major victory for Jaysh al-Mahdi would also have potentially undermined the gains achieved the previous year against al-Qaeda in Iraq. A protracted war against the Shi'ite militia had the potential to throw Iraq into sectarian violence once again. Luckily, thanks in no small part to U.S. support in Al Basrah and the 4th Infantry Division's successful campaign against Sadr City, Maliki was able to ensure the survival of his government and dramatically weaken Jaysh al-Mahdi. The summer of 2008 was consequently far less violent than the bloody spring and summer of 2007.

The surge officially came to an end in December 2008. However, as the political scientist Eliot Cohen once remarked, "Outcomes in irregular warfare are blurry; these wars end not with a bang, but with a haggle." The campaign wound down in phases. The surge brigades, whose deployment the Bush administration had announced with significant fanfare in January 2007, gradually withdrew from Iraq between March and June 2008: the 2d Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, in March; the 4th Brigade, 1st Infantry Division, in April; the 2d and 3d Brigades of the 3d Infantry Division in May; and the 4th Brigade, 2d Infantry Division, a Stryker unit, in June. In spring of 2008 new forces rotated into Iraq, but not as many as had been needed the previous year.





Meanwhile, U.S. forces continued to root out AQI cells in northern Iraqi cities such as Mosul. That summer and fall, Special Operations Forces carried out cross-border raids into Syria against al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Ghadiya, who was ultimately killed in a raid into Syria just across from the Iraqi city of Al Qa'im.

In September, General Petraeus handed over command of MNF-I to his former subordinate, General Odierno, now on his third tour in Iraq. Petraeus in turn became the commanding general of CENTCOM. As Odierno took command, the Bush administration worked to formulate a new status of forces agreement that would codify American-Iraqi relations beyond the end of Bush's presidency. The effort to create the agreement in many ways constituted the final act of the surge campaign. It also demonstrated how dramatically the situation in Iraq had turned as a result of the reduction in violence. Emboldened by his successes against Jaysh al-Mahdi, Maliki held firm and insisted that the United States agree to a specific date to withdraw all forces from Iraq. Eager to conclude a settlement to ensure U.S. forces would remain in the country past his presidency, Bush acquiesced, agreeing to the withdrawal of all American forces from Iraq's cities by the end of June 2009 and from the country entirely by the end of 2011. On 27 November 2008, the Iraqi parliament ratified the accord and the two countries formally signed the agreement in Baghdad on 14 December.

## ANALYSIS

The cost of the surge was high. Over 1,200 U.S. servicemen and women died between 10 January 2007 and the end of December 2008, about a quarter of the total Americans killed throughout the eight-year-long Iraq War. Over 8,000 Americans were wounded. The Army bore the brunt of the American losses; 1,012 soldiers were killed in the campaign, 931 from the Active Component, 62 from the Army National Guard, and 19 from the Army Reserve. About 6,700 soldiers were wounded in the fighting. Iraqi security forces casualties were

about 2,900 killed while over 33,000 Iraqi civilians died in the course of the campaign. Most of these casualties were incurred in the first half of 2007. By the middle of the year, the incidences of civilian deaths and insurgent attacks started to drop. Between August 2006 and December 2007, the average number of civilians killed a month in Iraq fell from over 1,700 to 500. The fatality rate continued to decline over the course of 2008.

Three major causes contributed to the drop in violence. The first was President Bush's decision to put the brakes on the transition strategy and instead pursue a more rigorous effort to provide security to Iraq's civilians. This necessitated an expanded American force and a renewed U.S. commitment to defeating extremist elements that had been tearing Iraq apart ever since the Al-Askari Mosque bombing. The second factor was the Multi-National Force–Iraq's new operational approach that balanced securing the major population centers with aggressive counterinsurgency offensives against al-Qaeda in Iraq, Jaysh al-Mahdi, and other extremist forces. Most of the elements of General Petraeus' operational design, such as the use of joint security stations, an emphasis on protecting the population, and clearing operations, had been carried out by American units during General Casey's tenure as commander in Iraq. However, the Bush administration's decision to abandon the transition strategy along with the addition of five new brigades allowed Petraeus to implement a coordinated and comprehensive counterinsurgency effort across the country with resources that were not available to coalition commanders up to that point in the war. While some analysts have characterized the surge as a shift from killing insurgents to protecting the people, it is more accurate to define the new approach as killing insurgents *and* protecting the people. The surge granted the Coalition the necessary combat strength to both patrol and secure major urban areas like Baghdad while also taking the fight into the belts that surrounded the Iraqi capital. Cut off from their safe houses outside Baghdad and their networks inside the capital, insurgent cells were quickly destroyed over the course of 2007 and their

ability to carry out major attacks against civilian and coalition targets dramatically diminished.

On its own, however, the addition of 30,000 American troops would not have allowed MNF-I to clear and secure Iraq's urban centers while simultaneously carrying out offensive operations against insurgent forces. Thus, the Al Anbar Awakening proved to be the third significant factor contributing to the surge campaign's success. The decision made by many of the Al Anbar Province's tribes to turn against AQI and other extremist forces occurred months before the surge campaign. However, General Petraeus' decision to support the Awakening in Al Anbar and back similar Iraqi-led initiatives against al-Qaeda in Iraq across the rest of the country was a critical decision. Having driven much of the Iraqi population into an alliance with the Americans, AQI had effectively robbed itself of the infrastructure and local support needed to plan and stage major attacks against Iraq's large population centers.

Throughout the campaign, the Army proved itself to be an agile organization capable of learning in the field. General Petraeus' arrival as commander and his new strategic focus infused the U.S. forces with a renewed energy and vigor. Nevertheless, success was incumbent on the ability of field commanders to translate Petraeus' broad strategic guidance into effective operations and tactics. This often required patience on the part of small-unit leaders. General Odierno, for example, observed that units needed to acquire a solid understanding of the cultural and social dynamics of their area of operations before they could devise an effective means for providing security. "You have to first come in, you have to understand the area you are operating in, and that, in my mind, takes somewhere between sixty and ninety days at a minimum." Colonel Townsend, whose Stryker unit would serve across Iraq from 2006 into 2007, noted in April 2007 that "there's just some stuff you got to learn when you get to Iraq." Sometimes acquiring a greater understanding of their areas of operation led commanders to undertake operations at a variance with Petraeus' overall focus on population security.



U.S. Army Spec. Jonathan Morris, a soldier with the 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry Regiment, 2d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, patrols a street in Baghdad's Gazaliyah District on 19 September 2008.

For example, General Lynch's decision to order his 3d Infantry Division to carry out large-scale aerial assaults and sweeps across Baghdad's southern belt was driven largely by the recognition that he simply did not have enough forces to both secure the population and destroy al-Qaeda in Iraq and Jaysh al-Mahdi.

While the surge was an operational and tactical success, its strategic achievements were more limited. The surge's main objective had been to reduce incidences of violence in order to give the Iraqi government breathing space. The Americans hoped that the Iraqi leadership would use this window of opportunity to build a more inclusive government that would govern in the name of all Iraqis. However, while the surge helped to dampen the sectarian war that nearly destroyed Iraq in 2006, it

could not eradicate the tensions and institutional weaknesses that had fanned the violence in the first place. Emboldened by his success against Jaysh al-Mahdi at Al Basrah and continually wary of the Al Anbar Awakening movement, Prime Minister Maliki continued to govern Iraq as a parochial leader concerned largely with the interests of the country's Shi'ites, at the expense of its Sunni Arabs, Kurds, and other population groups. The Iraqi security forces remained firmly Shi'ite organizations, alienating the country's Sunnis. The success of the surge also convinced Maliki that he did not require American forces to govern and secure Iraq, contributing to his reticence to maintain a continued U.S. troop presence in the country past the promised 2011 withdrawal date. However, many of these strategic problems were outside the control of General Petraeus and the U.S. forces in Iraq.

Nevertheless, the Army's efforts during the surge went a long way to shifting the course of the Iraq War. By reducing sectarian violence, defeating al-Qaeda in Iraq, stemming the influence of Jaysh al-Mahdi, and maintaining security throughout the country, the soldiers who carried out the surge demonstrated considerable agility and versatility as they adapted to an ever-changing irregular fight against a wide array of insurgent groups. Having won Maliki's government breathing space, the Army now set about continuing its efforts to help Iraq provide for its own security after the withdrawal of U.S. forces. It would not be an easy task.



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